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ZOFKA KVEDER (as Dimitrije Gvozdanović): The Grandson of Prince Marko

Author: Zofka Kveder Demetrović, under the pseudonym Dimitrije Gvozdanović
Title: The Grandson of Prince Marko
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Language: Yugoslav

About the author

Zofka Kveder, also **Zofka Kveder Demetrović** (1878, Ljubljana–1926, Zagreb), was a writer who holds a prominent place in the Slovenian and Yugoslav literary canon.[1] Her recognition has resulted in a prevailing perception of her life as a constant struggle, later awarded with pioneering achievements that paved her way into schoolbooks and public history.

1 Her life and work was researched by prominent Slovenian literary historians, most notably by Marja Boršnik (1906–1982), Erna Muser (1912–1991), and in the last two decades by Katja Mihurko.

Challenging the boundaries of what was deemed possible for a woman at the time, Kveder embodied the archetype of the "new woman" typical of the *fin-de-siècle* era: she boldly cut her hair short, wore pants, and traversed geographical boundaries through her travels and contacts.[2] Relying on her intellectual and artistic work, she became a symbol of what we today call women's empowerment, or, at least, financial independence. Residing at the time in urban or even metropolitan centers such as Ljubljana, Trieste, Zürich, Prague, and Zagreb, Kveder embraced an international lifestyle. She cultivated friendships with influential writers and political figures of her generation and emerged as an advocate for women's rights.

After the First World War, she became a proponent of the Yugoslav monarchy, with Yugoslavism being just as significant to her as royalism. Her political views, shaped by the complexities of her time, also reflected some attitudes common to her generation, including instances of antisemitism.[3] In the analysis of her overall work, it is crucial to consider all of these aspects, especially given that canonized authors tend to be remembered as one-dimensional heroes: the importance placed on canonization tends to outweigh the desire to fully comprehend the nuances and complexities of artists or historical figures.

Zofka Kveder had a difficult family background. Her upbringing was full of deprivation and violence, so she eagerly awaited emancipation and the chance to live independently. At nineteen, she first acquired a room of her own in rural Kočevje in Carniola, now in today's Slovenia, where she worked as an administrative technician. After her years in Kočevje, she returned to Ljubljana in 1897, where she found a full-time office job. In her spare time, she wrote stories, which, due to the conservative cultural and political environment, she had to publish under a male pseudonym. As this excerpt shows, she would again use a male pseudonym, Dimitrije Gvozdanović, for some of her writings in the interwar period.[4] This complexity challenges the notion of a linear narrative of emancipatory progress. She moved from her concealed identity as a young writer in Ljubljana to her empowered visibility in the first fourteen years of the twentieth century in Prague and Zagreb, only to find herself once again hidden in the final years of her life.

2 For the most comprehensive biography, see Katja Mihurko Poniž, *Drzno drugačna. Zofka Kveder in podobe ženskosti* (Ljubljana: Delta, 2003). For her identity formation as a new woman, see Katja Mihurko, "My Spirit is Reaching to You with Sympathy," in *Women, Nationalism and Social Networks in Habsburg Monarchy 1848–1918*, ed. Marta Verginella (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2023), 197–222.

3 Most notably in her novel *Hanka* (Zagreb: Hrvatski štamparski zavod, 1918), 147–51, but also in her journalistic work; see, for instance, Zofka Kveder, "Jugoslovenke i židovsko pitanje," *Jugoslavenska žena* 2, no. 3, March 1, 1918, 107–16. For further contextualization, see Natka Badurina, *Nezakonite kćeri Ilirije* (Zagreb: Centar za ženske studije, 2009), 173–95, or Mihurko Poniž, *Drzno drugačna*, 200.

