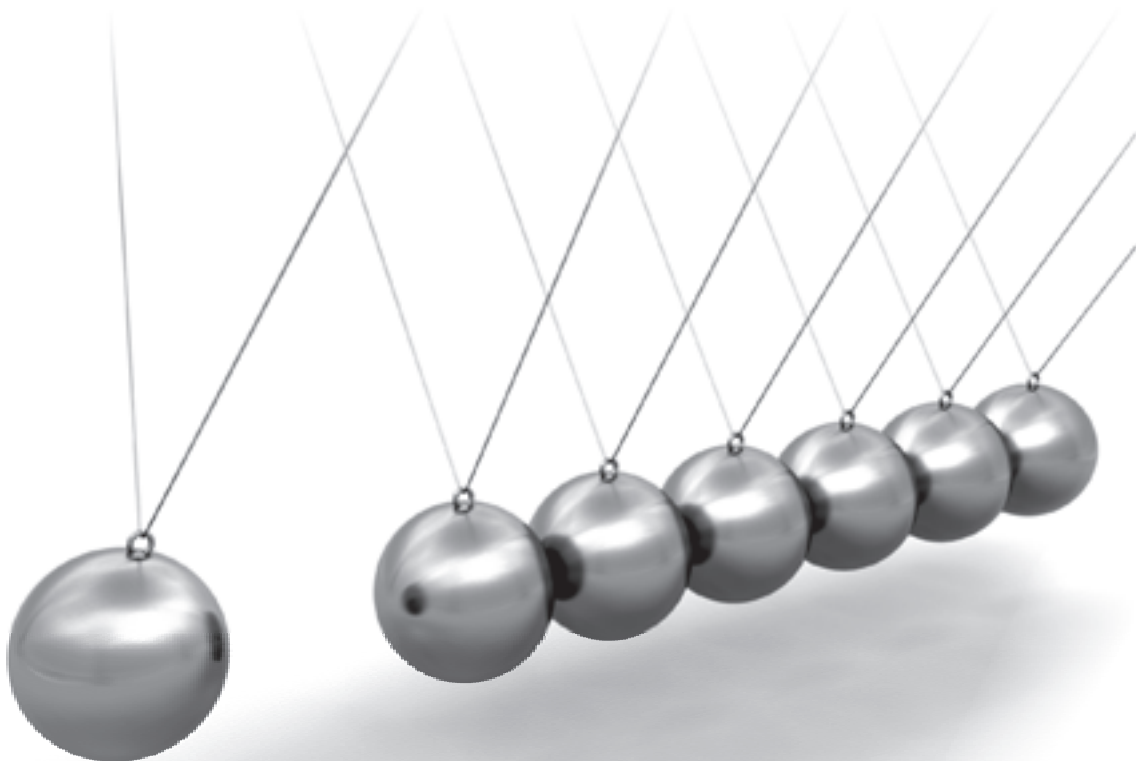


Women in Times of Crisis

Edited by Irina Deretić



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**omen in
Times of Crisis**

Edited by Irina Deretić

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Women in Times of Crisis
Edited by Irina Deretić
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Referees
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PREFACE

Inspired by the global pandemic crisis of COVID 19, in this small volume, we want to elucidate how certain women philosophers and writers reacted to the various types of crises that affected them, whether marital and personal, or political, financial, or military in nature. Although we consider that individual differences, and not gender characteristics are decisive for determining one's capacity "for a particular pursuit or working task or social role,"¹ we do think, generally speaking, that in the history of humankind due to various social, political and historical factors, women developed some especially noteworthy reactions to various crises.

In the first two contributions, the women and crises are discussed in a general fashion. In the paper "Emancipation or Instrumentalization: Some Remarks on Plato's Feminism," Aleksandar Kandić explores the critical socio-political background of Plato's feminism, endeavoring to determine what Plato really meant about the social and political role of women in his *kallipolis*. In the "Greek and Roman Female Friendship in the Times of Crises," Tamara Plečaš elucidates in which way friendships of women of letters developed in a context of crises. She highlights that the concept of *aretê* is constitutive for determining ideal friendship.

Two contributions deal with two women philosophers, intellectually very influential, who did not leave any written evidence. In "Aspasia: Woman in Crises," Irina Deretić claims that what is reported about what Aspasia said and did is of philosophical relevance, and deals with various kinds of crises, from marital to political ones. Deretić also provides the reasons Plato ascribes to a woman the Funeral Speech he offers in his *Mexenus*, in which thoughtful and apt consolation is offered to those who lost their loved ones in the Peloponnesian War. In "St. Monica as Participant in St. Augustine's Philosophical Companionship: A Woman's Voice in the Time of Crisis," Dragana Dimitrijević writes about the influence that Saint Monica had on the thought of her son Saint Augustine. Dimitrijević argues that the term *philosophical-contemplative companionship*, borrowed from a new form of philosophical practice, can be applied to the Cassiciacum dialogues, and the participation of St. Monica in them, particularly in the *De beata vita*.

1 Deretić, I. (2013). Plato on the Social Role of Women: Critical Reflections. *Skepsis Journal*, XXIII, 152–168, p. 165.

In “Hegel’s Antigone: Crisis and Collapse of the Ancient Greek *Sittlichkeit*,” Višnja Knežević reconsiders Antigone’s role in the framework of Hegel’s concept of *Sittlichkeit*. Her main hypothesis is that this tragic heroine challenges both the Greek androcentric order and Hegel’s hypotheses on subjectivity. Knežević interprets Antigone from the perspective of the crisis of the order of power, and that of virility, and eventually the crisis of *Sittlichkeit*.

In her essay “The Balkan Sanitary Crisis in the British Women’s Narratives during WWI,” Melina Rokai explores how British women in the Balkan military zone of WWI wrote on the sanitary crisis, which led to several epidemics. The military crisis was a way for the British women to prove their worth in the theatres of war, as a prerequisite for obtaining suffrage.

Two papers are devoted to significant Serbian women in the twentieth century: Isidora Sekulić and Ksenija Atanasijević. Jovan Bukovala elucidates both the critical times in which the best Serbian writer Isidora Sekulić lived, particularly what she experienced during and after WWII. In “Dealing with a Crisis: A Note from Ksenija Atanasijević,” Marija Petrović analyzes the fundamental account of Ksenija Atanasijević, promoting an organic unity of pacifism and feminism whose joint objective is to tame selfish human nature and to establish a better and a nobler relationship not just between sexes but between all people. In dealing with crises, both those that affect all humankind and those that are deeply personal ones, Atanasijević engaged in a philosophical dialogue with her era.

This small volume deals with how women philosophers and writers from very different times face the calamities in their own lives, offer profound analyses of the various types of crises, display deliberation on how to act in crises, and provide insight into overcoming crises. In times of natural disasters and epidemics, both women and men must respond to save their own lives and the lives of others. In wars and post-war times, the roles of women seem to be significantly different. In war times women take over men’s jobs and responsibilities, changing their roles in society. In the post-war times, women must take leading roles in the consolidation of society, including paying due respect to their dead husbands, consoling parents of the dead soldiers, educating and nurturing the youth, and organizing sustainable work and order in political society. Only by confronting crises bravely and analyzing them meticulously, can one hope to overcome the often difficult and dangerous events of our lives. Moreover, women philosophers and writers, as both participants and witnesses, reflect not only how to overcome crises, but also how to profoundly understand them, and, perhaps, in the future, thereby avoid at least some of them.

Aleksandar Kandić*

EMANCIPATION OR INSTRUMENTALIZATION: SOME REMARKS ON PLATO'S FEMINISM

Abstract: The paper explores broader socio-historical circumstances which led to the famous Plato's argument in favor of gender equality in *Republic V*. The author will critically discuss some of the most relevant interpretations of the argument given by G. Vlastos, J. Annas, A. W. Saxonhouse, and other contemporary philosophers. While some influences of Pythagoreanism or even Spartan practices must be admitted, Plato's argument appears to be quite original and "revolutionary" for the 4th century B.C. Athens. Of particular importance is to recognize the instrumentalist character of Plato's and ancient Greek feminism in general, through careful comparisons with the contemporary era.

Keywords: emancipation, instrumentalization, Plato's feminism, ancient Greece.

Prior to the feminist revolution, which gained pace mostly during the 1970s, Plato's considerations on the social role of women elaborated in the *Republic* were often neglected by the commentators or taken as an example of Platonic irony. Influential scholars such as Benjamin Jowett, Alfred E. Taylor, Allan Bloom, or Ernest Barker, offered superficial discussions on the topic and usually expressed disagreement with the key points of Plato's argument on female emancipation – even if the argument wasn't meant to be taken seriously. But then, in the second half of the 20th century, this entirely changed: the so-called Plato's feminism became one of the burning issues in women's studies, particularly because it represents the very first historical example of a systematic, rational-philosophical argument put in favor of gender equality. After Karl Popper's eerie silence on the feminist views expressed in the Book V of the *Republic*, which simply didn't fit his liberal critique of Plato's ideal society, we suddenly found ourselves in the midst of a fierce philosophical (and socio-political) debate. Were Plato's feminist ideas genuine, emancipatory in character, or was he

* Aleksandar Kandić, Research Associate, Institute for Philosophy, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade, e-mail: akandic1@gmail.com.

only trying to exploit the gifted women to the benefit of his society? Are there any similarities between the contemporary and Platonic concepts of feminism? Should Plato's position in the *Republic* even be called 'feminist'? Thus, after paving his way into contemporary ethical, epistemological, and natural-philosophical debates, Plato's thought became quite relevant for gender studies as well. His dialogues are an almost endless source of provocative ideas which surpass the time in which they were conceived.

To shed light onto Plato's strategy in *Republic V*, first, we shall examine the historical circumstances in ancient Athens, as well as the most relevant philosophical and cultural influences under which Plato conceived his ideas on female emancipation. According to Luc Brisson (2012), Plato's project is "revolutionary" for the 4th century B.C. Athens. Back then, human beings were differentiated by their bodies and physical traits. One of the main consequences of such differentiation was the distribution of social roles in which males dealt with public affairs, and females with private. Women were not allowed to participate in politics, to make meaningful decisions on governmental and other important state issues. Naturally, the distribution of jobs was also affected – due to their stronger physique, males were given tougher jobs, particularly within manual labor and the military. Women's position in classical Athens is, in fact, comparable to the female social role within some contemporary Muslim societies (Annas, 1976, p. 311). They had no rights to formal education, nor to ownership of property. Instead, they were educated by their mothers and relatives only to prepare for marriage and household work. But, as Brisson points out, in ancient Athens there was no particular religious, metaphysical or political theory that underlay such social order. It derived from a very simplistic world-view dominated by biology and human physical traits. Thus, it was quite natural for Athenians to (over)emphasize woman's reproductive function and to build their social structure and relationships on the basis of this biological principle.

However, the social role of women was not identical in all ancient Greek states. In Sparta, the greatest Athenian nemesis within the Greek world, women held noticeably more power (Pomeroy, 2013, p. 67). In contrast to Athenian laws and practices, Spartan women had rights to at least some formal education, as well as to own property.¹ Although they didn't actively participate in the military, they had more saying in governmental affairs and generally possessed more freedom than their counterparts in other Greek societies (which brought them the reputation for "promiscuity"). While there is no direct evidence that Plato's views on the social role of women were inspired by Spartan practices, he might have been

1 This was, of course, sharply criticized by conservative Aristotle.

under the impression that the active role of Spartan women contributed to the battleground achievements of the army. Unlike Athenian society which excluded women from social life, and took much more interest in philosophical investigations and development of democratic institutions, Sparta was largely subordinated to military goals. Spartan way of the organization usually brought prevalence in military conflicts, particularly in the second Peloponnesian war. But, it is rather difficult to recognize aspects of female "emancipation" within Spartan society or Plato's ideal society in the modern, *libertarian* sense of the word. The inclusion of women usually meant *more boots on the ground*: more warriors, more workers and artisans, more available human power. Plato's political ideas resemble a call for full mobilization during the time of grave crisis. Even in Athens, women who renounced their projected child-bearing futures were welcomed in the military.

Another significant and often overlooked influence on Plato's social theory comes from the Pythagorean philosophy (Kandić, 2013). In her recent study on the Pythagorean women, Sarah Pomeroy rightly claims that:

Pythagoreanism survived among women also because some of its tenets were later absorbed into Platonism, which admitted female disciples. ... Both Pythagoreanism and Platonism emphasized mathematics as having not merely material value but also a spiritual power, and music was an audible expression of mathematical relationships. (2013, p. 56)

Pythagorean philosophical schools were, in fact, the first to admit women. Although some of the evidence is disputable and problematic, one can enumerate several influential Pythagorean woman-philosophers who lived before Plato, such as Theano, Damo, Myia, and so on. In the *Symposium*, Plato himself imagines the female character of Diotima of Mantinea, who reveals the true nature of Eros and the form of beauty to Plato's Socrates. She is not a "lover of wisdom" – she *is* wise and in possession of the highest knowledge, which, in a certain way, puts her in more authoritative position than Socrates. Perhaps the passages on Diotima, as well as the analogy between the Socratic method and maieutics in the *Theatetus* make a stronger case for Plato's feminism than the rigid, military program elaborated in the *Republic*, bringing it a little bit closer to contemporary values.² Pomeroy also provides us with the following important information, closely related to the discussion in the previous paragraph: "Pythagoreanism would seem to have a special attraction for Spartan women. The largest contingent of women were Spartans..." (p. 10). So, it appears that

² Arlene Saxonhouse appears to follow this line of thought, although she does not explicitly endorse it (1976). She also introduces the analogy between politics and the female art of weaving from the *Politicus*.

there is some interconnectedness between Plato's ideal state, Pythagoreanism, and Spartan practices. According to Pomeroy, we shouldn't take seriously Aristotle's testimony on the Pythagorean table of opposites in which the female is associated with "evil" and "darkness" (*Metaph.* 986a) since all the other evidence suggests that the Pythagoreans made the first, monumental steps towards gender equality.

In 2018, a young woman philosopher Caterina Pelò completed her doctoral thesis on the women in early Pythagoreanism at the Cambridge University. Her study represents a significant contribution to the understanding of the social role of women in early Pythagorean societies. The last chapter of the thesis examines the relationship between Pythagorean philosophy and Plato's feminist theory in *Republic V* in detail. Pelò concludes that although the influences of Pythagoreanism are "minimal," they are quite significant and undeniable. She also finds that "Plato develops the Pythagorean views on male and female natures into a non-gendered philosophical anthropology" (p. 67). There are several important differences between Pythagorean and Platonic conceptions of the female role in society. First, in Plato's ideal city, the educational practices mostly apply to the guardian women, while in Pythagorean societies they encompass the entire female population. Second, in Kallipolis, female rulers, or philosopher-queens are made possible, but in early Pythagoreanism there is no evidence that women were assigned ruling tasks. Third, the communism of property, which was present in early Pythagorean societies, is extrapolated to the communism of wives and children in the *Republic*. Even though the Pythagoreans called for philosophical education of women, they retained their traditional roles of wives and mothers, and unlike Plato, highly praised the traditional concept of "nuclear" family by making it fundamental to the unity of their classless society. So, the Pythagorean lifestyle inspired Plato's social theory in certain extent and set the stage for his revolutionary vision of the female role.

However, when it comes to Plato, Pythagoreans or Spartans, I find it hard to argue in favor of female "emancipation" in the contemporary sense of the word, which is based upon libertarian philosophy. All versions of ancient feminism inevitably suffer from the *instrumentalist* approach: their main goal is to find more *use* for women, not to set them free. The intellectual, technological and military development of human societies which gained pace during the 6th century B.C. not only in ancient Greece, but in multiple parts of the world simultaneously, generated demand for utilization of entire populations, and this meant tapping into all available human resources. While some of Plato's ideas, taken out of their historical and philosophical context, might be compared to contemporary

feminist views, this must be conducted in a very cautious manner. As Arlene Saxonhouse suggests (1976, pp. 196–203), Plato's feminism – and we may add, ancient feminism in general – is quite prone to de-sexualization of women. For the ancients, feminism was not about the free expression of intellectual, social and sexual desires. It mostly promoted the utilization of gifted women who were encouraged to contribute to society to the same extent as men. Thus, some women led *double lives* as mothers, and as professionals. In Plato, the instrumentalist paradigm is elevated to extreme heights, as the female natural, reproductive function is considered almost irrelevant in the process of labor division.

I will now turn to Plato's argument in *Republic V*, as well as some of the most relevant interpretations, particularly those given by Gregory Vlastos and Julia Annas. Irina Deretić offers a clear, straightforward analysis of the argument (2013, pp. 154–158). She points out the “big question” with which Plato's inquiry begins: “...whether female human nature is capable of sharing with the male all tasks or none at all, or some but not others, and under which of these heads *this business of war falls*” (*Resp.* 453a).³ The general meaning of the argument is slightly distorted by this wording. One immediately wonders, does Plato aim to introduce gender equality within the military ranks only, or within all jobs? Is he genuinely interested in other fields of human productivity at all? The theme of warfare occupies the central spot. Nevertheless, the argument itself is very sound and logically founded. It revolves around the concepts of sameness and difference, which are, interestingly, central to Plato's cosmology in the *Timaeus*, as well as the philosophy of language in the *Sophist*. Sameness and difference appear to be fundamental concepts which are often employed by Plato when very important explanations must be given. The seeming contradiction between the two starting premises of the argument in *Republic V*, according to which we ought to allocate different pursuits to different natures and the same to the same, and that men and women can perform the same tasks, even though they have different natures (454b), is resolved through the realization that our understanding of the distinction between the same and the different, with respect to the issue of division of labor between men and women, is wrong and oversimplified. This distinction is not absolute, but contextually dependent: sometimes the two natures are different in one respect, but not different in another one. Thus, it is necessary to examine whether two natures are different or the same “*with respect to a particular function that they ought to perform*” (Deretić, 2013, p. 155). This sets the stage for the famous shoemaker analogy (454c). A good shoemaker possesses intrinsic nature that makes him

3 Translated by Paul Shorey. My italics.

a good shoemaker, which implies that his physical appearance has nothing to do with his shoemaking ability. Him being bald, or long-haired, is completely irrelevant. Therefore, the main purpose of the argument is to show that physical, or biological differences between the sexes are irrelevant for the tasks which they are supposed to perform. For example, although women are *generally* not as strong as men, a *particularly* strong woman will be more suitable for construction work than a particularly weak man. Social roles must be allocated in accordance with individual traits. While women's physical and intellectual capabilities might be diminished during pregnancy, they are usually compatible with men's. More importantly, Plato's argument establishes equality at intellectual level. In Book IV, we have seen that all human souls possess identical tripartite structure, which implies that the female soul is fully capable of reasoning. From this follows that women should receive the same education as men (455e). This is in stark contrast to Athenian beliefs and practices of the time, as well as Aristotle's conservative, misogynist views. Plato's argument in *Republic* V is the first one in philosophical literature to directly challenge the biologically founded social order in which men have active roles, and women passive, as suggested by Luc Brisson. This is, in a certain way, revolutionary. Plato's feminism goes far beyond Pythagorean, or Spartan feminism.

On the other hand, one may wonder why Plato, a skillful writer, includes numerous sexist and misogynist remarks throughout the text of his *Republic*. If he genuinely stood for gender equality, wouldn't he be careful not to allow the Athenian prejudices into his vision of the ideal city, perhaps not even as examples of ill thinking and stupidity? In her essay, Arlene Saxonhouse (1976, pp. 195–196) conveniently reminds us of the statements in the dialogue which enforce the sexist views: that women will always be weaker than men (455e, 456a, 457a), that the plundering of the corpse is an act of small and womanish mind (469d), that women succumb easily to grief (388a, 605e), that they are like children (431c, 557c). On top of that, in Book VII the proposed inclusion of women in the ruling class is forgotten and has to be reasserted (540c), and in Book VIII the equality of sexes actually brings about the descent of democratic society into anarchy and tyranny. So, it's not one or two places, but multiple places which are apparently inconsistent with the argument in Book V. At this point, the reader of the *Republic* begins to doubt Plato's intentions, even without any consideration of the historical circumstances or influences under which the work was written. The discussion which we undertook in the first part of the essay only amplifies these doubts. Plato's feminist ideas originate from an entirely different social matrix and have very little in common with contemporary women's rights movement rooted in liber-

tarian and hedonist philosophy. For the ancients, "emancipation" usually meant "instrumentalization."

Gregory Vlastos aims to resolve the supposed inconsistency in Plato's reasoning in his controversial treatise "Was Plato a Feminist?" (1994).⁴ Vlastos argues that even though Plato's position is multifaceted, being that some aspects of the *Republic* are obviously antifeminist, the ideas concerning the social role of women within the guardian class elaborated in Book V can still be considered feminist in the contemporary sense of the word. Vlastos acknowledges that Plato's personal view of the remaining majority of women belonging to other classes is misogynist, but explains that the sexist remarks scattered throughout the text of the *Republic* and enumerated in the previous paragraph actually refer to the traits of women "deformed and misshaped by the society which has reared them" (p. 18). Such remarks voice what Plato thinks of the Athenian women who grew up in corrupt society which "stunted them intellectually and warped them morally" (p. 18). While this might hold true, it still doesn't answer the main question, which is why did Plato decide to emancipate only gifted women in the guardian class, and not *all* women in *all* classes. Contemporary feminism is not selective, it encompasses all women regardless of their social and financial status, race, or ethnicity. If Plato was genuinely feminist, he would at least clarify that his sexist remarks represent a description of "misshaped" women in Athenian corrupt society, and then propose radical social reforms which dramatically improve the female position by including *all* women into his emancipatory project. Nowhere in the text we may find such clarifications or ideas. As Vlastos himself suggests, only schizophrenia would enable Plato to represent both feminist and antifeminist views simultaneously (p. 17). Either Plato's reasoning is inconsistent, or there is no inconsistency at all since the kind of feminism Plato promotes in *Republic* V has nothing to do with contemporary understanding of the term. Yet, instead of taking this interpretative approach, Vlastos' strategy seems to be to rip Plato's emancipatory ideas not only out of context of the *Republic* and Platonic philosophy, but out of the entire socio-historical context. Vlastos has no other choice, since he's quite persistent in his claim that Plato's feminism is somehow compatible with contemporary one. Paradoxically, this is precisely what enforces the "false impression of inconsistency" (p. 12) which Vlastos' argument is supposed to eliminate in the first place! To support his claims, Vlastos lists seven rights which were denied to Athenian women, but are now provided to the guardian women (pp. 12–14). These are the rights to education, vocational opportunity,

4 Vlastos' paper was first published in 1989. I am using the re-printed version from the collection of essays under the title *Feminist Interpretations of Plato*.

unimpeded sexual intercourse, legal capacity, sexual choice, ownership and disposal of property, as well as political rights. Vlastos even employs wording from a proposed Amendment to the United States Constitution in order to clarify what he means by “feminism” (p. 11). But, can we even speak of citizen “rights” within Plato’s *Republic*? The modern concept of “human rights” is only a few centuries old. And the so-called ERA (Equal Rights Amendment), originating in the contemporary United States, has certainly nothing to do with the issues Plato is trying to resolve in the 4th century B.C. Athens. Vlastos cites several examples from Greek poetry as possible influences on Plato, but he doesn’t take Pythagorean philosophy, Spartan practices, nor the broader socio-historical circumstances into account. We have shown that this is very much relevant for the understanding of Plato’s argument in *Republic V*.

One of the most eloquent critiques of Vlastos’ paper was formulated by Morag Buchan (1999). Buchan writes:

Vlastos is among those critics who are guilty of adopting an anachronistic argument. He takes a 20th-century notion of feminism and superimposes it on Athenian society in the fifth century B.C. But this will not do, for there is no reason whatever to suggest that Plato regarded women as an oppressed group within society and sought to remedy this. (p. 144)

According to Buchan, there are two main problems with Vlastos’ argument. First, it is valid only if we accept the definition of feminism that is offered at the beginning of the paper. But there are no sufficiently convincing reasons to ascribe such definition to Plato. Second, if we do accept a definition of feminism which involves the notion of equal rights of men and women, then Plato could be considered either feminist or anti-feminist. There is no intermediate position. Since Plato’s stance alters from situation to situation within one dialogue, as well as between various dialogues, it is very difficult to portray Plato as “feminist” in the contemporary sense of the word. Surely, some of his ideas may be broadly compared to contemporary ones, but they’re not compatible, simply because the driving forces behind Plato’s feminism are completely different. As Buchan points out, the reason why Plato gives rights to women is not social fairness, but compulsion – his main goal is to exploit all talented individuals in the city-state, male or female, for the benefit of the whole society (p. 145). This is hardly the case with the contemporary gender rights movement. Vlastos appears to be carried away by his desire to portray Plato as a thinker whose ideas are relevant for contemporary feminist discussions. Perhaps they are, but certainly not in the way Vlastos has imagined.

