

Intimacy, Censorship, and Gender (An Introduction)

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This thematic issue of *Primerjalna književnost* titled “Intimacy, Censorship, and Gender” originates from the international workshop “Censoring Intimacy in Women’s Writing and Reading in the Long Nineteenth Century” which was held in Ljubljana on August 23–24, 2022. The workshop explored the ways in which women, writing about intimate topics, faced censorship from religious authorities, state administration and self-appointed censors (literary mentors, friends, and guardians who attempted—sometimes through giving advice, but often with more aggressive interventions in the texts—to shape the poetics of women writers).

Initially focused only on women’s writing, the editors of this special issue have felt that there is need for broadening the perspective and context of occurrences of censorship vis-a-vis intimate topics in relation to authorship and censorship. Consequently, we have added new insights to the debate on the censorship of intimacy by including two articles examining the works of two male authors. Thus, we aim to point out that male authors are also subject to the censorship of intimacy when they transgress the boundaries of accepted and established concepts of intimacy.

All in all, the articles in this issue explore how censorship is linked to intimacy when looked upon within a transnational/transcultural context, as well as investigate how modes of censoring intimacy change when they travel from one space to another, from literary centers to literary peripheries or fringes. They also analyze how the concept of censorship is related to gender in creative processes: whether it hindered them or it was a productive force, a stimulus to creativity, whether it led to new literary genres, themes and other literary devices. Moreover, the articles reveal the way in which writers have responded to social and literary censorious expectations in articulating their gender in relation to intimacy, further exploring what the role of family, friends, mentors, publishers, editors, and critics is in the process of censoring intimacy. Last but not least, the articles focus on modes of linking censorship to the canonizing processes.

To start with, Katja Mihurko Poniž and Carmen Beatrice Duțu’s review article “Censorship—the Knot that Binds Intimacy and

Women’s Writing?” opens this thematic issue with a brief historical overview of the intricacies of the relationship between censorship, gender, and intimacy. The authors (who are also the editors of the volume) further claim that when dealing with women’s writing, censorship could be regarded as “the knot that binds intimacy and women writing,” which is merely a paraphrase of Sue Curry Jansen’s view on censorship, regarded as “the knot that binds knowledge and power.”

The volume continues with the first case study. “A Complicit Reading Strategy: Exposing Censored Themes of Intimacy in Swedish Alfhild Agrell’s *Räddad*” is a seminal text by Birgitta Lindh Estelle who boldly proposes an ethical reading by taking the specific socio-historic censorship situation of the Swedish female playwright Alfhild Agrell into account. Through multiple textual references, the author adopts a complicit reading strategy in order to expose silenced themes of intimacy in the gendered period-specific censorship situation of the 1880s in Sweden.

Zita Kārkla and Eva Eglāja-Kristsons take a militant stance in “*Her Story is Like a Weed: Censoring the Vulnerability in Women’s Writing.*” Focusing on the example of Latvian writer Anna Rūmane-Ķeniņa (1877–1950), the authors’ outspoken intention is to broaden the feminist scholarship on women writers by exploring the relationship between women’s writing, intimacy, vulnerability and censorship and rediscovering and canonizing women’s writing through the Latvian literary culture, in the early twentieth century.

In “Becoming a (Slovenian) Poet at the Turn of the Nineteenth Century: Male Censorship of Vida Jeraj’s Poetry” Alenka Jensterle Doležal approaches the theme of censorship from a performative viewpoint, discussing the case-study of the Slovenian woman writer Vida Jeraj (1875–1932). The article is an analysis of the gendered censorship discourse visible in the correspondence between her and the male authors in her first period of writing—with great impact on the poetic strategies of the young promising poet.

The same performative approach is proposed by Carmen Beatrice Duțu, Roxana Patraș and Antonio Patraș in the article “On Becoming ‘Princesse Bibesco’: The Intimacy of Modern Identity, Between the Self and the World.” The authors present reasons and contexts of the exclusion of the Romanian-French writer Martha Bibescu (1886–1973) from the Romanian national literary canon. The authors’ specific aim is to move away from the enduring narrative of censorship in Martha Bibescu’s case and to propose her as a candidate figure for a transnational literary canon forging a specific, modern, intimate *écriture*.

In line with the more recent “new censorship” theories, the problems of self-censorship are brought into discussion by Cecilia Anell who, in “Unspeakable Desire? Norm Breaking Strategies by Swedish Women Authors of the 1880s,” explores strategies that nineteenth-century Swedish women authors invented to handle censorship when writing about intimacy and sexuality. The author thus reveals the fact that the dichotomy of the virtuous and the sinful woman has functioned as a strongly self-censoring factor for women authors throughout history in their writing on intimacy, desire, and sexuality.

On the other side of the spectrum, Natalia Panas’ “Double Censored Freedom? Cultural Memory’s Censorship of Intimacy Writing in *Moj život* by Maga Magazinović” discusses the case of the Serbian woman writer Maga Magazinović (1882–1968), a free thinker and a feminist advocate. Moreover, the article underlines that this perspective was regulated by two censorship systems in cultural memory: that of moral/erotic nature in Kingdom of Yugoslavia and ideological/political one in Socialist Yugoslavia.

Elena Lindholm’s article “The Censorship of a Closeted Spain: The Case of Elena Fortún (1886–1952)” focuses on how self-censorship and state censorship have shaped the literary legacy of the Spanish author of children’s books, Elena Fortún. The homosexual *closet* is presented as a key concept for understanding the impact of censorship on the work of a lesbian writer such as Fortún who has contributed to various narratives of Spanish femininity over the course of almost a century.

Irena Selišnik’s article “Self-censorship, Family Interpretation and the Influence of Legitimate Narrative on Autobiographies of Women” presents a comparative analysis of autobiographies of three Slovenian women writers and feminists: Elvira Dolinar, Minka Govekar and Marica Bartol. Selišnik explores their interpretation of life story together with the thematization of their narrative as well as the narrative style. Thus, Selišnik reveals how the authors self-censored themselves, sometimes voicing and sometimes keeping silent about important life decisions.

The issue of homoeroticism and censorship is addressed in Andrej Zavrl’s article “Who are the Addressees of *Shakespeare’s Sonnets* (in Slovenian)?” which discusses the translation of Shakespeare’s sonnets. The author contends that in the case of two recent translations into Slovenian, one cannot speak of censorship in the classical sense of hiding or deleting undesirable content. Rather, in these translations of the sonnets, among other things, a seemingly opposite effect may be traced, as the lyric subject addresses a man in many more sonnets than in the

original, which is the opposite of what one would expect in the case of censorship. Conditionally, one could perhaps speak of a ‘censorship’ of the gendered or fluid nature of the source texts.

The relation between male authorship, intimacy and censorship is explored by Marijan Dovič in “Burning *Erotika* and Ivan Cankar’s Revolution in Slovenian Poetry.” The author discusses the reception of Ivan Cankar’s poetry collection *Erotika* (1899), focusing on the reasons for the infamous purchase and burning of the collection ordered by the Bishop of Ljubljana, Anton Bonaventura Jeglič. Dovič points out that around the turn of the century in the Habsburg Monarchy, books were no longer subject to state censorship, however, this particular book was nevertheless subject to a special kind of informal censorship that actually benefited the author by putting him in the spotlight—as a harbinger of the erotic revolution in Slovenian poetry.

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