4 Mihurko Poniž, *Drzno drugačna,* 166–67.

However, for Kveder, Ljubljana soon seemed too small and in 1899 she moved to Trieste, where she became close with the circle around the first Slovenian women's newspaper, *Slovenka* (Slovenian Woman, 1897–1902).[5] She wrote articles about topics that the Slovenian-language press had not previously addressed: abortion, prostitution, infanticide, sex education, and divorce. After a year of traveling, she settled in Prague in 1900, where she supported herself and her firstborn daughter Vladimira (1901–1920) solely with the money she earned herself from intellectual work. Both in her literature and in her life during this period, she was open-minded and progressive. After happy years in Prague, at the explicit request of her husband, Vladimir Jelovšek (1879–1934),[6] she moved to Zagreb with her family, where she worked as an editor for the newspaper *Agramer Tagblatt* and gave birth to two more daughters, all while continuously working. Her husband's manipulations and infidelity, the demands of motherhood, and endless work led her to a mental breakdown. During the First World War, she supported the three daughters herself and was exhausted from her work. However, at that time she managed to write her last work with a dominant female protagonist, *Hanka*, a strongly autobiographic epistolary novel.

After the war, her societal position in Zagreb underwent a dramatic shift. Her second husband, Juraj Demetrović (1885–1945), whom she married in 1914 (but with whom she had lived since 1912), became a Croatian politician of Yugoslav centralist views in the parliament in Belgrade. Both Kveder and her husband aligned themselves with the government and supported the Serbian royal Karađorđević family, a stance that was unpopular among intellectuals in both Zagreb and Ljubljana.[7] Consequently, she faced public ridicule,[8] and—as documented in the letters to her husband—their marriage became increasingly strained due to his absence and separate life in Belgrade.[9] From 1917 onward, she

5 Marta Verginella, ed., *Slovenka: Prvi ženski časopis (1897–1902)* (Ljubljana: Znanstvena založba Filozofske fakultete, 2017).

6 After completing his medical studies (1905) in Prague and further specialization in Prague, Vienna, and Zagreb, Vladimir Jelovšek worked as an ophthalmologist in Zagreb and Karlovac. As one of the ardent representatives of the younger generation in the Croatian modernist movement, he advocated for absolute freedom of artistic creation and high aesthetic standards. In Prague he published the collections of poems *Simfonije I* (Prague, 1898) and *Simfonije II* (Prague: E. Stívina, 1900).

7 Kveder's critical representation, among those of others, can be recognized in Miroslav Krleža's autobiographical article "Pijana novembarska noć 1918," in which he criticizes (not without gender-specific stereotypes) Yugoslav nationalism, including the women who took part in it. He describes them as "Yugoslav democratic women ... with the one and only ideal of the Karađorđević dynasty on their pasty pink lips." See Suzana Marjanić, *Glasovi* Davnih dana*: transgresije svjetova u Krležinim zapisima 1914–1921/22* (Zagreb: Naklada MD, 2005), 127.

8 See, for instance, her caricature in the humorous Croatian satirical newspaper *Koprive*, April 20, 1919, 4, where Kveder is represented as "Novinarska piljarica," a journalistic grocer who sells her ideas at the fruit market. The caption reads: "Prodajem članke o svim aktuelnim pitanjima na malo i veliko," that is, "Selling articles on all current questions, piecemeal or wholesale."

9 Mihurko Poniž, *Drzno drugačna,* 200.

served as the editor of the newspaper *Ženski svijet* (Women's World), which she founded and later renamed to *Jugoslavenska žena* (Yugoslav Woman) in 1918. The publication was both political and cultural, addressing Yugoslav issues and frequently featuring writings by her husband under the pseudonym Nikias. The predominant ideological position of the newspaper was Yugoslavism for women, with a special sensibility for border areas that after the First World War experienced Italian occupational tendencies (Rijeka, Sušak, Krk, Istria, Trieste). What started as a newspaper of liberal and socialist ideas soon transformed into a means of mobilizing women for the ideology of Yugoslavism.[10]

In 1920, her eldest daughter Vladimira, with whom she had a tumultuous relationship, died of the Spanish flu in Prague. This tragic loss was followed by her second divorce that she vehemently opposed, and from which she never fully recovered. During this period, she devoted herself entirely to the dramatic arts. As she stated on her response form to the Slovenian Biographic Lexicon in 1926: "I am conserving my strength solely for the theatre, aspiring to become for our Yugoslavia what Shakespeare was for the English."[11] The concept of "our Yugoslavia" took center stage in her writings signed under the pseudonym Dimitrije Gvozdanović. These texts are politically charged, aiming to serve as foundational theatrical pieces for the Yugoslav nation. Even in her final work, the collection of novellas titled *Po putevima života* (Along the Paths of Life, 1926)—signed again as Zofka Kveder Demetrović—she utilized 13 novellas depicting heartbreak, where all women are abandoned by their husbands and lovers. Through this very personal narrative, she aimed to illustrate how women from different parts of Yugoslavia, representing different nationalities, religions, and social classes, collectively endured suffering as one, as Yugoslavians.