Finally, we must recall Julia Annas’ deliberations on the topic which seem to capture the essence of Plato’s reasoning in the *Republic* to great

extent. Unlike Vlastos, Annas establishes sharp distinction between Plato's ideas on the social role of women and contemporary feminism. This is key to any consistent interpretation of *Republic V*. Annas makes several important observations about Plato's argument. Even though Plato undeniably establishes that biological differences between men and women are irrelevant for the distribution of jobs, he doesn't give up on belief that men are better equipped both mentally and physically (455b), as well as that men are able to outdo women in absolutely everything: "The one sex is, so to speak, far and away beaten in every field by the other" (455d). He only argues that there are no pursuits which are appropriate for women as such, but he doesn't even bother to show that there might be occupations for which men are unequipped. Therefore, while his argument introduces women into spheres previously inaccessible to them, it also cunningly preserves the existing inequality between sexes (only to a lesser extent). Contemporary feminism doesn't stand for such multifaceted values. Naturally, Annas also finds that Plato doesn't take women's desires or needs into account, which is the starting point of modern feminist philosophy. He is mainly interested in utilization of gifted women. In the *Laws*, his position is even a bit more conservative, though he maintains that women have rights to formal education. But, as Annas rightly observes, Plato did not have a word for "rights" (1976, p. 313). In his view, education is not supposed to provide women with better and happier lives, but to increase the number of skillful workers which are obliged to serve the state. Annas concludes her essay with the following remarks:

Mill begins *The Subjection of Women* with the statement that the subordination of one sex to another is wrong in itself. It seems to me that to be a feminist one has to begin from this point. But it is a point that Plato never reaches. And it is not surprising that he never reaches it, for he is not going in that direction at all. (p. 321)

It is not entirely inappropriate to speak of Plato's "feminism," providing that the nature of his feminist ideas is thoroughly investigated and explicated. As we have seen, Plato's social theory doesn't develop out of itself, but under the influence of various intellectual and socio-historical currents, such as Pythagorean philosophy, the rivalry between Athens and Sparta, the corruptness of Athenian society. Although Plato's ideas on the social role of women are *comparable* to modern ones, they are clearly not *compatible*. While contemporary feminism stands for libertarian and emancipatory values, Plato's feminism – as well as ancient feminism in general – appears to be mostly concerned with instrumentalization of intelligent, capable women. Is it even reasonable to acknowledge women's emancipation in Plato's ideal society? While the kind of emancipation

undertaken by Plato is not compatible with contemporary one, it must be admitted that his proposed social reforms do present at least *some* women in ancient Athenian society with fantastic new opportunities. In this sense, it is a step forward – greater than the one Pythagoreans or Spartans undertook. Even “revolutionary.” However, the entire project has military (authoritarian) undertones. They might be picked up at multiple places in the *Republic*. For Plato, the equality of sexes represents a convenient opportunity to strengthen the guardian class and expand the military capabilities of his ideal city.

Many papers examine whether contemporary notion of feminism might be applied to Plato, but none deals with the question of whether Plato’s version of feminism is represented in the real, modern world. This could be a topic for future historians. Today, the rapid technological and cultural development requires massive engagement of all talented individuals, male or female, to the extent never seen before. The goals of states, international alliances and huge multinational companies are put before any personal goals. Numerous women, particularly talented ones, are put under tremendous pressure of fulfilling both family and business duties at the same time. Some private companies silently encourage women not to bear children, in order to dedicate themselves fully to their professional careers. Numerous countries are introducing reforms by which not only women, but also homosexual and transgender persons may join the military. But the reasons for this are not always libertarian. The very complex security situation sometimes necessitates the inclusion of women in the military, police, and other similar public services. Having this in mind, perhaps we should make sure that contemporary feminism is genuine, and not of Platonic type under the cunning disguise of democratic principles and libertarian philosophy.

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Александар Кандић*

ЕМАНЦИПАЦИЈА ИЛИ ИНСТРУМЕНТАЛИЗАЦИЈА: НЕКА ЗАПАЖАЊА О ПЛАТОНОВОМ ФЕМИНИЗМУ

Апстракт: Рад испитује шире друштвено-историјске околности које су довеле до чувеног Платоновог аргумента у прилог родне равноправности у петој књизи *Државе*, као и неке од најрелевантнијих интерпретација тог аргумента понуђених од стране Г. Властоса, Џ. Анас, А. Саксонхаус, и других савремених филозофа. Иако се морају признати извесни утицаји питагорејства, па чак и спартанских обичаја, чини се да је Платонов аргумент веома оригиналан и „револуционаран” за Атину 4. века п.н.е. Нарочито је значајно препознати инструментални карактер Платоновог и старогрчког феминизма уопште, путем обазривих поређења са савременим добом.

Кључне речи: еманципација, инструментализација, Платонов феминизам, античка Грчка.

* Александар Кандић, научни сарадник, Институт за филозофију, Филозофски факултет, Универзитет у Београду, имејл: akandic1@gmail.com.

Tamara Plećaš*

FEMALE FRIENDSHIP IN ANCIENT GREECE AND ROME IN TIMES OF CRISIS

Abstract: This paper aims to show that the idea of a female friendship in Ancient Greece and Rome is possible, even in terms of an “ideal” friendship, i.e. form of a friendship ancient philosophers aspired to. The author of this paper will elucidate the position of women in Greece and Rome and points out that various women actively participated in the work of the philosophical schools and women’s societies. In accordance with the philosophical ideals, “ideal,” “perfect” or “genuine” friends could only be those who possess or at least strive for moral virtue (ἀρετή), while education (παιδεία) was seen as a precondition for acquiring moral virtue. Having in mind that various women met that precondition, it is emphasized that the ideal friendship could be ascribed not only to virtuous men but also to virtuous women. Thus, educated women could potentially be both, “ideal” and “ordinary” friends.

Keywords: Sappho, female philosophers, Pythagoras, Plato, Hellenistic and Roman philosophers.

The Historical and Political Background

The women of the Athenian πόλις did not have political or economic rights, and in the life of each one of them, there had to be present a man (κύριος) who took care of all of her personal affairs with the only exception of the household, in the strict sense of the word. Namely, in Athens “a modest, well-brought-up young woman was hidden from the public eye” (Pomeroy, 2002, p. 3), and for most girls, even the mere possibility of education (παιδεία) was not an option. On the other side, Athenian marriage was an important political institution, to the extent that unmarried men were forbidden to take part in some of the state jobs. However, the woman was mainly “the subject of a contract” established between her κύριος, that is her father, and later her husband, which “closely reflected on her social

* Tamara Plećaš, Research Associate, Institute for Philosophy, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade, e-mail: tamara.plecas@gmail.com; tamara.plecas@f.bg.ac.rs.

position” (Avramović & Stanimirović, 2012, p. 118). Thus, a lawful and “well-brought-up” Athenian wife’s daily routine occurred within the area of the home where she received barely or no education at all (see also: Atanasijević, 2010, pp. 61–62). “We have courtesans for pleasure, concubines to perform our domestic chores, and wives to bear us legitimate children,” Flaceliere quotes words of Demosthenes (Δημοσθένης) (Flaceliere, 2002, p. 73). Solon (Σόλων), an Athenian statesman who lived centuries before Demosthenes, ordered the opening of brothels, at the same time reducing the dowry to a minimum, because “he did not wish that marriage should be a matter of profit or price,” but rather the ordinary life of a man and a woman which should consist in having children, delight and friendship (χάριτι καὶ φιλότητι) (Plut. *Vit. Sol.* 20.4). Thus, a woman of the Athenian πόλις was marginalized and her role was mainly reduced to being a wife and a mother who bears legitimate children, and it seems that the majority of Greek city-states followed the Athenian example. However, in the vast Greek world, apart from Athens, did exist rare communities where women enjoyed far more freedom than women of Athens. These communities were mostly found in Sparta and the island of Lesbos.

Although women possessed little, if any freedom at all, they, nevertheless, maintained a distinguished place in Greek religion and mythology. Women played an important role in ritual and religious ceremonies and aspects of πόλις life (see also: Katz, 2000, pp. 514–516). One of the most prestigious Greek oracles was in Delphi, where ruled Apollo, who ever since “discovered the secret of prophecy,” taught this secret to his priestesses (Greves, 2008, p. 73). Numerous girls and women, nameless to history, were given the name of Pythia after becoming priestesses, sibyls, or prophetesses at Apollo’s temple in Delphi. Only a few we know by their name: Phemonoe (Φημονόη), Aristonike (Ἀριστονίκη) and Periallos (Περίαλλος) (Dillon, 2017, p. 358; *Hdt.* 7.140.1; *Hdt.* 6.66.2). The enigmatic words of Delphic priestesses were influential, in the sense that prophecies of the Delphic oracle shaped the history of the ancient world for more than a thousand years.

If the well-known Delphic principle or maxim “know thyself,” which was always on “Apollo’s lips” (Greves, 2008, p. 75), was applied to his priestesses, it would be apparent that they had very little or no rights, being primarily reduced to the tools or property of the sanctuary as “Apollo’s prophetic ‘mouthpiece’” (Dillon, 2017, p. 9). Those women were powerful, and simultaneously characterized as insane and possessed by Apollo (Pl. *Phdr.* 244b), and they were not the only ones. Trojan princess Cassandra (Κασσάνδρα) was also an instrument of Apollo’s. However, Cassandra, unlike Pythia, represented a prophetic voice that could not influence the

course of the events, not even of her own destiny, even though her area of expertise was the *world of war* which was “traditionally reserved for men” (Gudo, 2003, p. 7). Yet, there were distinguished voices of other women that could be *heard* through some of the Greek plays, though written by male authors, such as Euripides’ (Εὐριπίδης) *Hecuba* (Εκάβη) or *The women of Troy* (Τρωάδες), Sophocles’ (Σοφοκλής) *Antigone* (Ἀντιγόνη) (see also: Knežević, in this Vol.), Aristophanes’ (Ἀριστοφάνης) *Lysistrata* (Λυσιστράτη), and others.

Plato (Πλάτων) also mentions one woman that could be easily both a Sybil and a priestess, and a female philosopher. Her name was Diotima of Mantinea (Διοτίμα), who was wise (σοφή) on the subject of Love and “on many other subjects too,” and who taught Socrates (Σωκράτης) the discourse about Love (τὰ ἐρωτικά ἐδίδαξεν) (Pl. *Symp.* 201d). Besides Diotima, Plato speaks about Aspasia (Ἀσπασία) (Pl. *Menex.*; see also: Deretić, in this Vol.). We are told that Pericles (Περικλῆς) fell in love with Aspasia because of her “political wisdom” and intelligence and that sometimes she was visited by Socrates and his friends (Plut. *Vit. Per.* 24). Once again, Socrates claims that he learned discourse (this time funeral speech) from a woman who “made many good people orators,” including Pericles (Pl. *Menex.* 235e). Thus, we conclude that even in Athens, specific women possessed a certain political power, and they could influence male citizens of Athens to some extent. However, these women were not Athenian by their birth. Furthermore, Diotima and Aspasia are silent in these Plato’s dialogues; Socrates is the one who speaks. Nevertheless, Aspasia’s example shows that political friendships and alliances between women and men, by all accounts, existed to some degree.

Apart from here mentioned priestess and women of Greek drama, as well as the women mentioned by Plato, some Greek women were engaged in writing poetry, philosophy, and science. However, Greek women of letters lived in challenging periods. Namely, the most famous Greek women poets and philosophers, almost without exception, lived and taught in times of crisis, that is, in times of “great danger” and various difficulties, which will be described in the following passages. Crisis (κρίσις) is also defined as an “event,” “issue,” “turning point of a disease,” “sudden change for better or worse” (Liddell & Scott, 1940), and thus could be applicable to the periods of social instability, poverty, exiles, war periods or periods in which something has to be *decided*, etc.

Sappho (Σαπφώ) abandoned her birthplace on the island of Lesbos (Campbell, 1982, p. xi) during the reign of the tyrant Pittacus of Mytilene (Πιττακός). However, due to insufficient information about her life, it is not entirely clear to what extent Sappho acted against the tyrannical regime. It

seems that the Poetess lived in Sicily for a certain period, which could imply that she (or at least her family) was an obstacle to the tyrant's regime. Perhaps her undesirable position was influenced not only by her aristocratic origins, but also by her engagement in a closed society, where the Poetess gathered around other women, and where love was celebrated. Several centuries later, Aristotle (Ἀριστοτέλης) wrote that tyranny, in general, should be seen as the most harmful form of government (Arist. *Pol.* 1310b). Moreover, tyrants are inclined to follow certain rules, such as the prohibition of all kinds of communal meals and associations of any kind (Arist. *Pol.* 1313b), and this could be a good explanation for Sappho's exile. Apart from Sappho, certain philosophers, like Pythagoreans and the Stoics, were also exiled from their hometowns on several different occasions.

The educated women of Sparta were part of a military, strictly hierarchically organised society. Paradoxically, they possessed greater freedom than other Greek women. Nevertheless, they lived in rough conditions, especially during the military expeditions that Sparta undertook.

The Athenian πόλις experienced its greatest economic and cultural prosperity during Pericles' reign. Athens of the "golden age" was the confluence of democracy, art, and philosophy. However, the internal situation in Athens was far from stable. The Athenians, after the controversial law on ostracism was implemented, expelled from Athens some of the most glorious military leaders who were responsible for the development and supremacy of Athens. In 431 BC, Athens went to a Peloponnesian war against Sparta and its allies. Both Athens and Sparta suffered substantial losses during the long and exhausting war, which ended in 404 BC. At that time Socrates was 65, while Plato was 23 (or 24) years old. The unfavorable political climate in Athens further deepened in the years that followed, and even Aristotle fled from the city. The Athens of the Hellenistic and Roman era differed from the Athens of Plato's time. However, Athens was still perceived as a philosophical center in the following centuries. Roman orator, statesmen and philosopher Marcus Tullius Cicero, for example, studied philosophy in Athens, like many others.

Women of Rome, just like women of Greek *polises*, did not have political rights and they were mostly excluded from all the public affairs, with the exception of the Roman priestesses. However, some amongst them were politically influential and glorious, like, for example, Cornelia, who was the daughter of Publius Scipio and Aemilia, and the mother of the Gracchi, Octavia Minor, Julia Agrippina, and others. Cicero did listen to Laelia, a daughter of Gaius Laelius and wife of Mucius Scaevola, who was eloquent like all good legal orators, and "Laelia's *elegantia* was passed on to her daughters, the two Muciae, and to her

granddaughters, the two Liciniae” (Bauman, 1994, pp. 47–8). Although Laelia is not mentioned by name in Cicero’s dialogue *On friendship*, his dialogue may owe much to the memory of the conversations he had with her (Bauman, 1994, p. 48). Nevertheless, Cicero ascribed virtue (*virtus*) only to men (*vir*) (Cic. *Tusc.* 2.43).

Fourth century Alexandria was “the western world’s center of scientific, philosophic, and other intellectual achievements” and “the site of tremendous social, political, religious, and academic turmoil” at the same time (Waithe, 1987, p. 169). Hypatia (Ἵπατία), a Neoplatonist philosopher and mathematician, was perhaps the most famous of all Greek women philosophers. She lived and taught in Alexandria¹, and has been called a philosopher (ἡ φιλόσοφος) (Deretić, 2020, pp. 148–151). Because of her involvement in the political circumstances of Alexandria at the time, and her intellect, beauty, and political connections, she died tragically, being murdered at the Caesareum.²

The Possibility of a Female Friendship

The Greek word φίλος has a variety of meanings such as “beloved,” “dear,” “friend,” “husband,” etc. while the female form of the noun, that is φίλη, means “dear one,” “friend,” “wife,” “mistress,” etc. (Liddell & Scott, 1940). Friends could be members of the same family, society, or even πόλις, allies, etc., which is an “ordinary,” “usual,” or “everyday” meaning of the word. A friend could also be described as “another self,” because “friendly relations with one’s neighbours [...] seem to have proceeded from a man’s relations to himself” (Arist. *Nic. Eth.* 1166a).

We cannot claim with certainty that *intimate* friendships between men and women or between women and women existed, especially since there are no documented sources and female records. However, one such assumption is reasonable, even though it wasn’t until the fifteenth century that women began to express their personal views on friendship more loudly and openly. Namely, one of the first women to cultivate a large number of intellectual friendships with both men and women was

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- 1 It is fascinating to point out that Alexandria was previously the capital of Ptolemaic Egypt, where women, contrary to the women of Greece and Rome, possessed more freedom, to the extent that some of them even ruled. Namely, in Ptolemaic Egypt “queens are to be found in the traditionally man spheres of government,” which was in Greek societies “off-limits to respectable women” (Pomeroy, 1984, xviii).
 - 2 The Caesareum of Alexandria was a temple founded by Cleopatra VII Philopator. One outstanding woman built this temple to celebrate love, and another died in it because of her love for wisdom.

an Italian writer and humanist, Laura Cereta, who was greatly influenced by Cicero's thought and his dialogue *On friendship* (James & Kent, 2014).

Ancient Greek and Roman philosophers searched for the definition of an "ideal," "genuine," "perfect," or *intimate* friendship. Plato's and Aristotle's thought on this subject influenced Cicero and the Stoics, while readings of Aristotle and Cicero had a substantial influence on the medieval and modern thinkers. Philosophers were solely focused on the nature of male friendship. Moreover, the *perfect* friendship was opposed to "everyday" or "ordinary" forms of friendships. Besides that, it is important to point out that Greek and Roman philosophers assumed that men in general can acquire moral virtue (ἀρετή). Furthermore, they assumed that moral virtue was a required precondition for an *ideal* friendship. In other words, no vicious man can be a true friend to anyone, not even to himself (see: Pl. *Lys.* 214 d; Arist. *Nic. Eth.* 1165b-1166b; Diog. Laert. 7.124). On the contrary, a vicious man could be a friend in the usual connotation of this word, because he is someone's son, father, etc. Having all this in mind, can we make any conclusive presumptions about the female friendship of that period?

Firstly, we should emphasize that an *everyday* or *ordinary* female friendship existed, which is also highlighted in ancient and other sources (Flaceliere, 2002, pp. 70–71; Plut. *Vit. Sol.* 20.4). Namely, the Greek and Roman housewives, often accompanied by their slaves, visited each other, and those visits were good opportunities for them to exchange daily news, worries, etc. Philosophers also recognize this type of relationship (Arist. *Nic. Eth.*; Plečaš, 2019) and we can easily observe that Aspasia was Pericles' φίλη and that Sappho had at least a few φίλοι. However, we need to answer the question if these or other educated women could be *ideal*, *perfect*, or *genuine* friends.

The so-called saying, which is often attributed to Pythagoras (Πυθαγόρας) and his followers (Diog. Laert. 8.10) that "friends have all things in common" (κοινὰ γὰρ τὰ τῶν φίλων) (Pl. *Phdr.* 279 c), was later used as a proverb by the Cynics and the Stoics (Diog. Laert. 6.72; Diog. Laert. 7.23). This saying implies that friends are equal and that they can share anything for that particular reason. Pythagoras was "the first Greek philosopher to include women among his disciples" (Pomeroy, 2013, p. xv), and we can assume that these women had some (equal) rights with their fellow men in the Pythagorean community.

Ancient philosophers mainly believed that through education human beings become more receptive to moral virtue. Moreover, as Lucius Annaeus Seneca claims, moral virtue could be cultivated only in an edu-

cated soul, that is in a soul which “has been trained and taught, and by unremitting practice brought to perfection” (Sen. *Ep.* 90.46). For that reason education, especially philosophical education, was seen as an indispensable precondition for acquiring moral virtue or excellence. It should be also stressed that the primary goal of education was not erudition, but pursuit of happiness (εὐδαιμονία).

Plato was explicit about the female capacity to obtain moral virtues. Namely, in Plato’s *Republic*, we find the idea that natural capacities among men and women are distributed equally, meaning that a woman can “by nature” participate in all affairs in which a man participates (see also: Kandić, in this Vol.). Moreover, the guardian women will instead of clothes “be clothed with virtue as a garment” (Pl. *Resp.* 457 a). The education that both women and male guardians should adopt consisted of music and gymnastics education, as well as warfare skills (Pl. *Resp.* 451e-452b). On the other side, Aristotle thought that a woman is not reasonable in the same manner as a grown-up man and that she is, by her nature, subordinated to a man (Arist. *Pol.* 1260 a-b). This means that a woman is not fully rational like a grown-up man. Nevertheless, friendships amongst women and men could exist, according to Aristotle, but only as an unequal form of a friendship, because one side of this relationship is more dominant than the other (see: Plećaš, 2019). However, love and mutual affection between a man and a woman could provide both benefit and enjoyment.

When it comes to Hellenistic philosophical schools, some of the Roman Stoics, like Musonius Rufus, held that education should be available not only to men but also to women who can equally develop moral virtue (Muson. 3, 4). Seneca “believed in women’s capacities for philosophical thinking” (Grahn-Wilder, 2018, p. 191), while Epictetus (Επίκτετος) also thought that women could be philosophers (Epict. *Diss.* 2.14.7–8). Since rationality was seen as a precondition for a person to have moral virtues, then moral virtues, according to the Stoics, were equally available to women because they thought that women were also rational beings in the same manner as men (see also: Deretić, 2016, pp. 102–104). The Stoics, like Socrates, equated moral virtue with knowledge (Dobrijević, 2021), which implied that happiness (εὐδαιμονία) depended exclusively on the complete realization of the rational nature of a human being. Stoic ideas followed, in a sense, Roman social practices.

In the Roman time, friendship or *amicitia*, at least seemingly, was exclusively oriented towards men. However, during the last century of the Roman Republic and the first centuries of the Roman Empire, the position of women gradually improved, although the family was still the “property”

of the *paterfamilias*. Roman women “in the early Empire” possessed more rights than women of the classical Greek period, and they were able to participate more actively in festivals and feasts (Motto, 1972, p. 156). Furthermore, wealthy Roman citizens could afford tutors for their daughters who educated them. With the rise of women’s rights and education, the number of divorces in Rome also had inevitably risen. Seneca writes, referring to women of his time, that “they leave home to marry, they marry to divorce? So long as it was a rarity, a divorce was feared; now that the divorce is a fashionable topic of a conversation, they have learned to perform what they have heard so often described” (Sen. *Ben.* 3.16.2; Motto, 1972, p. 156).

Poets, Philosophical Communities and Women Philosophers

In this segment of the paper, we will highlight women who were educated, and therefore, were able to develop moral virtue, which was taken as a prerequisite for an “ideal” friendship. Several of these women have previously been introduced in this paper by their names.

Plato mentions one among “the wise women of old,” namely “the lovely Sappho” (Σαπφούς τῆς καλῆς) (Pl. *Phdr.* 235 b-c), who was considered to be the tenth Muse in antiquity (*P. A.* 60: Campbell, 1982, p. 49). Although Sappho’s work is fragmentarily preserved, we do know that the Poetess wrote lyric poetry on a variety of topics. She was a member of a closed society, as previously stated, where female deities were celebrated. However, it should be noted that closed societies or groups of this type were not an exclusive feature of Lesbos, but also of other parts of Greece like Sparta. Moreover, it seems likely that in such or similar communities women called Gorgo (Γοργώ) and Andromeda (Ἀνδρομέδα) taught (Campbell, 1982, p. xiii).

There are testimonials which “speak of Sappho as a *teacher* in some sense” (Parker, 1993, pp. 317–321). Nevertheless, we do not know with certainty that the Poetess “ran a school” (Parker, 1993, p. 321). However, the poets in general belonged to the group of people who were praised in every part of Greece, and their legacy was of high importance, both in ancient and modern times. Sappho’s correspondence with other women from her circle was sometimes perceived as “highly controversial” (Konstan, 1997, p. 47) because it was suggested that Sappho was involved in some type of homoerotic relationships with other women. We could easily be “blinded by the largely unexamined assumptions of the previous gen-

erations of scholars” (Parker, 1993, p. 312), and thus cautious and critical evaluation of her work is very much needed. The Poetess “addresses some women as φίλαι and ἐταῖραι” (Konstan, 1997, p. 47). However, this could also be interpreted in the sense that she perceived them as her *close* and *intimate* friends. This leads us to the assumption that her friendships could be explained without the homosexual connotation. Namely, sexual intimacy is not the only form of intimacy we could strive to achieve.

It could be perceived as peculiar but there was a great number of educated women in Sparta, to the extent that there were even more educated women than men. Sparta prescribed “an educational program for both boys and girls” since childhood and girls from Sparta married at the age of eighteen, later than other girls of Greece (Pomeroy, 2002, pp. 3–5). Thus, they had more time to learn writing, poetry, music, etc. Women of Sparta were “neither silenced nor secluded,” while women of Athens were (Pomeroy, 2013, p. xvi). One of the distinguished women was Phintys of Sparta or Croton (Φίντυς), who belonged to the “members of Pythagoras’ family and the original Pythagorean cults” (Waithe, 1987, p. 19).