Zofka Kveder was a highly political writer throughout her career, but it is particularly in the final years of her life that this aspect becomes impossible to ignore. Maybe this is the reason why many of her biographies tend to leave these years out or end with her divorce and heartbreak. She was, indeed, heartbroken, but her divorce was not solely a private matter. As her then-ex-husband Juraj Demetrović wrote to her: "Duty towards others, towards public work, was killing the life that we had together."[12] Embracing Kveder's public and private Yugoslavism also entails fully embracing the life and work of this remarkable writer, who was as much a political thinker as she was an artist.

10 Andrea Feldman, "Proričući gladnu godinu – žene i ideologija jugoslavenstva (1918-1939)," in *Žene u Hrvatskoj: Ženska i kulturna povijest*, ed. Andrea Feldman (Zagreb: Ženska infoteka, 2004), 240.

11 Narodna in univerzitetna knjižnica, NUK Ms 1113, M 1.

12 NUK Ms 1113, M 13, D, Korespondenca, Juraj Demetrović, March 27, 1926.

MOST IMPORTANT WORKS: *Misterij žene* (Prague, 1900); *Njeno življenje* (Ljubljana, 1914); *Hanka* (Zagreb, 1917); *Vladka, Mitka in Mirica* (Ljubljana, 1928); *Zbrana dela Zofke Kveder*, 5 vols. (Maribor and Ljubljana, 2005–2018).

Context

Zofka Kveder stopped writing fiction in the Slovenian language in 1915 and began using exclusively what we could call the "Yugoslav language," a mixture of Slovenian and Serbo-Croatian. She used this language to write six theatrical texts under the pseudonym Dimitrije Gvozdanović. *Arditi na otoku Krku* (Arditi on the Island of Krk, 1922) and *Unuk kraljevića Marka* (The Grandson of Prince Marko, 1922), the most complex works, were both published by the *Hrvatski štamparski zavod* (Croatian Printing Institute). In the same period, she also wrote the one-act play *Oluja* (Storm, 1923), which was published in *Jugoslavenska njiva*, edited by her husband Juraj Demetrović, and included in the repertoire of the National Theater in Zagreb but was never staged.[13] Additionally, she wrote *Sukob* (Conflict, published in *Jugoslovanska njiva* in 1922). Manuscripts of other plays, including *Prelazna generacija* (Transitional Generation, 1922), *Dječji dom u Crikvenici* (The Children's Home in Crikvenica, 1922), and *Mrtvi grad Karlobag* (The Dead City of Karlobag, 1923), have been preserved and are housed in the National and University Library in Ljubljana, but were never published.[14]

These extensive works, all dedicated to the theme of Yugoslavism and written with great fervor, can be considered her final ideological legacy. However, they are relatively under-researched in the Slovenian (and post-Yugoslav) context and largely unknown to the wider public compared to her other works.[15] None of Kveder's Yugoslav works have been translated into the Slovenian language, with the exception of one excerpt from *Arditi na otoku Krku* that was published in Kveder's reader *Odsevi* (Reflections, 1970), edited by Erna Muser.[16] This late legacy of Kveder challenges the prevailing public memory of her as a socialist,

13 Taras Kermauner, *Jugoslovanski nacionalizem*, vol. 1, *Sentimentalni heroizem* (Ljubljana: samozaložba GolKerKavč, 2002), 5.