Pythagorean society allowed some women to be educated. Furthermore, there were women within Plato’s Academy. Namely, Axiothea of Philesia (Ἀξιοθέα Φλειασία) and Lasthenia of Mantinea (Λασθένεια Μαντινική) were known as Plato’s students (Waithe, 1987, p. 83). Yet, there is no record of a single woman from Aristotle’s Lyceum, which is not surprising if we recall his opinions on women.

When it comes to the Hellenistic philosophical schools and societies, it seems that most of them were, to some degree, open to the idea of women philosophers. One of the most prominent women of that era was the aristocrat Hipparchia of Maroneia (Ἰππαρχία ἢ Μαρωνεΐτις), who left her father’s home, and lived on the streets of Athens with Crates of Thebes (Κράτης ὁ Θηβαῖος) (Diog. Laert. 6.96–98). This marriage “was prompted by love,” and Hipparchia “was herself another Crates,” that is a Cynic (Epict. *Diss.* 3.22.76). The Garden of Epicurus (Ἐπίκουρος) was also open to women (Nišavić, 2018, pp. 21–23; Diog. Laert. 10.25), while the Stoics encouraged women’s education. Namely, some of the well known Roman Stoics, as we have previously pointed out, thought that women could also be philosophers.

Pythagoras’ student and later wife Theano of Crotona (Θεανώ), together with their daughters, laid the foundations of the Alexandrian school, while Arete of Cyrene (Ἀρήτη) succeeded her father Aristippus of Cyrene (Ἀρίστιππος ὁ Κυρηναῖος) as the head of the Cyrenaic school of philosophy (Popović, 2012, p. 24). There are no reliable sources of Arete’s teachings; however, we do know that she taught Aristippus, “who went

by the name of mother-taught” (Ἀριστιππος ὁ μητροδίδακτος ἐπικληθεὶς), and that his disciple was Theodorus the Atheist (Θεόδωρος ὁ ἄθεος) (Diog. Laert. 2.86). A couple of centuries after Pythagoras died, “Neopythagorean women became the first women in the Greek world to write prose texts that are extant” (Pomeroy, 2013, p. xv). These women lived in different places like Rome, Athens, western Greek colonies and Alexandria, and some of their texts are preserved (*ibid.*, p. 42).

Finally, Hypatia was widely known for her philosophical work, and lecturing in the public square in Alexandria, wearing a philosophical cloak that was often considered to be a recognizable sign of a philosopher in Roman times (Whiting, 2020, p. 26). Yet, a cloak was not, as Roman Stoic Epictetus suggests, a sufficient indicator of whether one is a *genuine* philosopher (Epict. *Diss.* 4.8). Namely, Stoics accepted the idea that *true* philosophers should live in accordance with their philosophy, which was a widely common idea in Greek philosophy (Plećaš, 2021, p. 283). Hypatia met that condition, being a paradigm of how a philosophical life should be led.

Thus, having in mind all previously said, the following is observed. All of the educated women could be equal to men within the philosophical schools and various societies mentioned in this paper. More specifically, they could be equal to men only in the sense that they had equal opportunity for acquiring moral virtue because in that period of history they could not achieve equal political or even social status as men. Furthermore, *intimate* or *ideal* friendships among all of the schools or society members could be potentially developed. Thus, the idea of an *ideal* female friendship in antiquity stands not only as a mere possibility but rather as a reality. Of course, we should bear in mind that the philosophical ideal of friendship was, as the word says, an *ideal*, thus something which only rare men or women could hope to achieve.

Concluding Remarks

In the first segment of this paper we have discussed the historical and political context in which lived and taught some of the most prominent women of letter of Greece and vast Greek, and later Roman world, which could be described at the same time as a period of *crisis*. In the second part of this paper, we have questioned the possibility of a female friendship or, more precisely, the possibility of women being *ideal* friends, according to the criteria of Greek and Roman philosophers who discussed the topic of friendship. This ideal could be met only on the hypothesis

that women were able to achieve moral virtue, just like men. Finally, in the third segment of this paper, we wrote about known women of letters of Ancient Greece and the Roman Empire, apostrophizing ones again that the idea of a female friendship is possible.

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Тамара Плећаш*

ЖЕНСКО ПРИЈАТЕЉСТВО У АНТИЧКОЈ ГРЧКОЈ И РИМУ У ВРЕМЕНИМА КРИЗЕ

Апстракт: Циљ овог текста је да покаже да је идеја женског пријатељства, током периода античке Грчке и Рима, могућа, па чак и када је реч о „идеалном“ пријатељству, тј. облику пријатељства коме су стремили неки од најпознатијих античких филозофа. Да би то показала, ауторка овог текста, анализира позицију жена у Грчкој и Риму, указујући да су неке од њих активно учествовале у раду филозофских школа или да су биле чланице женских удружења. У складу са филозофским идеалима, „савршено“ или „идеално“ пријатељство је било могуће само међу онима који су поседовали, или макар тежили томе да остваре моралну врлину (ἀρετή), док се образовање (παιδεία) посматрало као предуслов за стицање врлине. Ако имамо у виду да су одређене жене могле да испуне тај предуслов, закључује се да се савршено пријатељство може приписати подједнако и женама и мушкарцима. Наиме, образоване жене могу, у начелу, да буду и „идеалне“, а не само „свакодневне“ пријатељице.

Кључне речи: Сапфа, филозофкиње Грчке и Рима, питагорејци, Платон, хеленистичке школе

* Тамара Плећаш, научни сарадник, Институт за филозофију, Филозофски факултет, Универзитет у Београду, имејл: tamara.plecacas@gmail.com; tamara.plecacas@fbg.ac.rs.

Irina Deretić*

ASPASIA: WOMAN IN CRISES

Abstract: Like Socrates, Aspasia did not leave any writings. We know about her from secondary sources. In this paper, I will show a number of things in the reports of what Aspasia said and did that are philosophically interesting, especially in what they show about dealing with various kinds of crises, from marital to political ones. First, I will argue for the most probable reconstruction of her life. Second, I will elucidate what kind of method Aspasia employed when considering marital issues. Third, I will endeavor to prove that Plato's representation of Aspasia was not a mockery, as some authors argue. Furthermore, the most significant philosophical points of Aspasia's Funeral Speech will be highlighted and assessed. Eventually, I will attempt to figure out what Plato's reasons might have been to ascribe this speech to a woman.

Keywords: Aspasia, philosophy, Aeschines Socraticus, funeral oration, *Menexenus*

Introduction

In the history of humankind, Aspasia¹ is not the only woman of real talents who was maliciously slandered and ruthlessly mocked. In Athenian Old Comedy, she is a “dog-eyed concubine” who “bears” Pericles “shameless lust” (259 K-A).² Moreover, Aspasia and her two prostitutes were accused for beginning of the Great War in all Hellas (*Ach.* 515–537). From Cratinus to Eupolis and Aristophanes, in comedy, Aspasia was nothing but a courtesan who employed her devilish charisma to accomplish shameless and evil goals. On the other hand, Aspasia is considered to be a sagacious woman with an excellent intellectual reputation both in rhetoric and philosophy by the most distinguished and prominent authors including Plato (c. 427–347 BC), Aeschines of Sphettus

* Irina Deretić, Full Professor, Department of Philosophy, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade, e-mail: ideretic1@gmail.com.

1 Like Aspasia, Saint Monica was one of the intellectually influential women, who did not leave any writings. In this volume, D. Dimitrijević insightfully writes on the intellectual contribution of Monica to Augustine's thought.

2 K-A/PCG stands for *Poetae Comici Graeci*, ed. R. Kassel and C. Austin.

(c. 425–350 BC), Xenophon (c. 430–354 BC), Cicero (106–43 BC), and Athenaeus (fl. AD 200). The opposed assessments seem to adduce that she, virtuous or not, played an important role in the public life in the Athens of her time.

In this paper,³ I will show a number of things in the reports of what Aspasia said and did that are philosophically interesting, especially in what they show about dealing with various kinds of crises, from marital to political ones. First, I will argue for the most probable reconstruction of her life. Second, I elucidate what kind of method Aspasia used when considering marital issues. Third, I will endeavor to prove that in the *Mexenus* Plato did not treat Aspasia as a laughing stock. I will highlight what are the most significant philosophical points of the Funeral Oration. Finally, I will attempt to find out what Plato's reasons might have been to ascribe this speech to a woman.

The Controversies Regarding Aspasia's Life

The problem with a reconstruction of Aspasia's *bios* is not a lack of information but, rather, too much of it that is controversial and inconsistent. The best-known source of information about Aspasia is Plutarch's *Lives of the Noble Greeks and Romans* (AD 100), an account written several hundred years after her existence. Plutarch's description of her life, which is a part of Pericles' *bios*, is a combination of Socratic sources and some allusions to Aspasia given in the comedies. According to Plutarch, Aspasia was Milesian by birth, the daughter of Axiochus, who was adored by Pericles not only for her sexual appeal, but also for her knowledge and political skills. Socrates and the Socratic philosophers respected her intelligence, education, and oratory skills. Plutarch says that she was a *hetaira* whose house was "a home for young courtesans," and also claims that Aspasia taught spouses of Athenian aristocrats. Aspasia's home seems to be a gathering place for the Athenian aristocrats, where she met Pericles, who fell in love with her.

Another reconstruction of Aspasia's *bios* has been offered by Peter J. Bicknell, which seems to be more credible.⁴ According to his research, based on the literary and epigraphic evidence, Bicknell has reconstructed Aspasia's life as follows: She was born around 470 BC in Miletus, in the

3 I gratefully acknowledge the insightful comments and suggestions given to me on this paper by Nicholas D. Smith.

4 See Bicknell, 1982, pp. 240–250.

family of Axiochus, a Milesian aristocrat,⁵ where she received an excellent education. The Athenian Alcibiades, the elder, was married to Aspasia's sister, who upon his ostracism in the spring of 460 BC took up residence in Miletus. He and Aspasia's sister had a son, whom they named Axiochus⁶ after his Milesian grandfather. Their second son was named Aspasius.⁷ Aspasia moved to Athens in 450 BC with her brother-in-law's family, because of political upheaval and threats to the family. Given that Pericles was closely associated with Alcibiades' family, he met Aspasia in their home and fell in love with her. After divorcing his wife, Pericles and Aspasia lived as husband and wife. Aspasia gave birth to Pericles, the junior.⁸ Bicknell compellingly argues that evidence in "favour of her having been a free woman at the very least [is] the legitimization of Pericles the younger" (Bicknell, 1982, p. 247).

The union of Aspasia and Pericles, which lasted eleven to thirteen years, seems to be based on mutual respect and emotional support, allowing Aspasia to develop her mind in ways rare for women of that time. Pericles died of the plague in 429 BC, which in all likelihood created another crisis for Aspasia. Soon after Pericles' death, Aspasia seems to enter into a subsequent union with Lysicles, a successful politician of democratic orientation, who died in 428/7 BC.⁹ Bicknell does not mention that she was *hetaira* either before or after her time with Pericles.

In the aftermath of the plague that killed Pericles and so many other Athenians, Aspasia might have chosen another intimate relationship for social and financial reasons. As a naturalized Athenian (assuming Bicknell's proposal is correct), Aspasia would not be legally permitted to possess wealth of her own, and would thus need an Athenian patron or else face personal and economic ruin. We cannot ascertain what other motives she may have had for this second union, which was realized so soon after Pericles' death. What is certain is that the choices available to women in

5 Aspasia's Milesian origin and the name of her father are attested by Plut. *Per* 24.2 and Diodorus of Athens in schol. Pl. *Menex.* 235e = Diodorus of Athens, *FGrH* frag. 40.

6 Although the name Axiochus was not rare among the Greeks of Asia Minor, "no earlier Axiochus is attested at Athens and the indications are that the name remained extremely uncommon there" (Bicknell, 1981, p. 246).

7 "Both born before Perikles' citizenship law of 451/0, Axiochos and Aspasius were immune from its provisions" (Bicknell, 1982, p. 247). According to this citizenship law of 451/0, citizenship would be conferred only on children whose both parents were Athenians.

8 See Eup. 110 *K-A/PCG*.

9 For Lysicles and Aspasia, see Plut. *Per.* 24.6, and additional testimonia in Krauss: *Aeschinis Socratici Reliquiae*, items VII, IX, X, as well as pp. 45–47.

her situation were very limited, and marriage to Lysicles would obviate many of the ones that would have been extremely difficult for her.

Aspasia and Marriages in Crisis

Aspasia is represented very favorably by Socratic philosophers such as Xenophon and Aeschines of Sphettus. The latter wrote a dialogue bearing her name. In *De Inventione*, Cicero cites parts of the dialogue written by Aeschines, in which Aspasia interrogates both Xenophon's wife and himself. Cicero acknowledges Aspasia's clever form of reasoning by employing her examples of ἐπαγωγή in his own argumentation chapter. First, Aspasia questions Xenophon's spouse, and then Xenophon himself in the same fashion:

"I wish you would tell me, Xenophon," she said, "if your neighbor had a better horse than yours, would you prefer your horse or his?"

"His," was the answer.

"And if he had a better farm than you have, which farm would you prefer to have?"

"The better farm, naturally," he said.

"Now, if he had a better wife than you have, would you prefer yours or his?"

And at this, Xenophon, too, himself was silent. (*De Inventione* [I.31.51–52])

After Aspasia's cross-examination, both spouses were ashamed: Xenophon's wife blushed, and Xenophon was silent. These emotional reactions are analogous to the responses of Socrates' interlocutors who become ashamed when acknowledging that their beliefs are false because Socrates shows their inconsistency. Shame does not always block the thinking of an ashamed person; it rather calls their attention to the fact that something is wrong with one's argument that thus requires further thought and revision, if not abandonment. As for Xenophon and his wife, they are also aware that they made an error in reasoning.

Why are their responses faulty? Reply to this question will require understanding that "the dialectical strategy" Aspasia employs here "moves the discussants up along a set of" (Henry, 1995, p. 44) apparently similar alternatives asking whether one prefers a better or worse alternative. One of the critical features of Greek thought in general, and Socrates' in particular, is to opt for a better, not a worse alternative. So it is not odd that the interlocutors nod to everything usually assessed as better. However,

both interlocutors prefer not just the better, but the better that belongs to someone else, i.e., to their neighbor, which makes their preferences morally problematic. The assent has been given to all these apparently non-contentious statements, such as preferring neighbor's better horse, his better property or neighbor's wife better jewelry. Both interlocutors, however, stopped nodding when they were asked whether or not they would prefer a better neighbor's wife or a better neighbor's husband. At that moment, both Xenophon and his wife grasp that coveting what is another's is a moral fault.

What Aspasia wanted is to bring both spouses into a situation where they will both self-examine their own roles in the marriage. She argues that if one prefers and wants a better spouse, one should be a better spouse. Each partner in a marriage should do everything possible to become a better person, including correcting oneself if she or he wishes to be loved and respected fully by the other partner. In addition, she highlights in a Socratic manner that only through the ἀρετή of both spouses, which implies a process of constant moral improvement, can they achieve εὐδαιμονία. Moreover, Aspasia and her Socratic friends consider that both spouses are equal and should engage in decision-making and practicing virtue.¹⁰ They should be the self-aware subjects in a relationship whose primary goal is the pursuit of ἀρετή. There is no indication that Xenophon's and his wife's marriage was in crisis, but from Aspasia, they could learn how to avoid eventual marital crises.

What makes Aspasia's method successful and philosophically interesting is that she leads husband and wife gradually, through analogy conceded as certain, to acknowledge what really matters in marriage. Her approach might not be so effectual if she had asked the last question at the beginning of her interrogation. The meaning of marital life might not be so evident if it were not prepared by the dialectical questioning, referring to analogical examples. According to Cicero's Aeschines, Aspasia invented a kind of ἐπαγωγή: the form of cross-examination in which an interlocutor responds to several uncontroversial examples and the questioner finds a general principle fitting all the responses. "The principle will then undermine what the interlocutor had said or claimed to believe about the controversial subject at hand" (Pappas & Zelcer, 2015, p. 54, n. 53).¹¹

Unlike Aeschines', Xenophon's Aspasia neither appears as a character in his works nor speaks directly. She is mentioned in the *Memorabil-*

10 For more on virtues of women in Ancient Greece and Rome see also Plečaš's essay in this volume.

11 Their argument is based on Cicero. See Cicero, *De Inventione* 1.31.51–52.

ia and the *Oeconomicus*. In both dialogues, as Henry rightly highlights, “Xenophon evokes a woman whose life and thought was neither dependent on nor mediated” by her relation with Pericles (Henry, 1995, p. 46). He is never even linked with Aspasia, who is praised by Xenophon’s Socrates as an honest, intelligent, and truthful person. In the *Memorabilia*, she describes a good matchmaker as not only the one who is skillful “at bringing people into marriage,” but also the one who says what is *true*¹² about a woman or a man who is supposed to be married. Aspasia considers veracity and honesty as the preconditions for the spouses to avoid marital crises. If the matchmaker lies about women and men who are supposed to be married, they might end their marriage hating each other. In the *Oeconomicus*, Aspasia not only advocated women’s education but also seemed to educate future spouses. Education is one of the conditions for equality of men and women in a marriage. The education of wives was not very common in the Greece of their times, which implies that both Xenophon’s Socrates and Aspasia seem to introduce an important novelty.

Aspasia and War Crises

One of the worst crises that can happen to humans is to be in a war. This is particularly difficult for women because they must stand by helplessly while facing the potential loss of sons and husbands. If their husbands die, they become responsible for the entire family’s survival, and yet, their own control over the means of survival is extremely limited. Aspasia is chosen by Plato to represent the voices of the dead. Although Aspasia is not interlocutor in the *Menexenus*, her *logoi* are dominant in this Plato’s dialogue. Her speech consists of both the *epitaphios* proper and a speech within a speech (246d1–248d6) wherein she conveys to the audience what the dead warriors advise their parents and children to do and feel. The first and second conversational interchange (234a1–236d2, 249d1–e7) between Socrates and Menexenus provide the opening and closing frame of the dialogue. The latter “expresses gratitude and amazement,” as Henry notes, “and Socrates promises to impart other political speeches (*politikoi logoi*) that Aspasia has also recited to him” (Henry, 1995, p. 33).

Jan M. Robitzsch (2017) distinguished the views on Aspasia in the *Menexenus* based on how the dialogue itself is understood. The first reading, which he calls traditional, sees Aspasia as “someone devoid of any

12 Emphasis by I.D.

serious merit” (Robitzsch, 2017, p. 228). It is consistent with the interpretation that the *Menexenus* is a parody.¹³ The second is a feminist interpretation, which holds that Plato, in fact, diminishes Aspasia’s contribution to the history of rhetoric and philosophy. This reading approaches the dialogue seriously.¹⁴ The middle way, to which Robitzsch belongs, interprets Aspasia and the dialogue as playful, neither completely serious nor entirely ironic. I will add to Robitzsch’s reconstruction Nickolas Pappas’ and Mark Zelcer’s view,¹⁵ who consider “Socrates’ ascription of the speech to Aspasia as a nod to her genuine rhetorical skills” (Pappas & Zelcer, 2015, p. 31). Moreover, they interpret the dialogue as “an intended improvement” upon the traditional funeral oratory, including the speech of Pericles (Pappas & Zelcer, 2015, p. 7). Overall, they positively assess both Aspasia and Plato’s *Menexenus*.

Concurring with Pappas and Zelcer, I will argue that speech within a speech is seriously intended. Through Aspasia, Plato expresses his views, which can be read in the framework of his ethics. Additionally, I will point out why Plato deliberately chose a woman to convey the advice of the dead warriors. Moreover, Aspasia’s speech contributes to our topic of crisis because her *logoi* are about the greatest crisis in one’s life when one is permanently deprived of one’s beloved who died in the war.

At the beginning of the dialogue, Aspasia is said to be a teacher in oratory of both Pericles and Socrates (*Menex.* 235e6–236a2). Plato seems to be ironic that Aspasia would write a better eulogy than Pericles did. How can she be the teacher of such an experienced politician and speaker as Pericles was? He was a successful rhetorician and politician before meeting her. Nevertheless, it might not be true that Plato mocked Aspasia and even her relationship with Pericles. First, by mentioning Pericles in this context, Plato alludes to his famous funeral oration in Thucydides. Additionally, Plato seems to mean that Aspasia was good at giving advice and that Pericles consulted with her as an intelligent person who understands politics well. She certainly belonged to his “internal intellectual circle.”¹⁶ Socrates himself also characterized Aspasia as his teacher in oratory. There may be Socratic modesty here, but it seems to be more than that because if Socrates could make speeches like that, why would he

13 See, for example, Pohlenz, 1913, pp. 261–262, Henry, 1995, pp. 33–36, etc.

14 See, for example, Glenn, 1995, pp. 37–39, Blair, 2012, etc.

15 Although Pappas and Zelcer (2015, pp. 31–37) regard Aspasia positively their reading of the *Menexenus* seems not to be characterized as a feminist one.

16 Robitzsch assumes this. It is, however, for him “difficult to gauge the exact level of influence Aspasia had on Pericles’ speeches and thinking.” See Robitzsch, 2017, p. 219.

need to avoid politics?¹⁷ The tone in the *Menexenus* suggests that Aspasia should be regarded similarly to Diotima. Both of them were portrayed as skilled and wise.

Although some question the serious character of the dialogue, there seems not to be anyone who criticizes its closing section, which is Aspasia's speech within the speech. She conveys what the dead would want their parents and descendants to feel and do to overcome the inevitable psychic crises that happen when their beloved ones are irrevocably cut off from their lives.

At the very beginning of Aspasia's oration, the dead, who lived (and died) nobly, made an appeal to their descendants to live as nobly as possible (εἶναι ὡς ἀρίστους, *Menex.* 246c). The fear of shame and the elimination of threats to one's homeland, family, and friends are what motivates warriors to fight in the war. Not only did they not want to shame themselves, but they also wished to save their fathers and descendants from shame as well, in this way showing that their life is linked to the past and future of their family. If their dilemma is to die, or live in shame, they prefer the first option because they find that life is not worth living for those who shame themselves or those they love (246d1–6). In this reasoning, we can find the same view represented as the one expressed by Socrates in Plato's *Apology* and *Crito*, who shows there that he would prefer to die honorably than live a shameful life that is thus no longer worth living.

The dead soldiers, as Aspasia conveys their words, appeal to the unity of virtues (246e ff.). This is an important element of the ethical thought of Plato's Socrates, and supports the interpretative hypothesis that through Aspasia's oration Plato conveys his own philosophical views. Virtue is the condition for attaining happiness, the well-being of any person. If one does not pursue virtue, but allegedly more attractive aims such as wealth, beauty, and bodily strength, then this person will lack internal harmony, integrity, and dignity.¹⁸ How can a person who is in disharmony with herself, lacking stability and honor, be happy and live a good life? Aspasia contends that wisdom must be united with justice and the other virtues, such as courage and moderation, or one will merely be cunning, and not genuinely wise. Consequently, only if knowledge is united with all other virtues can any of us achieve well-being.

Another potent, undoubtedly heroic appeal, coming from death, is uttered in an even higher tone. The dead convey, as Aspasia understands

17 In the *Apology* (31c3 ff.), Socrates explicitly says that his *daimonion* prevented him "from taking part in public affairs" (31d4–5).

18 This idea also appears in the work of Serbian philosopher Ksenija Atanasijević. For more on her philosophy see Petrović's essay in this volume.

them, that their defeat will be in vain if their sons are not better off than they are. The descendants should not treat the honor and glory of their fathers as if it were their own. This is not meant to imply that the sons ought not to be aware, remember, and celebrate their fathers, but to act independently, endeavoring to accomplish honors with their own strength. The dead fathers appeal to their sons that they should affirm the honor and glory of their fathers by their own courageous actions. Moreover, what the dead would want is not only to be privately or publicly remembered, but much more than that, that their spirits will be present in the brave deeds of their descendants.

Given that the dead know that the grief¹⁹ of their parents will be the greatest, it is a special assignment to find how to console those who have experienced this most terrible loss. In the history of humankind, women have been regarded as more empathic, because they intuitively know how to console those who suffered the most. Plato's Aspasia is represented in this way. Consonant with deeper understanding and empathy, the advice to parents, intended as a proper remedy for their pain, implies what kind of emotion grief is and what implications it produces. Aspasia acknowledges the inner pain a person can suffer because of some significant loss, especially in the case of the death of a beloved one. She contends that if we share lamentation with parents who lost their sons, their pain will increase. Mourning with persons who are in such anguish, would, in fact, encourage them to indulge in intense and deep grief, which is self-destructive. Instead, the bereaved parents should contend with their grief: (i) by being moderate in bereavement, (ii) "by turning their minds to the concerns of the living" (248c), and (iii) by limiting lamentation of the dead (249c).²⁰

In Plato's account, Aspasia's attitude to grief is in accordance with the Greek ethical ideal. Her advice is consonant with the famous Greek saying "Nothing too much," by affirming that the deceased do not want their parents to grieve excessively but to overcome their pain. Nevertheless, Plato's Aspasia's message is far beyond any emotion or even beyond any particular state of affairs. She associates μηδέν ἄγαν with happiness (εὐδαιμονία), as the utmost purpose of one's life, which consists in practicing virtue in general, and justice and moderation in particular. What Plato's Aspasia is pledging, conveying the will of the dead warriors, is that their deaths should not result in permanent reductions in their loved ones' and descendants' capacity for happiness in life.

19 I discuss about grief in detail in: Deretić, 2022 (forthcoming).

20 Deretić, 2022 (forthcoming).

Why a Woman Represents the Wishes of the Dead

There are significant reasons, in my opinion, why this speech is ascribed to a woman²¹ in general and Aspasia in particular. First, in the history of humankind, women were expected to empathize with those who suffer, especially when those who grieve are parents whose bereavement is caused by the permanent disappearance of their sons. This might be called, as Mark Zelcer did, “empathic feminine perspective” (Zelcer, 2018, p. 34). Second, this speech proves what we know from the historical evidence that she was engaged with political and social issues. Nickolas Pappas and Mark Zelcer hold that Plato de-domesticates Aspasia so that she could apply her intelligence on issues that are beyond marriage and courtship (Pappas & Zelcer, 2015, p. 36).

Who is missing in the speech of the dead? Absent are wives of the deceased warriors, although wives are necessary to implement their dead husbands’ wishes. As it seems to me, the most important reason why Plato represents Aspasia is the fact that she is a woman who relates well to the wives of those who passed away. It is the wives who better than anyone else understand their husbands’ last wishes. They also know to carry out in a practical life how to make their wishes true. Furthermore, Aspasia, as a clever woman, who in her own life successfully overcame many crises, is the one who with all seriousness understands what the dead soldiers would wish and appeal for regarding what should be done after the lost war, if only they could speak for themselves. Plato purposefully chooses Aspasia to represent the wishes of the dead warriors because this politically educated and wise woman is deeply aware of the social and political implications of the lost war. Given such a sober and yet also uplifting and virtuous point of view, we should not mistake Plato’s praise for mere mockery.

Recently, Mark Zelcer (2018) offers another interpretation of why Aspasia is a “natural choice as the author of the dialogue” because she is portrayed persuasively “as having once been pro-Pericles but is now sympathetic with Socrates” (2018, p. 41). Additionally, Zelcer points out the fact that is “generally overlooked” that Aspasia lost her and Pericles’ son in the war. Pericles the Younger was one of the Captains in the Battle of Arginusae. He was “executed along with the other defendants who returned to Athens to face the trial” (2018, p. 40). Zelcer argues that had the author of the *Menexenus* mocked Aspasia, he would have been mistreated cruelly

21 In this volume, V. Knežević provides an interesting view about the women’s subjectivity and the cult of the dead in the Ancient Greek society.

“grieving mother of a citizen in a funeral oration, no less, which clearly alludes to the death of her son” (2018, p. 42).

Aspasia was a woman whose whole life was full of crises. As a young woman, she came to Athens without attested Athenian citizenship. Nevertheless, with Pericles, one of the best and wisest Athenian politicians of all times, she lived together in mutual love and respect, and they had a son, Pericles the younger. She was known as an intelligent and thoughtful person, who in the writings of Socratic authors had a prominent place, not only for giving martial and economic advice but for a contribution to an important method of reasoning. How the Athenians lived during the plague is so strikingly described by Thucydides. She got out of this crisis by entering into a union with another very powerful Athenian politician, who soon died. Because of the defeat in the Battle of Arginusae, her son was executed. There was not a word in any historical reports of how she reacts to this infamy. Approximately more than a decade after she died, Plato represented her philosophizing about a broad and complex subject, unifying in the funeral speech both Athenian and her own tragedy.

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Ирина Деретић*

АСПАЗИЈА: ЖЕНА У КРИЗИ

Апстракт: Попут Сократа, ни Аспазија није оставила ниједно писано дело. О њој знамо само из секундарних извора. У овом тексту тежићу да поткрепим тезу по којој је много тога што се приписује Аспазији од филозофског значаја, те да покажем како се она бавила различитим врстама криза, од брачних до оних политичких. Прво, настојаћу да утврдим која је реконструкција њеног живота највероватнија. Друго, размотрићу коју је методу Аспазија користила када је реч о браку и брачним односима. Треће, тежићу да покажем како Платон није приказивао Аспазију у комичном светлу, како тврде неки аутори. Затим ћу критички преиспитати најзначајније поенте Аспазијиног погребног говора, који је од ње чуо Сократ. Истражићу Платонове разлоге који су га навели да управо овај говор припише жени.

Кључне речи: Аспазија, Есхин, филозофија, погребна беседа, *Менексен*

* Ирина Деретић, редовни професор, Одељење за филозофију, Филозофски факултет, Универзитет у Београду, имејл: ideretic1@gmail.com.

Dragana Dimitrijević*

ST. MONICA AS PARTICIPANT
IN ST. AUGUSTINE'S PHILOSOPHICAL
COMPANIONSHIP: A WOMAN'S VOICE
IN THE TIME OF CRISIS

Abstract: The Cassiciacum dialogues mark an important point in St. Augustine's spiritual journey from teacher of rhetoric to bishop of Hippo, and present Augustine as a Christian who had very recently found God, but was still unwilling to break off with the Greco-Roman philosophical tradition. Thus, Augustine designed his early philosophical writings in the old, classical manner. Although there is a vast body of scholarship on the Cassiciacum dialogues, only limited attention has been paid to the question of how significant a role Augustine's mother Monica plays in them. In this paper I argue that the term *philosophical-contemplative companionship*, borrowed from a new form of philosophical practice, can be applied to the participation of St. Monica in the *De beata vita*, and most likely to the Cassiciacum dialogues as a whole.

Keywords: St. Monica, St. Augustine, philosophical companionship, woman's voice

Introduction

Scholarship regarding the participation of women in ancient philosophy has been limited until recently¹. The history of the female teachers and students of philosophy – as well as the wives, sisters, daughters, and mothers of male philosophers – was a rather neglected topic (Waithe, 1989), and for a very long period of time the histories of philosophy were almost silent regarding women's enrolment in ancient philosophical

* Dragana Dimitrijević, Associate Professor, Department of Classics, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade, e-mail address: ddimitri@f.bg.ac.rs.

1 A valuable contribution to the subject is Deretić's essay "Aspasia: Woman in Crises," in this volume.

schools, theories, and practices². The same is true for the conversation concerning women's involvement in theological and philosophical inquiries within the Christian communities in antiquity. On the other hand, in the last few decades there has been much conversation on negative attitudes towards women and other underprivileged groups in the ancient Christian tradition. These studies often focused on reading the ancient Christian texts with a concern for applying their content to contemporary ideologies such as feminism and sexual equality (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1999; Ehrensperger, 2004; Sugitharajah, 2008). Interest in these topics has grown in the Augustinian scholarship as well, and the work of scholars who use social-scientific methods to study the great Doctor of the Church attempts to frame his viewpoints within modern social frameworks and concepts³. Although I see all those inquiries useful, I think that there are other features in Augustine's works related to matters of gender, which have been given much less scholarly attention than they deserve, as is the case with the role of Augustine's mother Monica in his early dialogues⁴.

St. Augustine's first four extant writings, commonly referred to as the Cassiciacum dialogues, are the following: *Contra Academicos* (Against the Academics), *De beata vita* (On the Happy Life), *De ordine* (On Order)⁵, and *Soliloquia* (Soliloquies). The themes of these dialogues are the knowability of truth, human happiness, the underlying unity of reality, and self-knowledge⁶. Augustine's mother Monica is participant in two of these dialogues – the *De beata vita* and *De ordine*. Her role is more significant in

2 See, for example, Alexander (1908), Durant (1926), etc. During the 1920s Ksenija Atanasijević, the first woman who achieved an academic career in philosophy in Serbia, gives a very rare example of rereading the ancient philosophical canon and writing essays devoted to ancient Greek women philosophers (Deretić, 2020, 123–152). For a fresh view on Atanasijević's works and actions, see Petrović's essay "Dealing with a Crisis: A Note from Ksenija Atanasijević," in this volume. It is interesting to note that Ksenija Atanasijević also wrote on St. Augustine's philosophy, see Атанасијевић (2007), 508–537.

3 Against this theoretical background, some argue that Augustine thought woman to be intellectually and spiritually inferior to man. See, for example, Farley (1976) and Wolfskeel (1976). For a helpful safeguard against importing anachronistic modes of thought, see, for example, McGovan (1987). McGovan argues that St. Augustine held that all people are an *imago Dei*, and that man and woman are spiritually equal, which is Augustine's legacy to posterity.

4 One of those rare examples is Seelbach, L. (2005).

5 I take that the actual order of the first three dialogues matches to the order in which Augustine discusses them in *Retractationes* 1.1–3.

6 Despite of the importance of context and chronology for a deeper understanding of Augustine's thought, we may justly say that Augustine always gave weight to the above mentioned philosophical and theological questions.

the former, which is, accordingly, the subject of this essay, while an exploration of her role in the latter remains a desideratum.

In this paper, I argue that the term *philosophical-contemplative companionship*, borrowed from a new form of philosophical practice (Lahav, 2016), can be applied to the participation of St. Monica in the *De beata vita*, and most likely to the Cassiciacum dialogues as a whole.

A Brief Sketch of St. Monica's Life

Everything we know about St. Monica, we have learned from Augustine's works, mainly from his *Confessions*. Thus, the picture of Monica is colored by her son's pen. Although she "had no political role or influence, and ... was not even rich enough to be locally known as a civic benefactor, commemorated in her hometown by statues and inscriptions" (Clark, 2015, p. 3)⁷, Monica's portrait is one of the most documented women's portraits in late antiquity. She was born in a Christian family, "in a faithful household, which was a good member of thy Church" (*Conf.* 9.8.17)⁸, possibly of Berber origin⁹. From an early age, she took responsibilities in the family household, such as to care for younger sisters. Augustine depicts her childhood as exemplary, with the exception of the wine-guzzling episode (*Conf.* 9.8.18), which adds a human color in the otherwise almost perfect picture of Monica¹⁰. Monica left her parents' household to marry Patricius¹¹, Augustine's father, a non-Christian who was later baptized on his death-bed. By her Christian patience she won over both her mother-in-law and her husband. After the death of Patricius, Monica kept a

7 Although I have cited here the words from Clark's monograph titled *Monica: An Ordinary Saint* and found useful many insights in this book, I do not think that the title itself is appropriate, nor happily chosen.

8 Trans. Watts (1912), p. 35. The Latin words read as follows: *in domo fideli, bono membro ecclesiae tuae*. Unless stated otherwise, Latin passages and English translations from the *Confessions* are taken from Watts (1912).

9 Scholars have concluded that "Monica" is a Romanized form of "Monnica" which could connect Augustine's mother, i. e. her family to the Berber ethnic group. See, for example, Moore (2007), pp. 148–149.

10 After some harsh words from a servant, who took care of Monica and her sisters, Monica quickly changed her behavior (*Conf.* 9.8.18).

11 There is a debate over the social status of Patricius. Augustine claims that he was no more than a fairly obscure town councilor (*municipis tenuis*) at Thagaste, which implies that Augustine came from a lower-class background. On the other hand, there are modern scholars who assert that Augustine's family, having in mind the social context of the provincial town of Thagaste, cannot be viewed as poor (Shaw, 1987, p. 8).

vigilant eye on Augustine and her patient treatment of him ended with his conversion and baptism. Thus, St. Monica has been seen as a model of Christian mothers.

The End of St. Augustine's Spiritual Crisis, the Cassiciacum Dialogues and Their Historicity

In his path from teacher of rhetoric to bishop of Hippo, Augustine's *pausatio* at Cassiciacum is one of the most important milestones. In the summer of 386, after the events in the garden, described in the eighth book of his *Confessions*, Augustine started to perceive himself as a Christian. According to Nock (1933), the most important feature of conversion is its intensity in the eyes of the person who experienced it. Augustine represented his conversion as the resolution of a long emotional and spiritual crisis he experienced in his twenties. The long-lasting crisis of Augustine's spiritual identity coincides with many serious political, social, and religious crises in the Roman Empire in the last decades of the fourth century¹². Nevertheless, during that challenging period, he could rely on his mother's spiritual strength and stability. Having all that in mind, it is not surprising that Augustine perceived it as something natural to spend a lot of time with her and enjoy her company in the autumn and winter of 386 and 387, between his conversion and his baptism.

Having quit his rhetoric position in Milan, in the late summer of 386 Augustine retired to Cassiciacum, a country estate north of Milan, and, according to his own words, took with him his mother Monica, his brother Navigius, his son Adeodatus, his friend Alypius, his pupils Licentius and Trygetius, and two of his cousins. Daily practices of this nonhomogeneous group of people with very different educational backgrounds included reading Vergil¹³, reading philosophical treatises such as Cicero's *Hortensius*¹⁴, and discussions on various topics, carefully chosen by Augustine. What this period of philosophical *otium* could have meant for Augustine¹⁵? Are there interrelationships between Augustine's conversion and his withdrawing into the country to study and philosophize? Was Augustine him-

12 For a broader picture of the later Roman Empire, see, for example, Cameron (1993) and Mitchell (2007).

13 *De ord.* 1.8.26.

14 *De beata v.* 2.10, see below.

15 For a recent study on the Roman concept of *otium*, see, for example, Dimitrijević (2018).

self certain of his final departure from the *ambitio saeculi* i. e. "ambition of the world" before he set out for that country estate north of Milan? In my opinion, the Cassiciacum dialogues themselves do not offer any decisive conclusions, but one thing is certain – the role of Monica was crucial for Augustine's conversion to Christianity and we do not have reasons to doubt that she was highly supportive when he left his career, in order to devote himself fully to God.

The century-old debate as to whether the Cassiciacum dialogues were transcripts of actual conversations or literary fictions began with Rudolf Hirzel in 1895. He questioned the view that the dialogues were transcripts (Hirzel, 1895, p. 377), while two years later Ohlmann (1897) defended their historicity. Meulenbroek (1947) gave additional support to Ohlmann's arguments. O'Meara (1951) argued that the debate over the historicity of the dialogues was itself a trope, while Madec (1986) pointed out that many features found in the dialogues reflect their Ciceronian models. In the last decades scholars prefer to treat the dialogues as literary, with Foley (1999; 2003) as an exception. Interestingly enough, on a common view, Monica's participation in the dialogues has been perceived as an unimportant element in the discussion regarding their historicity. Thus, it is frequently left unmentioned, both in the articles which support the historicity of the dialogues (e. g. Foley, 2003) and in the articles which argue against it (e. g. O'Meara, 1951). For scholars interested in the historicity of the Cassiciacum dialogues, however, the question of Monica's participation should hold special interest. Why would Augustine fabricate the role of his mother in the dialogues at Cassiciacum or at least her involvement? Does the fact that she participates in the two of these dialogues give more weight to the claims that the dialogues reveal the real, historical situations or to the claims that they are merely products of Augustine's philosophic and religious interests in a key period of his life? The focus of attention in this paper is Monica's participation in the *De beata vita*, not the historicity of the Cassiciacum dialogues. Though I do not presuppose or argue for a definitive answer on this issue, it would be superficial to insist on discussing the question of Monica's participation in the Cassiciacum dialogues wholly in isolation from all other issues. It is implicit in the article's title that I think that there is not enough evidence to argue against the historicity of the dialogues. In my view, Augustine's writings and actions disclose a truly Christian mentality, unwilling and/or incapable of inventing important elements of the situations described in his works, such as the participation of Monica in his early dialogues.

St. Monica's Voice in the Dialogue *De beata vita*

The conversation regarding the role of Monica in Augustine's early dialogues started with the publication of Kolbe (1902) at the beginning of the twentieth century, but has never become too intensive, nor continuous. Kolbe's article does not contain strong claims or even a discussion supported with arguments, but rather gives an outline of all instances where Monica appears as interlocutor in Augustine's dialogues. Kolbe offers a beautiful picture of Monica, almost repeating Augustine's words, and thus commenting on Monica's intellectual abilities he says as follows: "the early writings of St. Augustine show that his mother had an exceedingly beautiful mind" (p. 520). The possible problem regarding the participation of Monica in Augustine's early dialogues arises partly from the state of the evidence – any account of Monica's philosophical and religious interests begins and ends with what Augustine has or wants to tell. Nevertheless, I believe it is fruitful to reread the parts of the dialogue *De beata vita* relevant for our topic, in order to try to reconstruct the process of facilitating dialogue.

After the dedication, Augustine's dialogue *De beata vita* reads as follows¹⁶:

Idibus Nouembribus mihi natalis dies erat. Post tam tenue prandium, ut ab eo nihil ingeniorum inpediretur, omnes, qui simul non modo illo die sed cottidie conuiuabamur, in balneas ad consedendum uocauimus; nam is tempori aptus locus secretus occurrerat. Erant autem – non enim uereor eos singulari benignitati tuae notos interim nominibus facere – in primis nostra mater, cuius meriti credo esse omne, quod uiuo, Nauigius frater meus, Trygetius et Licentius ciues et discipuli mei; nec Lartidianum et Rusticum consobrinos meos, quamuis nullum uel grammaticum passi sint, deesse uolui ipsumque eorum sensum communem ad rem, quam moliebar, necessarium putauimus. Erat etiam nobiscum aetate minimus omnium, sed cuius ingenium, si amore non fallor, magnum quiddam pollicetur, Adeodatus filius meus. (*De beata v.* 1.6)

On the Ides of November fell my birthday. After a breakfast light enough not to impede our powers of thinking, I asked all those of us who, not only that day but every day, were living together to have a congenial session in the bathing quarters, a quiet place fitting for the season. Assembled there – for without hesitation I present them to your kindness, though only by name – were first, our mother, to whose merit, in my opinion, I owe everything that I live; my brother Navigius; Trygetius and Licentius, fellow citizens and my pupils; Lastidianus and Rusticus, relatives of mine, whom I did not wish to be absent, though they are not trained even in grammar, since I believed

16 I quote the Latin text from Green's edition (1970).

their common sense was needed for the difficult matter I was undertaking. Also my son, Adeodatus the youngest of all, was with us, who promises great success, unless my love deceives me. (Trans. Schopp, 1948, p. 50–51)

In this part of my essay, I attempt to apply the notion of the philosophical-contemplative companionship, which emerged from a new form of philosophical practice (Lahav, 2016), to Augustine's dialogue *De beata vita*. Difficulties of such an application arise due to the differences between Augustine's and current historical context, as well as between the aims of Augustine's philosophical inquiries and current philosophical practice(s)¹⁷. Nonetheless, I believe there are points of convergence between them, as will be discussed further below. According to De Haas (2018), "philosophical practice, as we understand it since the 1960s, is an *encounter* (somewhere sometime) between a philosopher and one or more interlocutors who talk about a *personal existential issue* of at least one of the interlocutors" (p. 114). Philosophical practice is characterized by the following: 1) the distance from academic philosophy¹⁸, 2) the multiplicity of approaches, 3) a conversational form, 4) an outer-academic location. From these four parameters, at least three (only the second may be viewed as an exception) are applicable for Augustine's early dialogues, in particular for *De beata vita* – at Cassiciacum Augustine gathered people with very different educational backgrounds and knowledge of the history of philosophy (parameter 1); he expected from them to engage in conversation on most important philosophical issues, such as human happiness (parameter 3); the dialogue took place at the baths, i. e. "in the bathing quarters" (parameter 4), which was not an unusual place for scholarly conversation in late antiquity (Schopp, 1948, p. 50).

A true dialogue begins when Augustine asks his companions whether they want to be happy. They respond that they do, although Augustine's mother Monica quickly adds that this is not enough, thus in order to be happy, one must want only good things.

Atque ego rursus exordiens: *Beatos esse nos uolumus*, inquam. – Vix hoc effuderam, occurrerunt una uoce consentientes. – Videturne uobis, inquam, beatus esse, qui quod uult non habet? – Negauerunt. – Quid? omnis, qui quod uult habet, beatus est? – Tum mater: Si bona, inquit, uelit et habeat, beatus

17 The 13th International Conference on Philosophical Practice was organized by the University of Belgrade and Serbian Philosophical Practitioners Associations, held in Belgrade, 15–18th August, 2014.

18 On the one hand, it is not obligatory for philosophical practitioners to have an academic degree in philosophy. On the other hand, in academia, skepticism towards philosophical practice occurs very, due to the lack of methodical clarification and academic education (De Haas, 2018, 116–117).

est, si autem mala uelit, quamuis habeat, miser est. – Cui ego arridens atque gestiens: Ipsam, inquam, prorsus, mater, arcem philosophiae tenuisti. Nam tibi procul dubio uerba defuerunt, ut non sicut Tullius te modo panderes, cuius de hac sententia uerba ista sunt. Nam in *Hortensio*, quem de laude ac defensione philosophiae librum fecit: *Ecce autem*, ait, *non philosophi quidem, sed prompti tamen ad disputandum omnes aiunt esse beatos, qui uiuant ut ipsi uelint. Falsum id quidem; uelle enim quod non deceat, id est ipsum miserrimum. Nec tam miserum est non adipisci quod uelis, quam adipisci uelle quod non oporteat. Plus enim mali prauitas uoluntatis adfert quam fortuna cuiquam boni.* – In quibus uerbis illa sic exclamabat, ut obliti penitus sexus eius magnum aliquem uirum considerare nobiscum crederemus me interim, quantum poteram, intellegente, ex quo illa, et quam diuino fonte manarent. (2.10)

Then I spoke again: ‘We wish to be happy, do we not?’ No sooner had I said this, than they agreed, with one voice. I asked: ‘In your opinion, is a person happy who does not possess what he wants?’ They said: ‘By no means.’ ‘What? Everyone who possesses what he wants is happy?’ At this point our mother said: ‘If he wishes and possesses good things, he is happy; if he desires evil things-no matter if he possesses them – he is wretched.’ I smiled at her and said cheerfully: ‘Mother, you have really gained the mastery of the very stronghold of philosophy. For, undoubtedly you were wanting the words to express yourself like Tullius, who also has dealt with this matter. In his *Hortensius*, a book written in the praise and defense of philosophy, he said: “Behold, not the philosophers, but only people who like to argue, state that all are happy who live according to their own will. This, of course, is not true, for, to wish what is not fitting is the worst of wretchedness. But it is not so deplorable to fail of attaining what we desire as it is to wish to attain what is not proper. For, greater evil is brought about through one’s wicked wilts than happiness through fortune.” At these words our mother exclaimed in such a way that we, entirely forgetting her sex, thought we had some great man in our midst, while in the meantime I became fully aware whence and from what divine source this flowed. (Trans. Schopp, 1948, p. 55–56)

Due to the limited scope of this study, I will only confine myself to commenting on three things quoted above. First, at the beginning Augustine as facilitator encourages everyone to contribute to the dialogue by using a set of rhetorical questions (“What? Everyone who possesses what he wants is happy?”)¹⁹. The employment of rhetorical questions, particularly the question “Quid?”²⁰, shows Augustine’s desire to elicit a quick response from his companions and to add a notion of spontaneity. According to

19 The Latin sentences read as follows: “Quid? omnis, qui quod uult habet, beatus est?”

20 I have argued elsewhere that the use of the rhetorical question “Quid?” is an indicator of the colloquiality of a given Latin text (Dimitrijević, 2017). There is clear evidence that Augustine used such Latin words and idioms that were familiar to his audience. See, for example, Andoková (2019).

Augustine's narrative, his mother Monica answered his question first, and thus provided an impetus for continuing the dialogue. Furthermore, the passage cited above reveal the important difference between Augustine's early dialogues, the *De beata vita* and *De ordine* in particular, and Cicero's dialogues, which served Augustine as a model. Namely, in Cicero's philosophical dialogues there was no room for women's participation, and in that aspect Cicero's dialogues differ from Plato's dialogues as well. Augustine's debt to Marcus Tullius Cicero²¹ ("undoubtedly you were wanting the words to express yourself like Tullius") and his philosophical dialogues has been widely acknowledged²², but comparisons have focused mainly on style and rhetoric rather than content and atmosphere²³. Finally, the last sentence in the paragraph ("At these words our mother exclaimed in such a way that we, entirely forgetting her sex, thought we had some great man in our midst") shows that Augustine was fully aware that the participation of his mother Monica might look somewhat awkward to his contemporaries, and thus he chose to comment on it by using socially acceptable gender stereotypes.