14 NUK Ms 1113, M 3C-5C.

15 Aside from Katja Mihurko, who mentions the dramas and summarizes their Slovenian reception in volume 5 of Zofka Kveder's collected works—Zofka Kveder, *Zbrano delo*, vol. 5, *Dramatika / Članki / Feljtoni*, ed. Katja Mihurko Poniž (Ljubljana: ZRC SAZU, 2019)—only Taras Kermauner has addressed them in his self-published study *Sentimentalni heroizem*, cited above. Natka Badurina's study "*Od strepnje do autoritarnog subjekta: Zofka Kveder,*" in her *Nezakonite kćeri Ilirije*, 173–95, is the most comprehensive study devoted to Kveder's Yugoslav ideology. The same topic is also partly addressed in Andrea Feldman's study "Proričući gladnu godinu," in *Žene u Hrvatskoj*, 235–46, where the author analyzes the Yugoslav ideology of several Croatian intellectuals of the interwar period.

16 Zofka Kveder, *Odsevi: iz pripovednih in dramskih del*, ed. Erna Muser (Ljubljana: Mladinska knjiga, 1970).

feminist, and religiously non-conforming woman of the *fin-de-siècle*. With her final writings, Natka Badurina claims, Kveder sacrificed her feminism, socialism, and even her identity as a female author for new political convictions.[17]

Kveder published plays in the early 1900s and then again in the early 1920s, with a long interruption between. A comparison of her plays from these two periods illustrates the shift in her political stance, transitioning from social democracy to Yugoslav nationalism. Her first play, *Pravica do življenja* (The Right to Live, 1901) tackles critiques of capitalism and the hypocrisy of the bourgeois family. Over the subsequent years, she authored several other plays—with perhaps her most intricate being *Amerikanci* (The Americans, 1908), about economic emigration and seductive lies of "American dream"—yet none of them made it to the stage. While her first dramatic endeavors fit well into the *fin-de-siècle* narrative with topics such as family, marriage, love, and gender, her work also has a strong social note that can be attributed to her social-democratic worldview. She writes about repressive forms of tradition, poverty, workers who cannot sustain themselves or their families with their profession, women who are forced to marry men they don't love for financial reasons, parents who sacrifice themselves for their children due to poverty. In short, she writes about unfair labor conditions and the failures of the capitalist system that forces so many people into poverty. Her second stage of dramatic writing, produced after the First World War, represents a complete shift in her writing style: she is no longer a sympathetic observer of people but an allegoric describer of ideas and ideologies. Her characters no longer feel real or human, but instead embody specific narrative roles in Yugoslav propaganda. Because Kveder was a very autobiographic writer—according to Mihurko, every one of her literary works at least partly addresses her experiences[18]—it is safe to read her political plays as her political beliefs.

"Our Yugoslavia is not without its faults—but I firmly assert that life is more beautiful and better for us in our country than for any other nation in theirs,"[19] wrote Kveder in the epilogue to *Unuk kraljevića Marka*. The premise of this extensive, 300-page-long allegoric text is straightforward: Yugoslavia is magnificent, yet its inhabitants remain unaware of the beauty it holds. Therefore, Kveder invites the reader to embark on the journey of Marko and Mihajlo. Marko Marković is an officer (*oficir*) and Mihajlo is his sergeant. Marko represents the ideal Yugoslav, a pure hero: honest, self-sacrificing, and intelligent, while Mihajlo symbolizes the Yugoslav people; he is simple but good and faithful, one who trusts Marko completely. In some ways, they resemble Don Quixote and Sancho

17 Badurina, *Nezakonite kćeri Ilirije*, 184.

18 Katja Mihurko Poniž, *Zapisano z njenim peresom: Prelomi zgodnjih slovenskih književnic s paradigmo nacionalne literature* (Nova Gorica: Založba Univerze v Novi Gorici, 2014), 136.

19 Dimitrije Gvozdanović, *Unuk kraljevića Marka* (Zagreb: Hrvatski štamparski zavod, 1922), 319.

Panza, but without a trace of author's irony. Marko is forgiving; he believes in the future potential of Yugoslavia and remains content by its current state. Or as he explained to Mihajlo: "There is much that is tragicomic in our young state! No matter, it will pass like childhood illnesses."[20] However, in order to cure the illness, traitors must be eradicated once and for all. This marks the culmination of the play, the final (fifth) act, where—alongside Marko and Mihajlo—different traitors emerge (for instance: a communist, a Montenegrin rebel, a dissatisfied Slovene, a German, Horthy's envoy, a Viennese Christian socialist, an Italian fascist, etc.). Kveder depicts these characters as enemies of the nation, driven by their own selfish interests to dismantle Yugoslavia. As each traitor unveils their plot to undermine Yugoslavia and they collectively agree to collaborate despite their ideological differences, Marko emerges. In the manner of contemporary superheroes, he detonates explosives, vanquishing the room filled with enemies of the nation. Marko sacrifices his (and most probably also Mihajlo's) life for Yugoslavia and his final wish being for God to always bless Yugoslavia with heroes who will defend it against anyone who dares to harm it.