Now, let us give a brief outline of Lahav's philosophical companionship, as described in Lahav (2016) and De Haas (2018b), in order to identify its similarities with Augustine's philosophical method. This new format of philosophical practice is centered on "togetherness" in a true dialogue, which consists of "thinking with each other" instead of "thinking about each other's ideas" (Lahav, 2016). The participants in Lahav's philosophical companionship are invited to contemplate on various topics and philosophical texts, chosen by Lahav, similar to Augustine's companionship. The main aim of Lahav's companionships is the searching for questions (Lahav, 2016), while Augustine's early dialogues could be conceived as an enterprise in searching for answers. Lahav intends to be a philosophical midwife, like Socrates, thus his main aim is to support others to discover their own thoughts and experiences, which is similar to Augustine's approach, as illustrated in the passage quoted above. Being maieutic philosophers, both Augustine and Lahav turn their attention towards their companions. However, the fact that Lahav has built the concept of philosophical companionship might suggest that he is inclined to stay in

21 Cicero's writings were held up as models throughout the antiquity and beyond. For a short account on Cicero's letters as a model for Pliny the Younger, see, for example, Dimitrijević (2006).

22 In his *Confessiones* Augustine had only positive things to say about Cicero's dialogue *Hortensius*, and credited the encounter with this book as beginning the journey that led to his conversion to Christianity. Unfortunately, the *Hortensius* is now lost and thus the above passage is of great importance.

23 It has been wisely pointed out in Foley (2003).

his own thoughts and principles (De Haas, 2018b). Thus, the words of his companions might be reduced to his themes and philosophical track. Unlike Lahav, Augustine showed himself as eager to leave behind his train of thought and to underline Monica's philosophical, i. e. spiritual superiority.

Concluding Remarks

To suppose that the issue of St. Monica's participation in St. Augustine's early dialogues can be settled beyond dispute would be naïve – the dialogues themselves yield interpretations, not proofs. While my reading of the *De beata vita* is admittedly interpretive, it addresses the question which has been often passed over in Augustinian scholarship. If this paper may contribute anything to a better understanding of the Cassiciacum dialogues and their context, it would be a fuller recognition of the importance of Monica's role in the resolution of Augustine's spiritual crisis, and its implications for a fuller appreciation of St. Augustine as great Christian philosopher. If Augustine favored his mother's voice in important questions, such as the conditions for human happiness, would it be fair to accuse him of being anti-woman or even misogynist? Does the fact that Monica had been given a voice in Augustine's early dialogues not imply, among other things, that he did not think woman to be spiritually and/or intellectually inferior to man? I think it certainly does. Thus, this paper may be viewed as a small contribution to some broader issues, including St. Augustine's philosophical anthropology, which has proven to be especially formative for not only Christian thought, but for philosophical thought in general²⁴, and has generated an enormous discussion since its conception more than sixteen centuries ago²⁵.

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24 For example, it is widely agreed that St. Anselm was influenced by Augustine in many ways, and the twenty-first century has witnessed a resurgence of interest in the Anselm's so-called ontological argument, both positive and negative. For a new refutation of Gasking's parody of Anselm's ontological argument, see Prelević (2018).

25 I wish to thank several friends and colleagues for helpful comments and stimulating conversations on various aspects of this paper: in particular, Vessela Valiavitcharska-Marcum, Irina Deretić, Kosta Simić and Uroš Rajčević.

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Драгана Димитријевић*

**СВ. МОНИКА КАО УЧЕСНИЦА У
ФИЛОЗОФСКОМ КРУЖОКУ СВ. АВГУСТИНА:
ЖЕНСКИ ГЛАС У ВРЕМЕ КРИЗЕ**

Апстракт: Дијалози у Касићјаку означавају важну станицу на духовном путу Св. Августина од учитеља реторике до епископа Хипона, и приказују га као хришћанина који је непосредно пре тога пронашао Бога, али још увек није био спреман да напусти грчко-римску филозофску традицију. Тако је Августин скројио своје ране филозофске списе по устаљеном, класичном моделу. Иако постоји много радова о дијалозима у Касићјаку, веома ограничен број је посвећен питању колико је значајну улогу у њима имала Августина мајка Моника. У овом раду износим аргументе у прилог тези да термин *филозофско-контемплативној кружока* ("philosophical-contemplative companionship"), позајмљен из нове форме филозофске праксе, може да се примени на Моничино учествовање у дијалогу *De beata vita*, те врло вероватно и на дијалоге у Касићјаку у целини.

Кључне речи: Св. Моника, Св. Августин, филозофски кружок, женски глас

* Драгана Димитријевић, ванредни професор, Одељење за класичне науке, Филозофски факултет, Универзитет у Београду, имејл: ddimitri@f.bg.ac.rs.

Višnja Knežević*

HEGEL'S ANTIGONE: CRISIS AND COLLAPSE OF THE ANCIENT GREEK *SITTlichkeit*

Abstract: This paper reconsiders Antigone's role in the ancient Greek *polis* in the framework of Hegel's concept of *Sittlichkeit*, as developed in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. My main hypothesis is that Antigone appears to challenge both the Greek androcentric order and Hegel's hypotheses on subjectivity. I prove this by reevaluating Hegel's notion of the Ethical act (*sittliche Handlung*). Finally, I identify the endowment of *Sittlichkeit* on natural sexual distinction as the real reason for its collapse and point out the problematic consequences of such endowment for further development of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

Keywords: *Sittlichkeit*, masculinity, femininity, natural difference, Ethical act, Antigone.

The Conceptual Framework of Hegel's Antigone: *Sittlichkeit* and the Natural Difference

Hegel's interpretation of Sophocles's *Antigone* is developed, primarily, in his *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807¹), in the chapter on the ancient

* Višnja Knežević, Research Associate, Institute for Philosophy, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade, e-mail: visnja.d.knezevic@gmail.com.

1 In addition, Hegel thematises the problem of tragedy in general in the second volume of his *Lectures on Fine Art* (1835 Hotho). Because in the *Lectures* Hegel is interested in tragedy primarily as a poetry genre, while in the *Phenomenology*, he regards tragedy as a form of experience of cognising and acting subjectivity, the former seldom recur to the tragic situation of *Antigone*, whereas the latter is concerned primarily with it. Although the analyses from the two treatises complement one another to a degree, they are substantially different concerning results on the subject matter of tragedy. The crucial difference is the problem of reconciliation: the *Lectures* posit reconciliation as the tragic τέλος (Hegel, 1975, p. 1163, 1166, 1193, particularly p. 1197) but *Phenomenology of Spirit* provides nothing of the sort. This subtle nuance often escapes the notice of those interested in Hegel's reading of *Antigone*.

Greek ἔθος (*Sittlichkeit*²). The genuine subject of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, the science of the experiencing consciousness, is Spirit in its self-cognising experience. At the end of its journey through various stages of mediation, the Spirit (re)cognises itself as a totality, unity of substance and knowledge, subject-object, as entire reality, that is – freedom. In the world of human self-consciousness, the struggle for recognition is its main motivational force. The Spirit is, hence, constituted on individual human πράξεις in the mutual struggle for recognition – it is a dynamic, struggling practical mutuality.³ (Hegel (1977) [PhG], §416–418). It naturally manifests itself, first, as the world of *Sittlichkeit*, which is not only a reality of self-cognition but a historical reality – ancient Greece. *Sittlichkeit* is the lively realm of the human πράττειν, and community life constituted on ἔθος, as well as the life of the community itself (Janicaud, 2013, p. 156). As such, it is both the πόλις and the πολιτεία but also the quotidian life, the οἶκος, the rites and the cult, the tradition. The ancient Greek *Sittlichkeit* is Hegel’s general framework for understanding Sophocles’s *Antigone*; specifically, it is the Athenian *Sittlichkeit*.

Hegel regards Antigone and Creon as (representatives of) the two Laws, the Human and the Divine, both formally equivalent in terms of their rights (legality). As Laws, they are formalities devoid of any substance, i.e., content, mere tautologies (PhG, §426, §431); neither one can hence claim its right over the other.⁴ However, in *Sittlichkeit*, the Human and the Divine Law are given substantial content. Human Law is the law of the City, community, active political life, universality – “the Law of light” (PhG, §447); Divine Law is the law of family, non-citizens, individuals, the οἶκος, private life, and hence particularity – “the Law of shadows” (PhG, §449). Nonetheless, the real domain of Divine Law is death: its cult is the cult of familial ancestors, its main practice is that of burial.⁵

2 Alternatively, *ethical order*, as *Sittlichkeit* is usually translated into English. The French language has more equivalents depending on the context: *unité étique*, *esprit étique*, *vie étique*, etc. (Janicaud, 2013, p. 156, n. 3).

3 Spirit stricto sensu is not possible in an isolated individual. An isolated individual is a purely hypothetical construct. The world is possible as my world only because it previously exists and is encountered as the world of Others, into whose community I enter by birth and with language; there is *my world* only because there is, first, *our world*.

4 That is, it cannot be recognised as Law but merely as a commandment or duty (PhG, §425). Inter alia, Hegel’s insight into the formal tautological nature of duty represents his critique of Kant’s deontological ethics, and consequently, an answer to all positions that justify Antigone’s claim from the framework of this ethics.

5 The opposition between human and divine law is present already in the ancient Greek language. It is the opposition between δίκαιος and ὄσιος, τὸ δίκαιον being that which is sanctioned by human law, whereas τὸ ὄσιον is that which is sanctioned by divine

The sexual difference provides Human and Divine Law with their content since, otherwise, they cannot be differentiated in respect to form.⁶ The natural difference additionally provides the substantial reason why both Laws are legitimate, and just the same, both equally criminal:

As regards content, however, the ethical action contains the moment of the crime because it does not do away with the natural allocation of the two laws to the two sexes but rather, being an undivided attitude towards the law, remains within the sphere of natural immediacy, and, qua action, turns this onesidedness into guilt by seizing on only one side of the essence, and adopting a negative attitude towards the other, i.e., violating it. (PhG, §468)

The conflict between Human and Divine Law is the very conflict of *Sittlichkeit* as the conflict between the ἔθος of masculinity (or, virility) and that of femininity⁷ (PhG, §459–460). One may say that sexual difference is its natural kernel and the ultimate source of its tragedy. The position of sexual difference in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, as well as the patriarchal organisation of the ancient Athenian πόλις, provide the foundation for Hegel's reading of Sophocles's *Antigone*.

law. Traditionally, the difference between human and divine law concerns the different distribution of power and roles that men and women had in a society, which seems to be linked to the perception of sexual power in Indo-European societies (Linke, 1992). This is particularly visible in cult practices. Hence, e. g., we find in old Norse the difference between *galdr*, referring to popular magic or incantations practised by all, and *seiðr*, referring to the type of magic that was considered more severe and was practised only by women and those whose position in the society was regarded feminine. In addition, the Old Norse term *ergi*, “effeminacy” or “unmanliness,” shows that the previously mentioned difference is closely connected with asymmetry in power. The term referred both to women and passive homosexuals and was a grave insult when employed among those who considered each other “real” men (Sørensen, 1983). I am thankful to Aleksa Krivošija for bringing my attention to these facts.

6 This is not contingently so. *Sittlichkeit* occupies a unique place in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*. It is Spirit, but the Spirit in its immediacy. *Sittlichkeit* is the Spirit that is the most proximate to nature and hence its establishment on a natural difference. However, the difference in question cannot be one of talent, natural potential or “energy of the will” since these are unsubstantial and irrelevant for the quality of the human πράττειν (PhG, §402–403). The only natural difference that Hegel assesses as substantial is the one between the two sexes (PhG, §459–460).

7 Hegel regards the two ἔθη, respectively, as the ἔθος of universality and one of the particular interests. He discusses the relationship between πόλις and economic separatism of particular families occurring through their organisation into particular “systems of personal independence and property,” “their own special and independent associations,” “which tend to isolate themselves” from the universal τέλος of the City; in order not to let their individualism to “become rooted,” the πόλις, then, enters wars in the aim of compelling these families to recognise the only absolute “lord and master,” death (PhG, §455). However, I do not see how the described separatism can be brought into connection with the feminine principle. In the 5th century BC Athens, the Athenian women had no economic power at all.

“While I am alive, no woman will rule!” The Importance of Sister: The Ethical Act

Until the formation of the first Greek πόλεις in the period of 8th–6th century BC, women had their political πράξεις: burial and mourning of the deceased. Because mourning women had the power to impose blood feud, they directly regulated violence, which was their participatory role in society (Stevanović, 2013, p. 263). However, their power gradually reduced since the formation of the πόλεις. In addition, the reforms implemented by Solon in the 7th century BC significantly restricted their burial and mourning practice, resulting in the enclosure into the family domain (Stevanović, 2013, p. 263). By the time of the 5th century BC and Pericles’s infamous citizenship regulation, the political realm belonged exclusively to men (the Human Law). In contrast, the Divine Law, still in the hands of women, retreated to the sphere of privacy, οἶκος and family. Not only were they not granted the role of citizenship, women and everything that concerned them were left by the City to their fathers and husbands to privately “regulate” them as their masters and owners.

Antigone emerges in such a milieu and is perceived therein as a crisis of the order of power, a crisis of virility, and the very crisis of *Sittlichkeit*. At least, this is how she is perceived by Creon, who is the principal representative of Human Law. He is πόλις, its governing force (ἀρχή). At Soph. *Ant.*, 525 (Sophocles, 1891), Creon says ἐμοῦ δὲ ζῶντος οὐκ ἄρξει γυνή, *While I live, no woman will rule (me)*⁸. He perceives Antigone as a “disobedient element” of the society, as someone endangering the androcentric order of the πόλις. Although both his son and the choir warn him that this is neither what Antigone is doing nor what she represents, Creon ignores their words. On the other hand, Antigone does not actualise her subjectivity as a woman but as a sister and advocate of Divine Law, which claims civilised burial for every soul regardless of their conduct during life.

In the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel specifically analyses woman’s actualisation as individuality of *Sittlichkeit* through familial bonds with brother. According to him, the relationship between brother and sister

8 On other occasions, he employs a similar argument or an insult. See, e. g., Soph. *Ant.* 672–80, 746 or 756 (Sophocles, 1891, 1912). Concerning the sentence ἐμοῦ δὲ ζῶντος οὐκ ἄρξει γυνή, I made the addition of the brackets following the most novel, Maričić’s translation into the Serbian language. Maričić comments (Maričić, 2020, p. 169, n. 394, original in Serbian): “If ἐμοῦ δὲ ζῶντος is genitivus absolutus, then [the translation is] ‘While I am alive [a woman will not rule]’ [*dok sam ja živ, žena vladati neće!*], but if it is genitive of object, then ‘While I live, a woman will not rule me’ [*pa mnome dok živim neće vladati žena*]. I decided on the first option.”

is a natural one, for they are of “same blood” but “blood which has... in them reached a state of rest and equilibrium”⁹ (PhG, §457). Hence, the fraternal-sororal kinship is a natural fact, albeit one of a “purer kind” since it is free from sexual desire. Hegel particularly points out that the bonds of kinship are not established on emotions of love or parental piety but on an ethical action (*sittliche Handlung*), which is the act of burial of the brother by the sister. The *sittliche Handlung* of burial is, in fact, prevention of the deceased from turning into a mere natural thing – death as “natural negation” – through which “the right of consciousness” is once again “asserted” in him (PhG, §452). In other words, it is an act of mediacy, whereby nature becomes consciousness.¹⁰

The sister is an “immediate mediacy,” an “immediate consciousness,” and “intuition.” She is Spirit – she has to be because she must bury the brother; to “assert to him the right of consciousness,” she herself must be consciousness. However, because she is an advocate of Divine Law, whose realm is the one of “shadows,” she is not self-consciousness (PhG, §457):

...the feminine, in the form of the sister, has the highest *intuitive* awareness of what is ethical. She does not attain to *consciousness* of it, or to the objective existence of it, because the law of the Family is an implicit, inner essence which is not exposed to the daylight of consciousness but remains an inner feeling and the divine element that is exempt from an existence in the real world.

More than nature, less than (self-)consciousness – that is the position Hegel bestows on a woman (sister) in his system following the one that woman had in the *Sittlichkeit* of the 5th century BC Athens. Yet, Hegel is obliged to such characterisation because he necessitates an integrative factor of nature, a transition from nature to self-consciousness. On the other hand, sister's immediacy is established in bonds of “blood in rest and equilibrium” – a description for which it is not clear if it is “quite” natural or not. The structural anthropology of the 20th century has proved kinship to be a cultural instead of a natural fact.¹¹ Hegel may or may not be obliged to recognise this fact, but he would have to account for some difficulties his interpretation of the kinship and sister hypotheses encounter.

9 Butler (2000) questions this point.

10 Hyppolite (1979, p. 343–344) points out that “the preeminent function of the family is to restore to death its true meaning, to remove it from nature and to make of it a spiritual action... The family community, as it appears in the ethical world, gives meaning to death.”

11 Founding his analyses on Lévi-Strauss' anthropological research, in an early article “La Famille” (1938), written for the *Encyclopédie française*, Lacan, too, extensively argues that kinship is not a natural fact but a social institution.

The True Meaning of Ethical Act. The Order of Power and its Recognition

Due to their specific relationship of peculiar “blood,” brother and sister are posited by Hegel as equals:

The brother ... is for the sister a passive, similar being in general; the recognition of herself in him is pure and unmixed with any natural desire... In this relationship, therefore, ... the moment of the individual self, recognising and being recognised, can here assert its right, because it is linked to the equilibrium of the blood and is a relationship devoid of desire. The loss of the brother is therefore irreparable to the sister and her duty towards him is the highest. (PhG, §457)

The “highest duty” is the burial, the *sittliche Handlung*. It is the sister’s ethical obligation to her brother, which one could interpret as her “symbolic return” of the “gift” of equality, received by nature – inasmuch as “balanced blood” is still “blood;” however, to the extent that mutual recognition of brother and sister is of supreme quality in comparison to the merely natural one between a man and a woman, and still of lesser quality than the recognition between the ἄνδρες, it is neither natural nor yet a struggle of two self-consciousnesses.¹² As the entire *Sittlichkeit* itself, it constitutes an intermediate phase between nature and culture, immediacy and mediation.

Nonetheless, it is noteworthy that the moment of burial is of decisive importance not solely for the brother but for the sister, too. The burial constitutes a moment of “reassertion,” not mere “assertion.” If she has *already* become an individuality through bonds of kinship with her brother, the moment of burial is the moment wherein the sister reaffirms her individuality. She does this through herself, through *her* πράξις. It is precisely through their πράξεις that individualities, as well as Spirit, are *self-established* (PhG, §416–418). Due to this reason, the sister can reassert individuality to the deceased brother (who, after death and before the burial, is merely a natural “thing”). During the complex ethical act, what takes place is both mediation (of brother, by the *sister*, through *sittliche Handlung*) and self-mediation (or sister, by *herself*, through *sittliche Handlung*).

12 Hegel considers the relationship between the masculine and the feminine, as two sexes, a natural one (PhG, §456): it is exhausted in sexual drive and reproduction, neither of which, according to him, bring true but only natural satisfaction and recognition (PhG, §360). In the ancient Greek ἕθος this relationship is even more complex because, according to Hegel, an ancient Greek woman cannot find even her natural recognition. Whereas ἄνθρωπος, due to being a πολίτης, “thereby acquires the right of desire and, at the same time, preserves his freedom in regard to it,” γυνή possesses neither this right nor this freedom (PhG, §457).

Nonetheless, once self-mediation takes place, subjectivity occurs because subjectivity *is* self-mediation. The Sister should become a subject herself.

Why, then, is Antigone's self-consciousness not acknowledged, either by Hegel or by Creon? Due to the order of power. He who occupies the position of power, either in the ancient Greek society or in Hegel's system, is the one who chooses to grant or retrieve the "right" to subjectivity at *his* own free will. It is not arbitrary that reduction of feminine power in the ancient Greek πόλις occurred, first, by way of limiting of their burial and mourning πράξεις. It, too, is not a coincidence that Antigone's symbolic burial of Polynices angers Creon. The principal reason for the latter is the fact that someone is burying a proclaimed enemy of the πόλις. However, there is another reason: a *woman* does it.

Yet, is Antigone's subjectivity really not recognised by Creon? Being a woman, Antigone is a priori excluded from the political order. In addition, when it comes to the right of the deceased, she herself does not acknowledge this order because she speaks in the name of the Divine one. Thirdly, she does not perceive herself primarily as a woman but as a sister.¹³ However, Creon sees what Antigone does not: the feminine bifurcating the perfect stillness of the androcentric πόλις. *He* is the one who recognises Antigone as a woman. With Creon's identification of the burial committed as a *feminine* πράξις, Antigone's "inscription" into the realm of Human Law takes place. Whereas Hegel perceives Antigone's πράττειν as a purely familial, individual act, Creon does otherwise: for him – and he *is* the Human Law (PhG, §436) – a woman has entered the πόλις, and she has entered it politically.

Creon's judgment is not only a charge. It is also an unwilling acknowledgement. By saying that while he lives, no woman shall rule (him), Creon recognises Antigone's appearance in the political realm as the appearance of the feminine. Specifically, this occurs through his reaction to Antigone's πράξις.¹⁴ If a woman is not a citizen, why should anything that she does be of significance for the City? Is Antigone's deed different from a deed of a slave? If a slave were to commit a crime and bury an enemy of the state, would the state put her to death, or would it leave the execution of the penalty to the slave's master? Finally, and most importantly, if the state

13 The famous lines Soph. *Ant.*, 909–912 demonstrate this point: *A husband lost, another might have been found / and if bereft of a child, there could be a second from some other man. / But when father and mother are hidden in Hades, / no brother could ever bloom for me again* (εἰ τοῦδ' ἤμπλακον / μητρὸς δ' ἐν Ἄιδου καὶ πατρὸς κεκευθότων / οὐκ ἔστ' ἀδελφὸς ὅστις ἂν βλάστοι ποτέ), (Sophocles, 1891, 1912).

14 An interesting perspective on how women's πράξεις, as well as death, were introduced in the (modern) political order as a form of activism is provided by Rokai. See Rokai (2021) in this volume.

were to execute the slave, would it engage in a prior discussion with her? Creon's conversation, his discussion with Antigone, is his recognition. The one in the position of the political power does not *discuss* matters with the one who committed a crime and who has no political power; he *acts* upon them. Certainly, Creon does not recognise Antigone as an ὁμοία, but he acts *as if* she were so.¹⁵ Hence, in Hegel's terms, one may say that not only has Creon overstepped the limits of the realm of Human Law, but he has also admitted Divine Law into this realm.¹⁶ Although the deed is done involuntarily or unconsciously, it cannot be retrieved once done.

The End of *Sittlichkeit*. The End of the Feminine

A woman has entered the πόλις. At that very moment, the political seizes to be the exclusive order of virility – even if only for a brief instance, even if Antigone is to be executed for her “transgression.” Alternatively, if the order of power continues to be the one of virility, the woman herself has become “masculine.” The natural difference is erased. Men will become women, and women will become men. It is what Creon is conveying when he says: ἢ νῦν ἐγὼ μὲν οὐκ ἀνὴρ, αὕτη δ' ἀνὴρ, *In truth, then, I am no man, but she is* [Soph. *Ant.* 484], (Sophocles, 1891, 1912). The end of πόλις. The end of the world as ἄνδρες know it. Ἀκοσμία.

According to Hegel, however, the ancient Greek πόλις is doomed to collapse because of the immediate relationship of ethical consciousness to Law, either Human or Divine, resulting in formal “undecidability” between the two Laws (PhG, §476, §435–437). Content-wise, *Sittlichkeit* collapses because neither of the two parties, masculine nor feminine, realise that they both are *moments* of the dialectical movement of the ethical being.¹⁷ It seems that *Sittlichkeit* cannot withstand its inner contradiction,

15 One might say that Creon is entering a discussion with Antigone because she is a member of his family, but this objection is not sustainable, at least not when it concerns *Antigone* of Sophocles. Unlike Anouilh's, Sophocles's Creon never addresses Antigone as a future daughter-in-law or an actual niece. His position of speech is always and exclusively that of the governor of the City.

16 Entrance of Divine Law into Human Law may, too, be regarded as the entrance of death into life. Hence, on a more profound level, Creon's hostility towards a woman entering the πόλις may be interpreted as his fear of death. On the hypotheses of the ancient Greek fear of death, see Deretić & Smith (2021).

17 “Spiritual being is actual substance through these modes being valid, not in isolation, but only as superseded [moments]; and the unity in which they are merely moments is the self of consciousness which, being from now on posited in the spiritual being, makes that being actual, fulfilled, and self-conscious” (PhG, §435).

the conflict between the two genders. They negate one another, and due to this, both will be dialectically sublated, superseded: In *Legal Status*, both the masculine and feminine allegedly disappear, and a new opposition arises – the one between an abstract juridical persona and the Master of the world. The *dialektische Aufhebung* came from without. *Urbs* has overrun the πόλις.

Nevertheless, it seems that the real reason for the collapse of *Sittlichkeit* is precisely in its substantial dependence on nature:

This ruin of the ethical Substance and its passage into another form is thus determined by the fact that the ethical consciousness is directed to the Law in an essentially immediate way. This determination of immediacy means that Nature as such enters into the ethical act, the reality of which simply reveals the contradiction and the germ of destruction inherent in the beautiful harmony and tranquil equilibrium of the ethical Spirit itself.. On account of this natural aspect, this ethical nation is, in general, and individuality determined by Nature and therefore limited, and thus meets its downfall at the hands of another. (PhG, §476)

Nature made a “transgression” into the Spirit. One might say that the “transgression” refers to the establishment of *Sittlichkeit* on natural difference instead of on spiritual phenomenon. Along these lines, Hegel’s argument could be improved as follows: The order of society cannot be established on the natural difference. If it is, the natural difference becomes a cultural opposition – the sexual difference becomes gender conflict. Both virility and femininity participate in nature, as self-consciousness is the property of both. If femininity and virility are one-sidedly attributed to nature and self-consciousness, respectively, such order is doomed to fail. (Inversely, the result would still be the same.) Since self-consciousness and nature are *opposed* to each other, collapse is an inevitable outcome: if nature is defined as an “unconscious Spirit,” it remains defined as opposed to the self-conscious Spirit, and, as well, from the position of the latter. What is unconscious can neither voice nor name itself. The voicing may occur perhaps through femininity, but the naming originates from the position of power – virility.

However, this is not *Hegel’s* argument. First, Hegel does not evenly distribute nature and Spirit between the masculine and the feminine. He does precisely what the argument objects to, i.e., one-sided attribution of nature (intuition, immediacy) to femininity and Spirit (self-consciousness, mediation) to virility. If Hegel had recognised the sister’s *πρᾶξις* of burial as a self-mediated practice and consequently acknowledged sister’s subjectivity, he would perhaps have succeeded in integrating nature into self-consciousness. Nevertheless, this is not what he does. As a result, nature and self-consciousness remain non-integrated, thorn apart, and as a con-

sequence of this “splitting” the woman falls back into nature, whereas the man rises to culture.

Hegel’s infamous lines about womanhood as “the everlasting irony of the community” (PhG, §475) may be his critique of the ancient Greek *Sittlichkeit*.¹⁸ However, I find this interpretation dubitable. If the “everlasting irony of society” is the irony of the male “supremacy,” the “otherness” of the masculine – the feminine – reveals the (petty) truth of the “sameness” of virility. This, however, is not what Hegel would claim; if he were, he would realise that both virility and femininity are self-mediated and mediated by the other, as well as they are one to another, and to their own selves, both the “other” and the “same.” This would eventually lead to questioning natural difference as ἀρχή of the ethical difference. The difference in primary sexual characteristics has no place in self-consciousness: conceptual thinking knows not of it, nor does it care for it. Yet, because the γυνή is left in *Sittlichkeit*, whereas the ἀνὴρ continues the “Odyssey of Spirit,” paradoxically so, he carries with him along the way the sheer determination he wishes to sublimate. The world of *Bildung* is the world of feudal European men, not men and women, and certainly not of genderless Spirit, self-absorbed in its hunger for freedom.

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18 Commenting such Hegel’s characterisation of womanhood, Kojève (1968, p. 92) provocatively voices Hegel’s perhaps silent thought: “La Femme est la réalisation concrète du crime.”

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Вишња Кнежевић*

ХЕГЕЛОВА АНТИГОНА: КРИЗА И ПАД АНТИЧКЕ ГРЧКЕ ОБИЧАЈНОСТИ

Сажетак: Полазећи од Хегеловог појма обичајности из *Феноменологије духа*, рад настоји да интерпретира Антигонину улогу у полису. Анализа обичајног поступка показује да је хероина изазов за андроцентрични поредак полиса, али и за Хегелове поставке о обичајној субјективности. Коначно, рад идентификује заснованост обичајности на природној разлици међу половима као садржински разлог пропасти овог облика искуства духовне самосвести.

Кључне речи: обичајност, маскулинитет, феминитет, природна разлика, обичајни поступак, Антигона.

* Вишња Кнежевић, научни сарадник, Институт за филозофију, Филозофски факултет, Универзитет у Београду, имејл: visnja.d.knezevic@gmail.com.

Melina Rokai*

THE BALKAN SANITARY CRISIS IN THE BRITISH WOMEN'S NARRATIVES DURING WWI

Abstract: This essay investigates how British women in the Balkan military zone of WWI wrote on the sanitary crisis, which demonstrated itself in epidemics. It researches how these narratives figured in developing and strengthening their agendas which were part of their cultural and personal background. The military crisis was a way for the British women to prove their worth in the theatres of war, as a prerequisite for obtaining suffrage. The health crisis in the war-stricken Balkans was the main danger of life for these women, and dying in an epidemic was viewed as the closest thing to dying in a battle, which in turn endorsed the possibility of obtaining suffrage.

Keywords: WWI, British women, suffragists, epidemics

With the entrance of the United Kingdom in the theatres of the First World War, an exceptional number of women doctors, nurses and non-qualified volunteers expressed their desire to participate in their homeland's war efforts and offered their knowledge and skills to be employed in the British military zones. The vast majority of them faced rebuke by the Imperial government, but soon enough found their posts in Belgium, France, and Serbia through the national Red Crosses, the Scottish Women's Hospitals, and the Serbian Relief Fund.

Some names stayed longer in the collective memory than the others. Dr. Elsie Inglis, the founder of the Scottish Women's Hospitals, Dr. Evelina Haverfield, Dr. Katherine MacPhail, or nurse turned soldier Flora Sandes, Lady Leila Paget the organizer of a medical unit and the wife of a British minister to Serbia could be considered as renowned.

When women set out for the Balkans and Serbia, they were aware of the epicenter of a sanitary crisis heralded by the epidemic of typhus. The

* Melina Rokai, Senior Research Associate, Department of History, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade, e-mail: melinarokai85@hotmail.com.

sanitary crisis was not the only one they experienced, as it was caused by the existing global military crisis which had the war as its continuation. Moreover, it was the age ripe with the crises of social order, politics, diplomacy, and finally gender identities.

The women do not belong to a clear category of professional or incessant writers; the majority of them had no published work before setting out for the Balkan adventure. Nonetheless, they added this detail to their careers when their letters, diaries, and memoirs of their wartime experience were recorded and made available to the general public. Moreover, British women did not operate in a social and cultural vacuum. Before they left for this humanitarian adventure, they had been existing and functioning within a familial and professional network, which impacted their ideals and aims that they brought with them.

This essay aims to investigate how British women in the Balkan military zone wrote on the sanitary crisis, which demonstrated itself in epidemics, most notably that of typhus that had raged in the winter of 1914–1915, but also in several smaller-scale ones: typhoid (enteric), malaria, dysentery, etc. It will consider why some narratives gloss over this essential experience. The essay will investigate how writings on sanitary crisis influenced the perception of other crises simultaneously occurring around them, and whether afore-mentioned ongoing predicaments impacted in turn the writers' view of the epidemics in the Balkans. It will explore in what way the cultural baggage women brought with them manipulated their observations, rationalization of the events, as well as their writing. Finally, it will be looked at how the narratives on sanitary crisis and epidemics figured in developing and strengthening the agenda that they ultimately brought with them to the region.

If the topic of women's wartime narratives in WWI is rarely tackled, it is even more true for those that concerned about experiences in the Eastern Front. This condition is mirrored in the treatment of the Eastern Front, including the Salonica Front, in the historiography of WWI, which consequently marginalized study of the larger part of the British women's wartime narratives, since this front was predominantly their destination. In Serbian historiography, the theme is considered mostly, but not only, under the history of medicine (Marinković et al., 2014; Petrović, 2010; Popović-Filipović, 2012; etc.), whilst assessments of the narratives from the point of the literary studies are less frequent (Spremić Končar, 2020). Studies on women's war narratives commenced earlier in the international context, so now several works exist that treats women medical narratives in the Eastern Front either as a part of a larger research that includes wartime narrative of medical female personnel in the Western

Front (Smith, 2007; Smith, 2013) or is dedicated solely to Russia and the Balkans (Halett, 2016; Ouditt, 2005; Smith, 2016).

Feminism and Pacifism: Crisis of the Social Order

Mrs. Mabel St. Clair Stobart (1862–1954), *The Tatler* 'girl', featured riding a black stallion on the cover page of this gossip magazine's issue of 1915, proclaimed "an English heroine," wrote of the sanitary crisis and epidemics she had encountered as the administrator of the Third Serbian Relief unit, the experience that she described in *The Flaming Sword in Serbia and Elsewhere* (Stobart, 1916).

Having arrived in Serbia in April 1915, when the epidemic of typhus was viewed as under control, Stobart's unit witnessed the outbreak of the typhoid (enteric) epidemic. Stobart's account of diseases starts with contemplation upon the death and funeral of nurse Ferris. A dramatic description of the moment of Ferris' death aimed to evoke the wrath of nature, but the mention of "a rainbow—in the mythology of our Scandinavian ancestors, the bridge which led heroes, fallen in battle, to their heavenly Valhalla" (Stobart, 1916, p. 55) intended to compare the death of a young woman by a disease in a military zone to the honors of men's death on battlefields. It is a testimony of her agenda to make women's war efforts worthy of acquiring citizenship – the right to vote, since it had been alleged women's inability to defend their homeland that had been used against suffrage for women. The portrayal of the funeral arrangements is presented to create an indisputable link between military and sanitary crisis and the demand for votes for women as a demonstration of the crisis of the social order in Great Britain. Stobart (1916) offers a detailed account of the funeral arrangements and funeral procession: "The Kragujevatz authorities [gave] a public military funeral," with "the British, French, Italian and Russian Attaches, medical and military officials, and representatives of the Crown Prince and the town, members of other units, and friends of the hospital" assembled and "the streets were lined with townsfolk" (p. 57). Stobart reflected on the fickleness of fate in mentioning the death of a young woman about to get married instead of her, a middle-aged widow with grown-up sons. The guilt of the survivor, well-known among the soldiers is articulated here and its purpose in the narrative is to equate the rituals through which gendered masculinity is expressed to those among the women functioning in a military zone. Describing her reaction to the event, Stobart did not deny her feelings, which rendered her feminine and human; however, her ability to control them and keep her composure

without indulging in histrionics, which was a charge against Victorian and Edwardian women's capability for exercising any public role, was there to prove the worth of a professional and a university-educated woman in a theatre of war. Stobart (1916) built her argument further by emphasizing another detail of nurse Ferris' life – she had been engaged to her fiancé, a man, who together with her mother had been waiting for her return, planning their future together in the very moment her body was interred into the foreign soil to rest there forever (p. 57). Stobart's selection of these details of Ferris' life and death were chosen thoughtfully to draw the undoubted resemblance between the life, death, and posthumous honors bestowed upon a nurse, a professional woman, and a man and a soldier. Stobart (1916) noticed the existing difference between the two cases and wondered why "Now that she was dead, she was saluted by passing officers and soldiers" and "whether it would always be necessary to reserve honors for women till after they are dead" (p. 57).

Stobart's radical agency was an outcome of her independent personality, genteel background, and previous experiences. She had a reputation in fighting for suffrage in this manner. In 1909 Stobart established the *Women's Sick and Wounded Convoy Corps* and served in Bulgaria in the First Balkan War. What made her idea "radical is that an entire hospital unit could be staffed by women, not just nurses but doctors too, with women taking all the other supporting roles" (Smith, 2007, p. 159). She understood the concept of self-promotion, and the necessity for media coverage which played the part in it, and advertised her work endorsing feminism: *War and Women, from Experience in the Balkans and Elsewhere* (Stobart, 1913). As a daughter of a baronet, she was well-connected and well-versed in the works of media and its power over the British public, particularly at times of military crisis. She had surely been aware of the media hype and its influence during the Eastern Crisis (1875–1878). As WWI started, Stobart raised a hospital with her funds and set off to help Belgium, risking death in front of a firing squad, as she was arrested by the Germans. With this experience, she wrote of the epidemics in Serbia and the tragic outcome.

The next death was Mrs. Mabel Dearmer's – an orderly, and the wife of the Chaplain in the unit, Dr. Dearmer. Its description follows the pattern set in the previous example: mention of nature's response, presence of the high-ranking representatives at the funeral, and the fact that "the representative of the Crown Prince expressed to me his condolences," (Stobart, 1916, p. 67) although the deceased was married and her husband was present. Interestingly, Mabel Dearmer herself left an account of the same events before her death in the form of letters to her friend.

Throughout the Summer of 1915, there was a lull in military activities in the Balkans. As “the typhus epidemic was diminishing” whilst “a serious epidemic of typhus, diphtheria, typhoid, and other diseases” (Stobart, 1916, 68) were raging among the civilians, Stobart (1916) was “determined to extend the work and to establish a series of roadside tent dispensaries, within an average radius of thirty miles around Kragujevatz,” (p. 73) demonstrating her superb leadership and managerial capacity with the flare for innovation as proof of women’s capability in the war zone. In her words: “this dispensary work brought clearly to light the fact that war [...] maims and kills, by slow torture, the women and children who are responsible for the life, health, and vigor of future generations” (Stobart, 1916, p. 69). Thus, she stressed that women died equally in war – if not in fighting then from a sanitary crisis caused by a military crisis.

In autumn 1915, the Central Powers attacked Serbia and Stobart was given the rank of major in the Serbian army: “the first time in history that such an appointment has been offered to a woman” to command “*The First Serbian-English Field Hospital (Front)*–Commandant Madame Stobart” (Stobart, 1916, p. 123). It was to accompany the troops to the front and as it happened followed them in the retreat through Montenegro and Albania. In this, she decided “to ride at the head of the convoy always” on a black stallion in men’s saddle, “determined to share with the men the practical difficulties of the road” (Stobart, 1916, p. 130). As Smith (2007) says it is “testament to Stobart’s reputation,” but also “an opportunity for publicity” (p. 168). She was to be known as *The Lady of the Black Horse* immortalized on a painting showing her astride the stallion, followed by the troops in a mountain gorge, with dead soldiers on the sides of the path (Hallett, 2016, p. 39).

On her tour in the US in 1917, Stobart used her varied experience in the medical corps in war-stricken Serbia to promote women’s rights. Stobart (1916) admitted openly that the purpose of her writing was suffrage and feminist and pacifist in nature: “it should show, without the need of further proof, that women can be of service, not only in base hospitals of war, both in subsidiary positions, and in positions of command” and “in the eyes of woman, the war also means the negation of civilization and progress” (pp. 311–312). As several maternalistic feminist pacifists of the time (Ouditt, 2005, pp. 4, 131–135, 140–142), Stobart exploited the image of a life-giving mother in her writing to advance her plea for suffrage, which would allow women to influence men-centered wars that destroyed the very lives women gave birth to. In her talk, she said: “there is no path of achievement impossible to women” (Stobart, 1917; Smith, 2007, p. 172).

Mrs. Mabel Dearmer (1872–1915) was an orderly in Stobart's Hospital, the wife of Dr. Dearmer, the Chaplain of the unit, the mother of two conscripted sons, and back in England, she was a published novelist, dramatist, and illustrator of children's books. Her friend and the editor of her letter stressed her pacifism and feminism that brought her to Serbia: "she thought that for all countries war was unrighteous, yet she went. She went on active service not because she was an Englishwoman, but because she was a woman" (Dearmer, 1915, p. 2).

It is her sensitivity coupled with Christian pacifism and feminism that colors Dearmer's narrative of her sojourn cut-short, including references to the sanitary crisis. Her letters are filled with obsessive remarks on the possibility of contracting typhus: "If I get it, [...] there is every chance of my pulling through." The cheerful: "It would be such a maddening way to die —before anything had been done at all" appears forcefully upbeat and saturated with a premonition: "One has to stop someday, and I would rather "stop" here, doing this work [...]. There is nothing terrifying or agonizing in typhus [...] just drift away into the unknown quite quietly" (Dearmer, 1915, pp. 128, 149–150).

For Dearmer pacifism was sexless: had she been a man, she would have not fought in a war; to one of her sons, she could not offer a blessing to join the Allies' army. Dearmer's piety encapsulated forgiveness for the enemy who would kill her sons, as they could not see that "the only way to see war is from a hospital." Her pacifism was ecumenical, it erased patriotism and strife for a nation-state, which she viewed as the root cause of all wars (Dearmer, 1915, pp. 144–145, 159).

Her upbeat tone can be understood as the consequence of feminism and the result of her freedom of choice – the choice to face death by a contagious disease. This was evident to her friend who stated that "she stood for freedom, above all for woman's freedom [...] a woman no less than a man must be free to follow her work and her ideal wherever these might lead" (Dearmer, 1915, p. 70). An Edwardian lady forfeiting her life in a war zone seems as striving for heroism usually accessible to men (Smith, 2016, p. 120), but to her contemporary, it was a desire for adventure, in which she found complete happiness (Dearmer, 1915, pp. 71, 133).

For Dr. Caroline Matthews, on the other hand, pacifism was not a choice, and serving the Serbians simply meant serving the British war cause prompted by the culture of imperialism she was raised in (Smith, 2013, p. 36). Matthews refused to leave the Hospital in Užice when the Serbian Army started to retreat and when she faced the Austro-Hungarian invasion. It was "this realization of my nationality that upheld me." Even though the British government did not want women in army medical

corps, for Matthews (1916) “all the pain of Life seemed worth the price if I might be of service [...] though, beneath an alien Flag, it would be for Britain” (pp. 109, 64).

Monica M. Stanley was an experienced nurse in Stobart's Hospital, who left the account of her work between April and November 1915 in the form of a war journal with entries detailing events of certain days. Nurse Stanley did not contemplate the interconnectedness between military and sanitary crises and a larger ideal.

Stanley (1916) mentioned the deaths in their unit – that of Nurse Ferris, also described in Stobart and Dearmer's accounts, and of Mrs. Dearmer. Talking of Nurse Ferris and Mrs. Dearmer's illness and deaths, Stanley methodically lists the stages leading to her funeral, including the day and hour of her death, the military funeral, and its attendants (pp. 63–68).

Stanley's (1916) descriptions of the human suffering in the Stobart's dispensaries due to the neglect caused by the disruption of the state infrastructure were employed to promote the need for the aid among the British: “People in dear old England cannot imagine the state of this part of the world [...] We are trying to stop some of the dreadful diseases spreading” (pp. 33, 39).

Her narrative of the sanitary crisis was not linked to the resolution of another type of crisis. It seemed purely humanitarian. Her even account is explained as a subconscious strategy for the preservation of their mental health where “a flat narrative tone” is juxtaposed “with its hideous subject matter” (Ouditt, 2005, p. 38).

Femininity in Crisis

Dr. Isabel Emslie Hutton (1886–1960) joined the Scottish Women's Hospitals in 1915, served in France, then with the French Army in Salonika, accompanied the Serbian Army during the war, led the hospital in Ostrovo, and, after the liberation of Serbia, the one in Vranje. Dr. Louise MacIlroy (1917), the surgeon in charge of the unit in Salonika, praised the success of the hospital on female surgeons among which “Dr. Isobel Emslie, bacteriologist” is singled out (p. 287). Her experiences in the Balkans and later in Sebastopol, Emslie Hutton published a decade after the events: *With a Woman's Unit in Serbia, Salonika and Sebastopol* (Emslie Hutton, 1928). She aimed to tell of sacrifices and work done by female medics and the “lack of antagonism between the sexes” (Emzli Haton, 2018, p. 8). Emslie's well-structured narrative reveals her feminist stance evident in the description of the work in the crisis-affected area, and her

leadership and managerial skills. By representing skillful women, Emslie also qualified other women her to obtain the right to vote. Most interestingly it exposes her gendered view on the issue, apparent in her constant reprise of the concept of femininity.

Emslie (2018) promised her mother she would go anywhere but to Serbia, yet three months later the Unit was there despite their better judgment (p. 11). If her mother's view was the accepted one on the matter, then working in a multiple-crisis zone meant a greater and more dangerous sacrifice to which a woman exposed herself, which consequently should have promoted her suffrage rights, since a woman placed herself in the region with the degree of danger exceeding that of the falling bombs and may have been only inferior to the horrors of the trench war. She struggled with atrocious hygienic conditions in Djevdjelij, she fought outbreaks of malaria fever and cerebral malaria, dysentery, sandfly fever, contagious jaundice, and scurvy in Salonika between 1916 and 1918. When Serbia was liberated, the returned epidemic of typhus of 1919 and the notorious 'Spanish flu' became Emslie Hutton's new enemies in her Hospital in Vranje (Emzli Haton, 2018, pp. 39, 40, 69, 70, 72, 98, 156, 160). In her work, she pointed out her achievement of becoming the manager of the hospital in Ostrovo before turning thirty, of creating a typhus ward in Vranje, and demonstrated the authority a professional woman held when she declined the orders of a military official (Emzli Haton, 2018, pp. 133–34, 177).

Emslie's expression of her war experience was naturally filtered through Victorian and Edwardian cultural and social paradigms – particularly that of gender roles (Smith, 2016, p. 14). There was no need in her opinion in changing gender so that the female sex could be deemed appropriate for acquiring honors i.e. women did not need to resemble men in outward appearance (clothes, behavior) and rituals. Thus, she was proud of her new hat with the pink feather that she wore when she gave the news of her leaving to her boss in Edinburgh, stressing that nothing gives self-confidence to a woman as a new hat. When she met Olive Kelso King, the Australian volunteer driver in the Unit, Emslie was reminded of "a boy," successfully contrasting her femininity with Kelso King's undeveloped masculinity, disclosing in the process the variety of motivations that led different women to experience the war-zone. Out of many fellow medical workers that she encountered again in Belgrade in 1920, Emslie (2018) mentioned only Olive Kelso King and Flora Sandes (p. 223) – two women who chose a gendered approach to construct their roles in WWI and post-war Serbia. Emslie (2018) described Mrs. Harley, the director as "fragile and lovely" despite her adoration for "everything military," whilst Miss Stouny the X-ray operator "looked like a reed (but) her physical

endurance was wonderful” (pp. 18–19). Here is evident the changing notion of femininity that became more prominent in wartime, as Stobart pointed out, which accepted “strength and resilience” in women, but shunned the outward sign of gendered masculinity. Emslie expressed her idea of femininity explicitly in the writing declaring that her wartime experience thought her that a feminine woman, proud of her look, was always the best worker. She further repudiates the notion of the masculine-looking woman as the strongest and the ablest one, explaining that such a type of woman allegedly was not the enduring one (Emzli Haton, 2018, p. 20). It seems that Emslie attempted to show that capacity for heroism existed in a common-looking British woman as in any man, without the need for masculinization, so that the majority of the British women's war efforts was to be viewed as worthy of suffrage.

Dr. Helen Hanson (1874–1926) from Stobart's Hospital, a militant suffragist with an interest in the position of women in Church and State, wrote letters to her family, which constitute a memoir of her life. Whilst it mentioned the hardship of her daily work in a region stricken by war and sanitary crisis, it draws the image of her femininity similar to the one approved by Emslie, another female doctor. Although a woman confident, dauntlessly fearless, capable of leadership in danger, who “worried the War Office for permission to wear uniform,” yet wore “her long skirts and her red hat and flowing red veil,” (Acres, 1928, pp. 50–69) Hanson does not show a desire for masculinity per se but demonstrates liberated femininity of an educated woman.

Famous Flora Sandes (1876–1956), a volunteer-turned-soldier is one of a few British women who witnessed the outbreak of the epidemic of typhus in Kragujevac in 1914. However, she neither talked of these times nor employed the sanitary crisis trope to resolve the crisis of her gender identity (Hazen, 2006, p. 61), which featured in her autobiography (Sandes, 1916), but she chose to resolve it through the theme of the military crisis and her involvement in the arms conflict. Risking the death by typhus may have not been a heroic enough choice of demise for her to be mentioned in her autobiography, and her nursing days would have been a testament to the repetitiveness of rituals of femininity. As it was pointed out not making a political point in her narrative did not aid the suffragette movement (Hallet, 2016, p. 43), despite Sandes' pre-war involvement in it.

As it is deduced not all medical staff mentioned epidemics in the accounts of their stay in the war zone in Serbia. Olive Aldridge, a nurse in Stobart's Hospital arrived on the eve of the retreat of the Serbian Army in

the fall of 1915. Although her narrative contains detailed descriptions of Serbian life, she paid attention to the fortitude of the British women during the evacuation through Montenegro and Albania (Hallet, 2016, p. 41).