The ending of the play can be interpreted as both radical and utopian. Radical in the sense that any measures and sacrifices are permitted for the preservation of the common interest, the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Utopian in the sense that, given the number of "traitors" and the slim likelihood of a "grand finale" of redemption, it is hard to imagine that Yugoslavia could ever truly be safe from all those who wish it harm. However, the radicalism with the glimpse of utopianism can be understood as the peak of Kveder's Yugoslavism—in its artistic as well as in its political sense. One could also guess that she saw her own writing as a possibility for the Yugoslav nation's redemption. In 1926, not long before her death, she filled out the form for the Slovenian Biographic Lexicon. The edited and published form leaves out several of her statements,[21] including: "Genius of the Yugoslav nation! Grant me strength to fulfill the mission for which I hope I am called: to awaken faith and love in our Yugoslav nation for our homeland."[22] This wish is not very different from Marko's.

In the afterword to *Unuk kraljevića Marka*, Kveder elucidated that the author "did not merely write with ink, but also with blood,"[23] emphasizing how the text transcended the limitations of the dramatic form. She also acknowledged her awareness of "national propaganda in the second part"[24] and anticipated the

20 Ibid, 224.
21 Katja Mihurko Poniž, *Literarna ustvarjalka v očeh druge: Študije o recepciji, literarnih stikih in biografskem diskurzu* (Nova Gorica: Založba Univerze v Novi Gorici, 2017), 60.
22 NUK Ms 1113, M 1.
23 Gvozdanović, *Unuk kraljevića Marka*, 317.
24 Ibid, 319.

director's role in editing out numerous elements. "They will say: current issues are not art. That is not true," she wrote, further stating: "Let this book serve as a testament to our era, not just a play."[25] She stated on several occasions that the writer's work is not only to write for oneself but to address the public.[26] She was thinking beyond the Yugoslav public; in her correspondence we can find a letter from the Slovenian-American writer Louis Adamič/Adamic, explaining to her why *Arditi na otoku Krku* would be too complicated to translate into English: because the "Yugoslav language" and English are too dissimilar.[27] She never reached the global audience she wished for, but her politics had an impact. One of her correspondents from Serbia, Julka Božičković, for instance, wrote in a letter how Kveder convinced her not only to be a Serb, but also a Yugoslav.[28] For Kveder herself, being a Yugoslav was not only a political position, but also the only intimate possibility. As she wrote: "Slovenian women no longer want me, Croatian women do not fully recognize me as their own, nor do Serbian women. The truth is, sometimes it hurts, but it also gives me strength; I remain what I am: a Yugoslav woman."[29]

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25 Ibid.
26 See for instance Zofka Kveder, *Izbrano delo Zofke Kvedrove*, vol. 8, *Hanka*, eds. Marja Boršnik and Eleonora Kernc (Ljubljana: Ženska založba Belo-modra knjižnica, 1938), 7, or "Optožujem," *Jugoslovanska njiva*, no. 3 (1923), 113.
27 NUK Ms 1113, M 13, D, Korespondenca, Louis Adamič, February 9, 1922.
28 NUK Ms 1113, M 13, D, Korespondenca, Julka Božičković, November 1, 1922.
29 Kveder, "Jugoslovenke i židovsko pitanje," 112.

ZOFKA KVEDER DEMETROVIĆ AS DIMITRIJE GVOZDANOVIĆ
"Afterword for the reader" in *Unuk kraljevića Marka*

Perhaps it is good that these two or three blank pages remain, so that I can add a few words to my work. I know that the first part will move and captivate many, as truth often does. With an agitated heart and trembling hand, the author attempted to depict what he heard and what shook him to his core. Those were the great days of suffering and heroism, which we forget all too quickly. Even the heroes themselves who participated in these events are slowly forgetting the peaks of their lives, the times when they were most self-sacrificing, most unselfish, and strongest.