Conclusion

The connection between the British women's writing of their experiences in the Balkan war-zone and the suffrage movement was known even to their Serbian contemporaries. Milan Ćurčin (1916), literal critique, and poet who stayed in London between 1916 and 1918, published a pamphlet stating that he did not "believe in Women's Suffrage—except for the women of Great Britain," since "this War made [him] see that British women must have the public privileges of men when their work and services are accepted for the public good like those of men" (p. 3). The 'otherness' of *Orientalism* and *Balkanism* is echoed in their position in the region that allowed them less structured experience, where they could prove their worth in the war-zone independently from the men-organized, imperial medical corps.

The Balkan experience facilitated the opportunity to prove themselves, just as the British men had been doing for the past century – e.g., Lord Byron and the archaeologist Sir Arthur Evans – the Balkans was a place "for men to build themselves through the challenges of life" (Rokai, 2017, pp. 84–86). The deaths of British women serving in the war zone was a shock that facilitated the success of their suffrage struggle, since it constituted their rights to function as contributors to the governmental decision-making that might lead a military crisis into a war.

Notwithstanding their deeply humanitarian response to a total crisis of WWI in the Balkans, the British women's narratives aspired to show the world their experiences of the military and sanitary crises, where they equaled the men in resilience, resourcefulness, cool-headedness, leadership, and human sacrifice. Some used it as a political manifesto to further their aims in resolving the crisis of the social order through suffrage and pacifism, others employed it for resolving personal, but a very social crisis of feminine identity that, whilst an ideal, also impacted suffrage – if all not pacifists, all of them were feminists. Finally, the British women's narratives on the sanitary crisis in the Balkan war zone during WWI were influenced by their ideals and by those of the social group they identified with, in regard to another crisis occurring around or within them.

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Мелина Рокаи*

БАЛКАНСКА САНИТАРНА КРИЗА У НАРАТИВИМА БРИТАНСКИХ ЖЕНА ТОКОМ ПРВОГ СВЕТСКОГ РАТА

Апстракт: У раду се анализирају писани наративи, сведочанства Британки о санитарној кризи, пре свега о епидемијама у балканској војној зони Првог светског рата. При томе је узета у обзир међусобна повезаност плеторе криза које су биле актуелне у овом периоду и које су значиле и постојање идеолошких агенди међу Британкама, које су утицале на решавање проблема. Војна криза, која је кулминирала ратом, представљала је начин да Британке докажу своју вредност у зонама војне агресије, као предуслов за добијање бирачког права. Здравствена криза на ратом погођеном Балкану била је главна опасност по живот за ове жене, а смрт у епидемији сматрана је најсличнијом смрћу у бици, што је утицало на добијања бирачког права.

Кључне речи: Први светски рат, Британке, суфражеткиње, епидемија

* Мелина Рокаи, виши научни сарадник, Одељење за историју, Филозофски факултет, Универзитет у Београду, имејл: melinarokai85@hotmail.com.

Jovan Bukovala*

ISIDORA SEKULIĆ: THE FIRST MARTYR OF SERBIAN LITERARY SCENE

Abstract: With this review, we will try to shed light on the suffering of Isidora Sekulić who has always been belittled, disavowed, misunderstood, rejected, improperly recognized, so she can rightly be called the first martyr of the Serbian literary scene.

Keywords: Isidora Sekulić, Milovan Đilas, communism

Instead of an Introduction

Throughout the existence of the human species, each time brought with it a certain crisis. Thus, throughout history, man and society have always gone through a political, economic, spiritual, moral, but, unfortunately, mostly through a health crisis. We are witnesses that last year and this year were marked by the pandemic of the COVID-19 virus, and we are afraid that the years ahead are also coming. However, a rhetorical question arises: at what time was there no crisis?!

From antiquity to the present day, there have been men, but also women who have left an indelible mark in the era of civilization with their works. Most of them were writers, painters, philosophers. Works, books and monographs about many scientists and artists have been published in our periodicals. Here are just a few that received the most attention: Ksenija Atanasijević (1894–1981), the first woman to receive a doctorate in philosophy, and Anica Savić-Rebac (1892–1953), a famous philosopher, writer and also a professor at the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Belgrade, whose tragic fate was even recorded on the television drama “Coast of longing” produced by Television Belgrade in 2002, and Desanka Maksimović (1898–1993), our greatest poet.

* Jovan Bukovala, Junior Research Assistant, Institute for Philosophy, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade, e-mail: jovan.bukovala@f.bg.ac.rs.

We must not lose the fact that a lot of research results also referred to Isidora Sekulić (1877–1958). Unfortunately, few people dealt with her fate in difficult times, such as the tuberculosis disease due to which she lost members of her immediate family, the First and Second World Wars, and, above all, the period after the Second World War when she was persecuted under communism, but also of the whole life to a greater or lesser extent.

With this review, we will try to shed light on the suffering of Isidora Sekulić who has always been belittled, disavowed, misunderstood, rejected, improperly recognized, so she can rightly be called the first martyr of the Serbian literary scene.

The Apostle of Loneliness

The smartest Serbian woman has been accompanied by family tragedies since birth. She lost one brother at the age of four, and a mother at the age of seven. They both died of tuberculosis. She was left alone in this world with her father, who then married another woman, and that hit young Isidora Sekulić very hard. Psychologists think that in most cases girls are tied to their fathers and boys to their mothers. Of course, it should not be generalized, but these indescribably difficult moments in the life of a fragile being influenced her to be called “the apostle of loneliness” in intellectual circles. When she needed her mother most to guide her into a cruel life in the dominant male world, she didn’t have one. Unfortunately, she did not even have a father to protect her, and that factor is crucial, so our heroine found solace in writing. She loved her father, she respected him very much, and she actually saw in him the ideal of a man. Unfortunately, she also lost him when she was twenty.

Shortly afterwards, life took her other brother, who also died of tuberculosis. Although childhood and youth last the shortest, we all need strong figures, either in the father or in the mother, or someone who will understand and love us. However, Isidora Sekulić had no one. Instead of rejoicing in life, because she was successful in her job as a professor, she despaired and suffered.

Given the circumstances in which she lived, and we must keep in mind that it was the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, sexism reigned and there was terrible pressure on women who had not married before and had children, especially in this region. Left alone in this world, Isidora Sekulić had both lungs sick. In that trouble, escapism was the only solution and our heroine is going on a trip around Europe.

Her life was full of nervousness, pain and blood, and the only salvation was in writing.

Although she escaped from reality and petty bourgeoisie, she was always awaited by condemnations, reprimands and attacks by Jovan Skerlić (1877–1914), the most prominent literary critic, on her works and the style in which she created them (Pavlović, 2010, p. 11).

In the general hopelessness, a man appeared in her life – Emil Stremnicki, for whom she got married, but she was left without him very soon, because he died on the train. At first, she thought she would be at least a little happy and fulfilled, and fate again denied her that opportunity.

Isidora Sekulić was and remained alone, but never lonely.

To Lovćen's Prometheus

In solitude, she welcomed the year 1941 and the April collapse of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia.

Although she refused to serve the German occupier and his domestic helpers, it was worth nothing to her after her release that she refused to sign the Appeal to the Serbian people in the fight against the red danger. Despite that, she immediately fell at the mercy of the new communist authorities, and, above all, Milovan Đilas (1911–1995).

However, she found solace in her spiritual father – Peter II Petrović Njegoš (1813–1851). It is probable that Isidora Sekulić also thought about Njegoš during the war wrote her monograph on him. That work was extensive as early as 1945, how she says in a letter to Isak Samokovlija (1889–1955). In one letter from 1946 she writes: “Who will publish the work is quite extensive, and I am not extensive in power and ability.” (Поповић, 1979, pp. 277). Until the book appeared, she published three more excerpts about Njegoš, which they talk about his biography and Montenegro, as well as a text about the *Rays of the microcosm*.

The first book about Njegoš was published in 1951, with the author noting that she wanted to “separate the monobiography into one volume, and the works on the three main works of Njegoš to form the second volume of the whole” (Секулић, 1951, pp. 388–389). Her friends, to whom she told this, did not agree with that, and neither did she finally.

Now that the work on the *Mountain Wreath* has stretched at three times stronger volume than *Rays*, now one whole edition has become pure impossibility ... We should not just break the rhythm texts even stronger than breaking a book to get the *Mountain Wreath* into it. *Mountain Wreath* will

therefore remain in operation for some time, and, if all circumstances so desire, appear as another volume of the whole. (Секулић, 1951, pp. 388–389)

However, it is only once she dedicated a monograph, a book of deep devotion, and she wrote it in her later years. In those years, critical spirits often choose to write about personalities of supreme intellectualism, wisdom. She then chose to write about a person who assimilates and synthesizes in himself the feelings and wisdom of different cultures. It is important to point out that Isidora Sekulić wrote a book about Njegoš not so much as a cultural historian as much as a literary critic and literary thinker; more as an artist-critic than as a scientist-historian and philologist. She did not write essays of objectivist views empowered by the ironic opinions and dramatic talent of the essayist, with aspirations to psychologically and sociologically (in a positivist way) the causes, causes, connections and characters phenomena and people (Адамовић, 2016, p. 84).

“Bishop Rade was deeply religious, and pessimism sublimated into spiritual superiority over transience and death.” (Sekulić, 2002, p. 277–311). We learn how much Isidora Sekulić was impressed by Njegoš, who “was a creator who was also a collaborator of God” (Sekulić, 2002, p. 277–311), but the culmination of his admiration and respect for Njegoš’s character will be expressed in a book she published a few years before her death, *To Njegoš – a book of deep devotion*.

Towards the end of her life, Isidora Sekulić increasingly returned to traditional values. Dragan Jeremić (1925–1986) called her “the last national romantic” (Jeremić, 1965, p. 105). Her works on romantic poets, on Vuk Karadžić, but primarily on Njegoš, are significant. For the writer, Njegoš is the greatest national poet, he is the ideal of her vision of a genius artist, and the work of *To Njegoš – a book of deep devotion* is an expression of great love and respect, and at the same time a combination of her nationalism and cosmopolitanism. Despite that, near the end of her literary career, Isidora Sekulić is again criticized for taking her into isolation for the rest of her life (Pavlović, 2010, p. 68).

The book about Njegoš was published in 1951 on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of his death. Some new ideologies rule in the country, religion is disputed, and the book about Njegoš is nothing but the thought and testimony of one religion. The book was vehemently opposed by the then prominent communist ideologue Milovan Đilas. Without any literary reason, he judges this literary work on the basis of his political ideology. The verdict is disparaging and incorrect:

...bearing in mind that it was written in fact against our so-called pre-war social literature (true and weak and primitive, but still social at the time

socio-politically important), and ostensibly in the praise of Krleža's (1893–1981) *Kerempuh* as “the victory of the eternal problem,” that is, in the time of bitter class struggles, then both the social place and the social role of this philosophy become clear. (Đilas, 1952, p. 1911)

Đilas described her essay *The Problem of Poverty in Man and Literature* as “the most banal pop sermon” and “blurry and dark individualistic skepticism” (1998, p. 166). If it was worth arguing with Skerlić, she had to keep silent and withdraw before Đilas. How much Isidora Sekulić, a woman who entered the eighth decade of her life, was affected by these inappropriate convictions, is best shown by the words to Jara Ribnikar (1912–2007):

“Mr. Đilas took an ax and killed an old woman!” (Рибникар, 1984, pp. 56–62). Criticized and unscathed again, at the end of her literary career, she isolates herself for fear of the “communist inquisition,” the malefactors will call her “a mad grandmother who has a strange and awkward nature” (Pavlović, 2010, p. 69).

Isidora Sekulić herself honestly says how much Đilas's verdict will put a stain on her fruitful writing career:

You see, this Đilas' book had a terrible effect on me. I don't agree with his views, I know seven philosophies, and he only knows one. What's worse, I can't write anymore now. I just can, but no one will be allowed to print my manuscripts. Therefore, these days I have burned my diary, which I have kept for years... (Marinković, 1963, p. 226)

In her later years, reflecting on her half-century-long literary career, she concludes:

I was unlucky in my work; I still don't have it. It's hard to see from the side, but I know it best. (...) They didn't let me to be my own or smart, they were constantly looking for something else in what I was doing. I felt on my shoulders all the burden of a woman cultural worker in an environment that, let's be honest, finds it very difficult to get rid of unhealthy traditions. (Marinković, 1963, p. 226)

Đilas points out that Isidora Sekulić is an important person in the culture of that time, but in his opinion, Marxists must not close their eyes to the fact that her book on Njegoš is:

Based on idealistic views on the interpretation of phenomena, not on the basis of the analysis of material, social conditions (without considering their specific archival study, which is very much with Isidora extensively and conscientiously), from which, in the end, spiritual phenomena originate and they are explained, rather than on the basis of general idealistic categories.

Such a method shows the deep impotence of idealism to really explain Njegoš and his epoch, and Njegoš's historical roots and the real meaning of Njegoš's poetry, and especially those religious, which Marxists today shyly keep silent and bypass in the holiday exasperation, dwelling only on the obviously progressive and the obvious the revolutionary Mountain Wreath. (...) When something has already been written in public, then it should also be publicly, very publicly criticized by those – in this case Marxists – who do not agree with that. (Đilas, 1952, p. 21)

Đilas also tried to explain his procedure to Isidora Sekulić, but he did not give up his intention to take her book about Njegoš more seriously. Actually, his goal was to settle accounts with the Serbs from Marxist positions idealism and its protagonists. That is how the book *Legend of Njegoš*, in which Njegoš had to come to the background (Томић, 2018, pp. 99).

Đilas bases Isidora Sekulić's objections on her vision of the mystical vitality of a nation that overcomes difficulties with the cosmic power of a higher order. This, he believes, is the focal point of her idealism, in which "there is nothing mentally original" (Đilas, 1952, p. 67). While the analysis of Isidora Sekulić goes towards the essences of Njegoš's ideas, Đilas lacks causality between Njegoš's and the modern age in her interpretation. It is about the lack of causality from which the idea arises and lasts (Томић, 2018, pp. 100). Criticism refers to absolute, non-historical interpretation, to existentialist and general modes of interpretation. He says ironically:

By the way, according to that – 'we' are not exactly a cat's cough and Njegoš is not only ours, but, you see, there is 'something deeper', 'more human', 'more worldly', 'more cosmic'... And really, we are not real cat's cough, just as the real Njegoš is not only ours! But he is not an existentialist either. (Đilas, 1952, p. 68)

From the perspective of the "eternal idea" and the "eternal law," Đilas does not see the "reality" of the historical moment, either of Njegoš or Tito (Томић, 2018, p. 100). In this regard, he necessarily connects Njegoš's and the socialist idea ("And since similarities can really be found there [fight against the occupiers: Turks with Njegoš, Germans with Tito], they portrayed what looks like the same, although in terms of content it cannot be the same," Đilas, 1952, p. 71), also criticizing Isidora Sekulić's "nationalist setting that Njegoš is a Serbian poet, from the Serbian-local Montenegro country" (Đilas, 1952, p. 71).

Following the idealistic cognition of Njegoš, Đilas emphasizes the unjustified and harmful ideologisation of Njegoš as a legend, in a manipulative sense. In the second chapter of the book *Legend of Njegoš*, Milovan Đilas discusses the way of creating a legend, its mythologizing and mystifying (Томић, 2018, p. 100).

Đilas uses the term “Serbian idealism” for the format of the legend in whose form it originates the thought of Njegoš, which, again, is not original, although in its original form, and with Nikolaj Velimirović (1880–1956), and with Isidora Sekulić. Đilas determines who has been since when “took” the idea, the thought, linking the contents of the books about Njegoš with the idea that Isidora Sekulić also continues the thought of her predecessor, both literary and philosophical (Томић, 2018, p. 101).

Đilas had no intention of researching either reveals some new, unknown facts from Njegoš’s life and work. He did not have the conditions for such a thing in prison, and that was not his goal. He focused on expressing his relationship, that is, his understandings and views of Njegoš as a person and his overall work, especially poetry.

So, they didn’t it was more about some ideological-political reasons but an irresistible need for searching in Njegoš and through Njegoš about the meaning of human existence and man fighting in general. In order to achieve that, Đilas had to experience the whole drama in himself first Njegoš, and from that experience, referring to some sources, to create their own seeing Njegoš and his work (Адамовић, 2016, p. 159).

Both Isidora and Milovan announced the continuation of their books. Although only Roman number one appears in it and in the title (which will appear in posthumous editions of the same reading to be erased), only Đilas fulfilled the given promise. According to her testimony, which the official legend will spice up with the patina of suffering, Sekulić burned her second work about Njegoš. Due to that, it spread with Serbian literary criticism a story about a magnificent achievement which is – as one of the performers said poetically the author’s last will – “cut across the waist.” The missing next part was to be dedicated to the *Mountain Wreath*.

The truth, however, does not reside in the fictions that culture has imprinted in mass psychology, but elsewhere. Not only did Isidora survive the *Legend*, rather, it continued to contribute to the literary and political life of Yugoslavia, by has – for example – written hymns to its armed forces (renamed since 1951 in the JNA) and youth work actions. In the meantime, it is taking place at Đilas a truly tragicomic somersault, after which the former omnipotent ruler in prison reads the writer’s court texts and at the same time regrets the injustice he inflicted on her – as he (did he ever manage to believe?). And is it he did not sin far more about Radovan Zogović, when he proclaimed it in his Manichaeism her Montenegrin counterpart?

There is an entry in Đilas’ prison diary from which it can be seen that he was not only sincerely saddened by the news of Sekulić’s death, but also that he was bitten by his conscience because he condemned her wonderful

literary work about Njegoš. “It is my sin the greater that I was in power,” the writer of the *Legend* sprinkled ashes (Brebanović, 2014, p. 144).

Thus, on the day of her own death, Isidora completely defeated Milovan. As a skeptic, she will continue to prove culturally tougher than the innocent an ideological heretic. Bazaar mythology sang of their clash as an immoral attack of the announced communist bloodthirsty to a fragile, indeed, female Schönggeist. Due to the perception of the chauvinist elite, it remained one of Đilas’ greatest crimes: fortunately for him, he was miserable (Brebanović, 2014, p. 145).

Resurrection

During her life, none of the men ever spared Isidora Sekulić! However, 63 years have passed since her death, but, unfortunately, she still does not have her peace, and by all odds, I doubt that she will ever have it. To this day, our heroine has been subjected to relentless suspicions, assessments and malicious tendentious research.

An example that best reflects this is certainly the text of Mr. Blagoje Pantelić, which was published on September 5, 2019 in the 399th issue of the highly read magazine *Nedeljnik*. As is usually always the case with us, the title was, of course, very sensational: *Did Isidora Sekulić really get her doctorate: The story of the first controversial doctorate*. We note that the author was then a researcher at the Institute of European Studies, and otherwise a theologian by profession.

A colleague began his tractate with an extreme statement:

There is not a single witness who saw Isidora Sekulić’s husband, her doctorate and another book about Njegoš. We know that she had a husband, defended her doctorate and wrote another book about Njegoš only from her stories, which were suspected before. It seems justified... (Pantelić, 2019)

It seems justified to the author to present such flat-out views that are not even the greatest intellectuals like Jovan Skerlić, who was our most eminent literary critic, let alone the stubbornest communists, among whom the leader was “later dissident” Milovan Đilas. Each of them managed to inflict as much pain as possible on our greatest writer and inviolable philosopher, while enjoying a sadistic manner.

However, the author continues in his recognizable style:

Stories about a man she fell in love with and married on the trip, and who soon passed away, so none of Isidora’s friends and compatriots ever saw

him, as well as the fact that she wrote another book about Peter II Petrović, but she burned and managed to destroy every trace of the work on that manuscript because of Đilas' critique of the first book – they really sound unlikely, but they are also difficult to deny. The story of Isidora's doctorate also sounds incredible. However, it is possible to check it, because there must be at least some trace of it. Does it exist?' (Pantelić, 2019)

If, by any chance, this colleague wanted to conduct a thorough research, he could have gone to the competent historical archive and tried to look for an excerpt from the registry of marriages for bridegroom Emil Stremnicki and bride Isidora Sekulić. However, he did not do that and he "skillfully" supported his claims in the article, calling them "indications" (Pantelić, 2019).

"Answer" to his rhetorical question *How do we even know that Isidora has a doctorate?* explains in the chapter he characterized as a *Testimony*.

Mr. Pantelić states that Isidora Sekulić from address *Berlin W, Luther Str. 29. I.* sent on June 16th, 1922 a correspondence card to her close friend, the famous Belgrade bookstore and publisher Svetislav B. Cvijanović, who also published her first two books, in which she informed him that she had obtained her doctorate in June.

However, he again posed a rhetorical question, to which he nevertheless answered by imposing his unsubstantiated opinion:

Why did Isidora need to hide her doctoral dissertation? Because she was modest? Or maybe for some other reason? In any case, only that hiding raises suspicion... But also some other data from her biography. The most important are, of course, those related to her stay in Berlin. (Pantelić, 2019)

By no means do I want to enter into scientific controversy and discussion, because such arbitrary assessments would result in the questionability of the scientific and social contribution of the candidate in general.

Mr. Pantelić based his hypothesis on the following sharp words:

Isidora changes her original plan, she does not go to England but to Germany, and there, after only a few weeks, she manages to defend her doctorate no less and no more, at one of the most famous philosophical faculties in the world. And that's really weird. Even if she had a written text, the procedure that precedes the defense of the work is complicated and often takes several months.

Many today are not aware of what the process that ended with obtaining a doctoral degree used to look like. At that time, almost not everyone could be crowned with that title. It took years of serious work in a particular field, and years and years of dedicated work on a specific topic. This was

especially true for German universities, and especially for the philosophical faculties there. (Pantelić, 2019)

However, the author again discriminates, but no longer gender, but age, and emphasizes that Isidora, as she is directly addressed, who was 45 years old at the time of her doctorate, then did not have years of serious work in the field of philosophy, let alone a day of study of some faculty of philosophy.

If we follow these formalities, according to that logic, Laza Kostić's dissertation would probably be disputable for Mr. Pantelić, because at the age of only 25 he obtained the title of Doctor of Laws at the Royal University in Pest, after defending his six-page dissertation!

A fellow researcher emphasized in his review article that if Sekulić really had a doctorate she had to publish the entire dissertation or at least a part of it. However, she did not do that and therefore he came to a "concrete" conclusion that she did not even defend the thesis, because if she had, the work would now be in the University Library "Svetozar Marković."

So, he sent a letter to Humboldt University in Berlin, which replied that it could not satisfy his request, because it did not have any doctorate in the name of Isidora Sekulić, but he sent it then to the University Archives, which he immediately addressed and received a reply with the same content – she never even studied.

Again, I do not want to enter the academic discussion, because the article was not published in a scientific journal, but in a weekly, and is not supported by facts, but I must single out the quote by which the author defined the chapter *Last question*:

In the end, we have only one question left to answer. Why did Isidora, who was a polyglot, an extraordinary erudite, a talented writer and a recognized and celebrated cultural worker, also invent that she was a doctor of science? (Pantelić, 2019)

Adhering exclusively to material evidence in the form of a paper document, Mr. Pantelić also referred to Ksenija Atanasijević, because she was the first woman who received a doctorate at the University of Belgrade, so she is rightly called Ksenija the First, while Isidora Sekulić was her rival who because of that decided to go to Berlin and magically gain the title of doctor of science there, also in the field of philosophy, because, unlike Ksenija Atanasijević, she could not cope with the criticism of Belgrade university professors and intellectuals.

The author ends his text with the words that there is half... (truth) in every joke, and I will answer all these his questions which obviously bother him so much, as an Orthodox Serb, very simply: we both believe (I hope especially he because he is a theologian) that only He (the Lord) is the Way, the Truth and the Life.

Isidora Sekulić, through the character of Ana Nedić, the protagonist of the novel *Deacon of the Church of the Mother of God*, would answer him exactly as her heroine who knew and felt that God came down and was in the church: "Great and marvelous are Your works, Lord God Almighty!" (Sekulić, 2019, str. 32).

So, both Isidora Sekulić and I, because we are calm and satisfied, have only this to say to him: "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe." (Јован 20:29, 1997).

Instead of a Conclusion

As we stated at the beginning, this year is also marked by the CORONA virus. However, apart from this plague, another very important event will be remembered. Namely, on June 1, the Law on Labor Equality came into force, which regulates very gender-sensitive language issues.

Our Isidora Sekulić has been surrounded by misogyny all her life and unable to express her deepest feelings. We hope that at least with this positive legal regulation, every person will be able to express themselves as they wish.

We believe that Isidora Sekulić is among us today, although her spirit lives and is chained in the stars, she would also fight fiercely for women's rights, but we are sure that she would also be constantly condemned by her Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, which she was a full member.

Certainly, justice has been satisfied, at least formally, and even today, after more than one hundred years, her impressive words remain written at all times:

Serbian woman! Smash with your fist and in men's way smash the pattern of that empty and sinful false life, and don't sleep when it's not time to rest, and don't cuddle when your children are born in a sign of death and decay... (Bjelica, 2012, p. 19)

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Јован Буковала*

ИСИДОРА СЕКУЛИЋ: ПРВА МУЧЕНИЦА СРПСКЕ КЊИЖЕВНЕ СЦЕНЕ

Апстракт: Овим прегледним радом ћемо покушати да осветлимо страдање Исидоре Секулић која је увек била омаловажавана, дезавуисана, несхваћена, одбачена, недовољно призната, па се тако се с правом може назвати првом мученицом српске књижевне сцене.

Кључне речи: Исидора Секулић, Милован Ђилас, комунизам

* Јован Буковала, истраживач-приправник, Институт за филозофију, Филозофски факултет, Универзитет у Београду, имејл: jovan.bukovala@f.bg.ac.rs.

Marija Petrović*

DEALING WITH A CRISIS: A NOTE FROM KSENIJA ATANASIJEVIĆ

Abstract: The paper focuses on a series of short texts written by Ksenija Atanasijević. Following her understanding of the role of philosophy in society, that it should not be confined to academia but must always correlate with everyday life, Atanasijević bravely states her views on the negative phenomena in the social, political, and cultural life of her time. She criticizes the irresponsible behavior of political and intellectual elites, their disinterest and cowardice, which she believes directly contribute to the multiplication of evil. The mentioned texts rely on her main ontological and ethical theses—that all human beings have the same essence and that the personhood of every human being must be respected. In dealing with crises, both those that affect all humankind and personal ones, Atanasijević engaged in a philosophical dialogue with her era. Only by facing the crisis bravely and analysing it meticulously can we hope to overcome it.

Keywords: Ksenija Atanasijević, war, feminism, intrigue, crisis

On Ksenija Atanasijević

A woman must step into the struggle of life—whether she wants to or not.
(Atanasijević, 2008, p. 29)

Ksenija Atanasijević (1894–1981) was an outstanding philosopher and a remarkable woman. She was relatively unknown to the Serbian public until recently when interest in her life and work began to grow. The relevance of her role in the intellectual circles of Yugoslavia between the two world wars is perhaps best grasped by stating the most important moments of her life.¹ She was the first woman to obtain a Ph.D. at the University of Belgrade, defending her dissertation *Bruno's Doctrine of the Minimum* in 1922. Two years later, she became the first female professor

* Marija Petrović, Research Assistant, Institute for Philosophy, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade, e-mail: m00petrovic@gmail.com.

1 For more on the life of Ksenije Atanasijević, see: Vuletić, 2005.

to be appointed to the Department of Philosophy at the University of Belgrade. Sadly, her academic career did not last long. Due to false charges of plagiarism and a massive public campaign against her, she was forced to stand down from her position at the university. She engaged in different local, regional, and international feminist initiatives. Atanasijević was a member of the *Presidium of the Serbian Women's League for Peace and Freedom* and was very active in the feminist and pacifist organization *The Little Entente of Women*. She wrote for the feminist magazine *Women's Movement*, of which she was also the editor (Ograjšek Gorenjak & Kardum, 2019, p. 133). Her bibliography includes more than 400 books, essays, reviews, and translations (Stanković, 1970). Like most women of her time, she encountered misogyny both in her personal and professional life (Vuletić, 2005, pp. 141–144; Šajković, 1970, p. 33–34). It was not easy for a woman in patriarchal Yugoslavia, on the verge of WWII, to stand boldly in defense of feminist and pacifistic ideas, but that is exactly what Ksenija Atanasijević did.

In this paper, I will focus on a series of short articles Atanasijević wrote between 1923 and 1940, intended for the general public and primarily published in daily newspapers, in social chronicles and daily reviews. These articles and essays were written in response to specific crises in the society of her time, but also to crises from the author's life. Three major crises that I believe had influenced her work the most were: a) the intellectual and political crisis between the two world wars; b) the difficulty of being a socially and academically engaged woman in a profoundly patriarchal society; c) false charges of plagiarism and a massive public assault on both her character and academic work.

I use the term “crisis” broadly here, to refer to an unstable or crucial time, or state of affairs, that demands serious attention, or to an emotionally significant event or radical change of status in a person's life (Merriam-Webster, Crisis). This is in line with the origin of the word *crisis*, which comes from the Greek term κρίσις, which can be roughly translated as decision, judgment, turning point, sudden change (Liddell & Scott, 1940, κρίσις). Understood like this, a crisis is a time or an event that always requires dealing with.²

Her view on how to act against evil in the world and overcome crises is perhaps most clearly expressed in the article *Towards an Open Struggle*, in which she says that “all that is wrong, artificial, and perverted must be clearly, distinctly, and unsparingly denounced” (Atanasijević, 2011, p. 76).

2 It is thought-provoking that the adjective “critical” has the same root as the noun “crisis”—from the Greek word κριτικός, taken as derivative of κρίσις (Merriam-Webster, Critical).

In *Fragments II*, Atanasijević writes that when our revolt is too general, it prevents us from seeing the essence of the specific problems we need to examine (Atanasijević, 1930, p. 194). That is why in times of crises it is necessary to carefully analyse and boldly and publicly identify all the individual problems, so as not to get lost in general issues and empty criticism. I will try to show that what Atanasijević did when faced with the above-mentioned crises was turn to what she knew best³—philosophy.

On the Role of Philosophers

... Philosophy has always been a guide to people towards light, truth, goodness, justice, and harmony.
(Atanasijević, 2011, p. 113)

Ksenija Atanasijević was one of the few Serbian thinkers whose philosophy was an expression of a living dialogue with her time. Her popular texts, collected in the publications *Ethics of Courage* (Atanasijević, 2011) and *Ethics of Feminism* (Atanasijević, 2008), are not a systematic exposition of a philosophical theory, nor do they pretend to be. They represent her intimate thoughts on philosophy, the society in which she lived, and the connection between the two. This, of course, does not mean that they lack philosophical or critical value. On the contrary, all texts are profoundly grounded in Atanasijević's philosophy. Based on her understanding of the role of philosophers, she bravely states her views on the negative aspects of social, political, and cultural life between the two wars.

Atanasijević's understanding of philosophy and the role of philosophers in society was largely inspired by ancient philosophers. This is not surprising when one considers that ancient philosophy was the main focus of her work (Deretić, 2020, p. 95; Šajković, 1970, p. 36). She was critical of the division of philosophy into disciplines, which she believed weakened the power of philosophical reflection (Atanasijević, 2011, p. 25; 1929, p. 11). Metaphysics, cosmology, ethics, and politics were more connected in ancient times, which is something that has been lost today. The ethical and political teachings of ancient philosophers had greater influence than those that followed (Atanasijević, 2011, p. 25).

Per her own belief that philosophy should not be bound to academia but must always have a connection with everyday life, the above-

3 The subject of "experts" and "expert knowledge" and their importance in times of crisis has been brought to surface by the COVID-19 pandemic. For more on this subject, see: Pavličić et al. (2021a), Pavličić et al. (2021b), Goldman (2001; 2018).

mentioned texts by Atanasijević rely on her main ontological and ethical theses—that all human beings have the same eternal essence and that the personhood of every human must be respected because the spark of universal spirit burns within them (Atanasijević, 2011, pp. 48, 111). Her major work *Philosophical Fragments* (Atanasijević, 1929; 1930) studies human beings, as the main element of reality. She understands philosophy as wisdom about the world that should focus not on metaphysical truths but on human and social reality. The goal of philosophy is to reexamine human existence and make everyday life better, more valuable, and humane.

To fulfill this goal, Atanasijević argues that we must boldly and courageously face the evil in the world. Evil is omnipresent in the world and we encounter it every day. As the basic negation of existence, evil threatens to nullify all of life's value (Atanasijević, 1968, pp. 18–19). She analyses various forms of evil and its ubiquity both in society and in the individual. It is the fight against evil that represents the core of her social engagement.

Only weak or fearful doctrinaires call for obedience and meekness. Tolerating increases evil, and a weak surrender to violence causes humans to fall to the lowest of lows. Injustice spreads faster than a vicious disease when one bows their head before it and can be somewhat suppressed only by ruthless destruction. (Atanasijević, 1930, p. 79)

Atanasijević considered her philosophical duty to fight against the challenges that life between the two wars brought upon individuals and societies.⁴ She courageously criticized political and intellectual elites' irresponsible behavior, their disinterest and cowardice, which she believed directly contributes to the multiplication of evil (see: Đurić, 2015, p. 109). We should not lose sight of the fact that a public activity like this from a woman in the 1920s and 1930s, especially in patriarchal Yugoslavia, was very uncommon and brave, to say the least.

Especially in her popular lectures and texts for the general public, Atanasijević gives preference to practical philosophy over theoretical, ethics and philosophy of politics over metaphysics (Deretić, 2020, p. 97). “Pondering the constitution of the world is enjoyable and indulgent; analysing relationships between people is a necessity” (Atanasijević, 1929, p. 11).⁵ That is why she claims that the role of philosophy is to help create

4 It is interesting to see how these remarks on the duty of philosopher resonate in the current COVID-19 pandemic. Pavličić, Petrović, and Smajević (2021a), as well as Quassim Cassam (2019), argue that philosophers—primarily philosophers of science and epistemologists—are obliged to express their judgment on the current pandemic situation and offer a critical discussion of public health policies.

5 This can be interpreted as a divergence from the philosophy of Branslav Petronijević (See: Lolić, 2020, pp. 236–238).

a better and nobler world for all mankind. “Philosophers in the true and best sense of the word, meaning philosophers both in terms of natural tact and culture” (Atanasijević, 2011, p. 28) are the ones who have or should have the needed ethical knowledge that enables them to show true respect for every person. I argue here that it was her understanding of the philosophers’ role in society that drove her to be socially engaged and openly critical of the crises she faced.

On War

But evil must be reckoned with...
(Atanasijević, 1968, p. 18)

The basic metaphysical assumptions of her philosophy are that the universe is deterministic (Šajković, 1970, p. 46), that evil is omnipresent in the world, and that man is a selfish being whose history is marked by conflicts. These also form the basis of her critique of academic and social elites and their passive response to the general negative social climate between the two world wars. Atanasijević believes that humans do not possess free will (Atanasijević, 1929, p. 80; 1930, p. 75), but that this is no excuse whatsoever for refraining from action. For her, rebellion against evil is the natural aspiration of a human who cannot bear it anymore and who wants to find a “path that will lead him to clean and fresh air” (Atanasijević, 2011, p. 82). In her *Fragments*, she emphasizes that we must not be “theoretical fatalists” and suggests that, although we know that we cannot essentially improve the state of affairs in the world, in practical life we must always assume the existence of free will (Atanasijević, 1929, p. 87).

Her text *The Religious and Philosophical Basis of Pacifism* begins with the words: “Empirical events show us, persistently and frequently, that the relationship between humans, from the earliest times to the present day, comes down to all forms of struggle and conflict” (Atanasijević, 2011, p. 29). Atanasijević sees the historical development of civilization as a vicious circle of conflicts and unrest. As the cause of these struggles, she sees the desire for self-affirmation of both individuals and societies (Atanasijević, 2011, p. 111). This pessimism concerning human nature is further elaborated when she says that all humans are egoistic beings (Atanasijević, 2011, p. 29) and that mutual affection is not in human nature (Atanasijević, 2011, p. 31). Primordial evil is embedded deep in human nature and can never be completely removed (Atanasijević, 2011, p. 127).

Analogous to her understanding of an individual, she defines society as “monads turned to themselves” (Atanasijević, 2011, p. 30), closed units

that are selfishly organized. Precisely human self-centeredness is the reason why people unite—so that they can defend themselves more easily and achieve their selfish goals. “... A man, family, tribe, or state are not satisfied with simply preserving themselves, but a desire arises in them to improve themselves beyond the limits of their needs, or even to occupy themselves with trivialities, to the detriment or destruction of others.” (Atanasijević, 2011, p. 30). In line with her view of humans as essentially selfish and of human relations as defined primarily by conflict, Atanasijević sees the origin of the war in the egoistic desire of individuals and societies to progress and develop themselves unhindered, even beyond any need and to the disservice of others.

She defines war as “one of the most disgusting and reckless manifestations of selfishness, blindness and all kinds of negativity, which are ominously rooted in human nature” (Atanasijević, 2011, p. 111). As already stated, the most important ontological and ethical assumption of her philosophy is that all human beings have one identical, indestructible, and eternal essence. In every human being lives a spark of the eternal spirit, i.e. a soul, and thus the personhood of every human being must be respected (Atanasijević, 2011, pp. 48, 111, 123). This is why every educated person should be a pacifist, and pacifist action should be aimed at “healing the roots of the evil that exists in human relations” (Atanasijević, 2011, p. 41). In pacifism, Atanasijević saw the possibility of bettering human souls.

Despite her pessimistic view of human nature, Atanasijević does not believe that humans are necessarily doomed to eternal conflict. Peace is possible, but only in the constant effort of humans to better themselves and overcome their egoism. It is here that the irreplaceable role of philosophy shines through. “Humanity can be saved only by strengthening philosophical and scientific knowledge and nurturing true religious sentiments,” Atanasijević argues (2011, p. 41). She believes that there are two ways to achieve this (Atanasijević, 2011, pp. 41–42): In choosing a transcendental way, a person can distance themselves from earthly things, perceiving them as empty and insignificant. This will bring them indifference towards other people, with whom they will then have no reason to enter into conflict. Another way, more suitable for humans, is that by comprehending philosophical truths, people will accept the moral principle according to which every human being is inviolable. From this will follow a political doctrine that will enable each entity, both an individual and a group, to live freely and develop unhindered.

The task of philosophy is to, at least partly, *tame* the egoistic nature of man. Atanasijević emphasizes that it will never be possible to bring humanity to a state of absolute peace, “because human nature will (...) attempt

to resist the control of consciousness and compassion” (Atanasijević, 2011, pp. 42–43). The goal of philosophy would then be to establish at least *relative* peace, which would help avoid the recurrence of great conflicts and bloodshed (Atanasijević, 2011, p. 43). It is not possible to eliminate evil in a person, but its negative effects can be mitigated.

On Feminism

... In politics, women must not be meekly patient.
(Atanasijević, 2008, p. 43)

Feminism and the idea of equality take up a significant part of Ksenija Atanasijević’s social engagement. She believed that feminism has profound ethical and ontological foundations, that it is based on the belief that every human being is inviolable and has the right to fully and freely develop itself, thus all spiritual, mental, and social distinctions between men and women must be dismissed as prejudice. (Atanasijević, 2008, p. 22; 2011, p. 45). Men and women are equal by their nature, they have the same essence and the same virtues and weaknesses, so the only difference between them can be physiological (Atanasijević, 2008, pp. 29–30). This notion is partly based on Plato’s view of equality of the sexes in Book V of his *Republic*,⁶ of which Atanasijević gave a detailed account in her article *On Emancipation of Women in Plato* (See: Atanasijević, 2008, pp. 82–85; Loncarevic, 2015; Deretić, 2016; 2020).

Atanasijević believed that feminism will bring with itself a new morality that will improve society as a whole. Through the advancement of women, it will help build a better and nobler relationship between people, that will exclude all forms of oppression (Atanasijević, 2011, p. 45). Precisely this is the connection between feminism and pacifism presented by the author. At the core of feminism is the equality of all people, which necessarily entails refraining from hurting others. For Atanasijević, feminism is a profoundly idealistic and optimistic position. Like pacifism, feminism must start with the assumption that it is possible to “tame the self-absorbed human nature, and to establish among men the conditions for living in individual freedom, in sympathy, and peace” (Atanasijević, 2011, p. 46). Through their feminist aspirations, women should aspire to establish harmonious cooperation between the sexes.

In pursuit of these goals, it seems that the author gives a privileged epistemic position to women. She writes that there are many “elements of

6 For more on Plato’s feministic views in Book V, see: Kandić, A. “Emancipation or Instrumentalization: Some Remarks on Plato’s Feminism” in this volume.

the morality of compassion and love” in feminism (Atanasijević, 2011, p. 46), which she seems to understand as inherent in women. This privileged epistemic position is especially seen in the following paragraph:

As mothers, feminists will instill in the blood of their children the truth that people do not exist in the world to kill each other. Women, as teachers, spread the ideal of peace very successfully among the younger generations, nurturing a pacifist mind frame. Women understand better than men the wisdom and truth of the words that, he who lives by the sword will die by the sword. (Atanasijević, 2011, pp. 46–47)

Atanasijević believes that women are by nature more inclined to resolve conflicts peacefully. This is explained in more detail in the text *The Altruistic Agency of Women*, where Atanasijević states that women are “because of their naturally assigned and more diverged sensibility, more compassionate and altruistically inclined” (Atanasijević, 2011, p. 50) which makes them more suitable to deal with discord and hatred than men. She goes on to say that:

Because women have a softer soul and a spirit more radiant with warmth than men, they are less likely to succumb to the desires of their own egoism, and more likely to grasp the truth (...) that every living being should be approached with compassion and sympathy. Since women, by their own orientation as mothers and educators of the human race, are better suited than men to tame self-centeredness, they can be more closely and more immediately illuminated by the supreme ethical inevitability, according to which thy neighbors should be seen as creatures akin and similar to ourselves. (Atanasijević, 2011, p. 50)

Contradicting her claim that there are no differences in men’s and women’s natures, other than physiological ones, Atanasijević states that, although men and women have equal moral capacities, virtues in women have “smoother gradations and tones than in men, due to their physiological nature” (Atanasijević, 2008, p. 30; see also: Duhaček, 2020, pp. 89–90). Therefore, as more sensitive and refined, women will rather than men become aware of their abilities to overcome the selfish human nature and encourage and maintain those abilities as one active power (Atanasijević, 2008, p. 23). This can be interpreted as, although men and women have the same moral capacities,⁷ women will be more inclined to resolve conflicts peacefully and fight for equality, thus being the bearers of a new morality that will correct the injustices in the world.

7 For a further discussion on equality of man and women regarding virtues in Ancient Greek and Roman philosophy, see Plečaš, T. “Female Friendship in Ancient Greece and Rome in Times of Crisis” in this volume.

On Intrigue

For my exodus from the University, I have to thank the insidious intrigues, masked as the “autonomy” of the university.
(Atanasijević, 2011, p. 74)

When she faced a personal crisis, persecution from the university, and the attack on her personality and work, Atanasijević also turned to philosophy. She analysed the concepts and social phenomena that she believed contributed the most to this situation: plagiarism, anonymous writing, slander, and intrigue.

Except for her response to the Rectorate (Atanasijević, 2011, pp. 67–74), where she addresses the Rector of the University of Belgrade and her colleagues by name, in all other texts that deal with her persecution from the university she sharply notes that this problem is not only personal but also a sign of a bigger social and intellectual derogation that concerns everyone. Her critique is successful precisely because it does not use *ad hominem* arguments, but measured and well-thought-out arguments that bring to the surface the unfoundedness of the claims of her rivals (Deretić, 2020, p. 94). By allowing intrigue to be used as a means of dealing with dissenters or rather with competition in intellectual circles, we fall into a state in which “the possibility of feeling safe has been radically eliminated” (Atanasijević, 2011, p. 86).

For intrigues and slander to succeed, anonymity is necessary, because it prevents the victim from directly dealing with its opponents, calling them to account and defending themselves. Atanasijević criticizes anonymous writing as a cowardly act that stands the “lowest on the ethical ladder” (Atanasijević, 2011, p. 109). Although she is not critical of all kinds of anonymity—she even notes that it was once a symbol of the primacy of the collective over the individual (Atanasijević, 2011, p. 106)—she believes that anonymity is abused to escape responsibility for the spoken and written word.

Related to this is her critique of “the special methods of presenting scientific views” (Atanasijević, 2011, p. 119). These special methods consist of incorrect and unclear or completely omitted citations of specific authors and works to which the writer refers or whose views are criticized. This is done with the aim of not only confusing the reader but also avoiding responsibility for the things that are claimed. (Atanasijević, 2011, p. 119). Atanasijević sees this as disastrous for the progress of science. The written word can only have meaning if it is honest, that is when there is “actual mental content” behind it (Atanasijević, 2011, p. 115).

If there is not any truthfulness to words, then their origin is confusion, illusion, and lies, or ontologically speaking, they come from “pure nothing” (Atanasijević, 2011, p. 117). Any written word should only be an expression of the author’s authentic thought. Otherwise, it is delusion, demagoguery, and a means of deception. Atanasijević believed that every person should express their honest opinion bravely, publicly and sign it with their own name. Failing to do so will create an environment in which one can say whatever they want and suffer no consequences for the harm they cause.

On Dealing with a Crisis

One must be strong—this above all.
(Atanasijević, 1930, p. 74)

Three major crises I singled out from Ksenija Atanasijević’s life are: a) the intellectual and political crisis between the two world wars; b) the difficulty of being a socially and academically engaged woman in a deeply patriarchal society; c) false charges of plagiarism and a massive public attack on both her character and academic work. In all three she acted having in mind her notion of philosophy—that it should not be confined to searching for metaphysical truths but always a dialogue with everyday life, which reexamines human existence and makes everyday life better, more valuable, and humane. This is why she considered her duty as a philosopher to bravely and publicly take a stand and fight for what she believed was right. Her social engagement was grounded in her philosophy and her philosophy was aimed at creating a better and nobler world for all mankind.

In dealing with the intellectual and political crisis between the two world wars, she criticized the passiveness of intellectual and political elites. She believed that every educated man and woman should be pacifists, and pacifist action should be aimed at minimizing evil in human relations. In dealing with challenges a profoundly patriarchal society had put before her, Atanasijević advocated for feministic ideas. She believed that at the core of feminism stands the idea of the equality of all people, which necessarily entails refraining from hurting others. When faced with a personal crisis, the false accusations of plagiarism, and the attacks on her personality and work, Atanasijević analysed the concepts and social phenomena that she believed contributed the most to that situation, incisively noticing that problems of false charges, slander, and intrigue are not only her personal but concern the society as a whole. By allowing anyone to falsely accuse and anonymously slander others without suffering any

consequences, we create a social atmosphere where no one is safe. It seems Atanasijević believed that the tasks of fighting injustices in the world and bringing a new morality to improve the society as a whole fall on women, as they are more inclined than men to overcome their selfish human nature. If there is a note to be taken from the way Ksenija Atanasijević dealt with crises in her life, it is that we should approach every difficulty courageously and never remain silent when confronted with injustice.⁸

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Марија Петровић*

СУОЧАВАЊЕ СА КРИЗОМ: НАПОМЕНЕ КСЕНИЈЕ АТАНАСИЈЕВИЋ

Апстракт: Рад се фокусира на серију кратких текстова које је написала филозофкиња Ксенија Атанасијевић, прва жена која је докторирала на Београдском универзитету. Иако су намењени широј јавности и објављени углавном у дневним новинама, овим текстовима не недостаје филозофске и критичке вредности. Следећи своје разумевање улоге филозофа у друштву, Атанасијевић храбро износи своје ставове о негативним појавама у друштвеном,

* Марија Петровић, истраживач-сарадник, Институт за филозофију, Филозофски факултет, Универзитет у Београду, имејл: m00petrovic@gmail.com.

политичком и културном животу друштва између два рата. Смело критикује неодговорно понашање политичких и интелектуалних елита, њихову незаинтересованост и кукавичлук, за које сматра да директно „доприносе умножавању зла“. Филозофија не сме бити ограничена на академску заједницу, већ увек мора бити у корелацији са свакодневним животом. Поменути текстови ослањају се на њене главне онтолошке и етичке тезе – да сва људска бића имају исту суштину и да се мора поштовати личност сваког човека. Бавећи се кризама, како онима које погађају цело човечанство, тако и оним личним, Атанасијевић је водила филозофски дијалог са својом ером. Само храбрим суочавањем с кризом и њеном пажљивом анализом можемо се надати да ћемо је превладати.

Кључне речи: Ксенија Атанасијевић, феминизам, интрига, криза, рат

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Thematically, the volume incorporates responses of real women to a variety of crises within their socio-historical setting, but also the reception of female literary characters' crises in male philosophical thought. ... The strength of the volume lies in the fact that the study of women's responses to multiple crises articulated through the written word and philosophical thought has not been done before. For this reason, the collection is pioneering in its aims and results.

From the review by Professor Margarita Silantjeva

... The main project of the book [is] to show how these meticulously selected female philosophers and writers have faced various crises, how those crises affected their work, and if their reflections are relevant today ... The publication explores women's role in the history of philosophy and a broad variety of crises some of the most outstanding women of western philosophy faced.

From the review by Professor Željko Pavić

Due to its unique subject and the scientific contribution of all its articles, this edited volume will be of great significance for both the Serbian and the international public.

From the review by Professor Ljiljana Radenović