No one is granted the ability to spend their entire life at the highest peak of their own being. At the peaks, one either perishes or one must come down to earth, into normal life. Thus descended Garibaldi and Mazzini, who created Greater Italy; thus Napoleon, who had carried the glory of France on the wings of his army's eagles across all of Europe, fell; and thus Bismarck, whose shrewdness built and developed a strong Germany, died in the banality of everyday life. In a similar manner, the descendants of Marko have here, in our lands, appeased. They have been caught in the cycle of their everyday life, so much that even they themselves do not think much about what once was. But those days were not only the maximum of what they could give as individuals. Those days represented the maximum of what the entire Yugoslav nation could give in its heroism, sacrifice, endurance, and suffering. And that is why those days must not be forgotten! That is why it is necessary to honor them by preserving the memory of them through statues, books, as well as in the souls and hearts of younger generations.

It was this mission that was before the eyes of the author as he wrote the first part of this book. He did not write solely in dark tones, believe me! It appeared to him, often, that he was likewise covered in wounds, that he too suffered from terrible humiliation and immense bitterness, the bitterness that at the time made the hearts of the best of our nation tremble. And he hopes, therefore, that the readers' souls will be equally stirred, as had been his own soul; that a tear would occasionally glisten in the readers' eyes, that same teardrop of deep, heartfelt feeling that blurred the author's vision as he described

the greatness of Serbian mothers, the nobility of men young and old, who died for the land that had given them life.

Now comes the age of witty skepticism and criticism, of mockery and of scorn. But you should take my word that all of that is just empty thought gymnastics, a virtuosity of the mind that leaves the heart empty and which neither forms nor deepens character. Let us have the courage to possess a soul and a heart and to not be ashamed of our feelings! Let vain minds and shallow souls mock us freely, those who are numbed because it is considered fashionable and who are hyper-critical out of inner poverty.

I do not know what critics will say about this book, and their objections will not disrupt me much. And still, I do hope that some souls will be moved by this book. I do hope that some young man's heart will beat stronger, that his eyes will shine brighter, and that it will further deepen and strengthen the love that he feels for this hard-won state of ours and for this beautiful people, who have soaked its foundations with their blood and who hold their land dear, as the bird does its nest.

I know, moreover, that this youth will comprehend and understand the second part of my book. They will understand that even its bitterness against traitors and hypocrites stems from love, from love for our great and beautiful Yugoslavia. They will understand that this love is so great that it, almost against the author's own will, broke the narrow limitations which the dramatic form demands. There is a lot of national propaganda in the second part of my book, I know. If the second part is ever to be staged, the director's pen will have to do a lot to tighten the plot, as the author himself was not capable of doing that. He knows that in many places the fighter prevailed over the artist. He is not sorry and does not regret it! For we forget national sins all too quickly, and we move on to new agendas all too swiftly. Let this book therefore be a document of our times, rather than just a drama. And finally, if lengthy, kilometer-long dialogues are allowed in French marital dramas, why should a writer of a nationalist drama not be allowed to be more extensive?

They will say: current issues are not art! That is not true! The works of Homer and Dante, of Molière and Dostoevsky, as well as those of countless other renowned writers, are full of various allusions to contemporary relations and people, yet no one would dispute that they are artists.

…

Perhaps readers will be interested to hear the fact that it is not only the first part of the play that is historical, but this is the case also with at least one half of the second part; this is particularly the case with "Zagorske zablude"

(Misconceptions of Zagorje), although, of course, in reality not everything happened simultaneously in the same place. Someone will say that whips in literature is barbaric! And I respond: the Americans have lynching both in life and literature, yet they remain Americans! The English had, even under Victoria, whips in the army as a legally prescribed punishment. And during times of war and revolution, all nations resorted to even worse things than whippings.

Our Yugoslavia is not without its faults—but I firmly assert that life is more beautiful and better for us in our country than for any other nation in theirs.

The Author

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