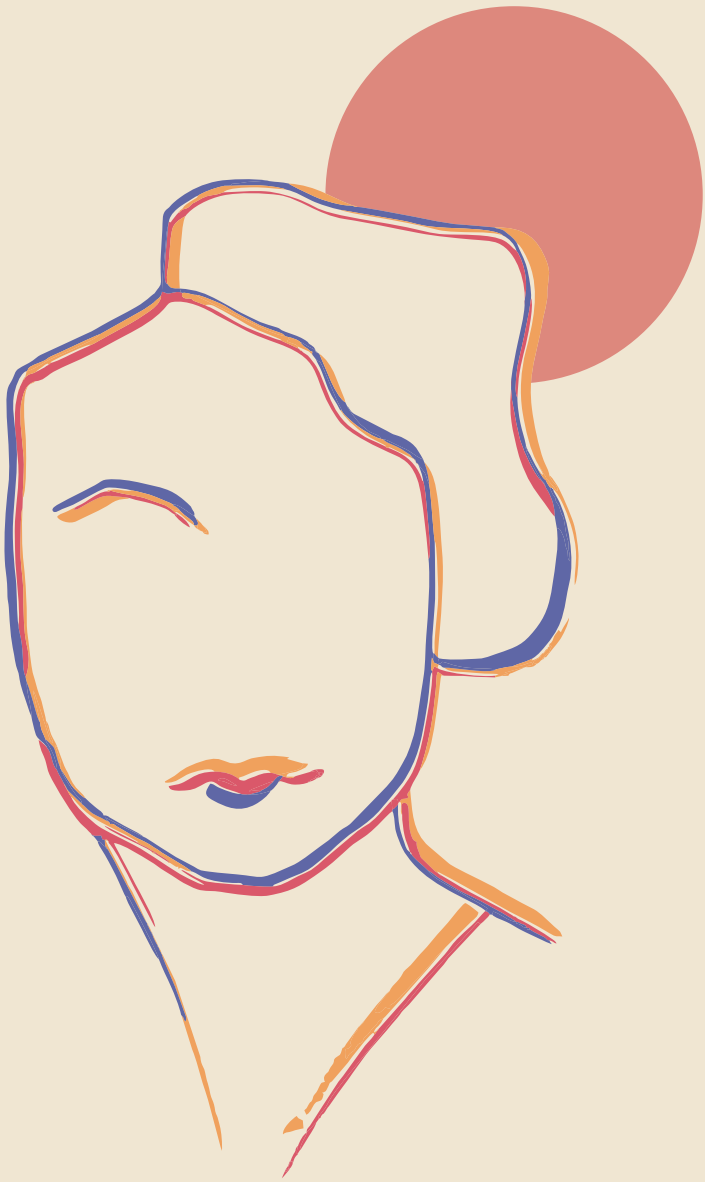
KSENIJA ATANASIJEVIĆ

A TAPESTRY OF THOUGHT – PHILOSOPHY, ART, LITERATURE, AND FEMINISM



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УНИВЕРЗИТЕТ У БЕОГРАДУ
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Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade | 2025

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A Tapestry of Thought — Philosophy, Art, Literature and Feminism

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Belgrade • 2025

The editors would like to express their sincerest gratitude to PS Fashion for their support in partially covering the cost of printing. Their generosity helped make the publication of this volume possible.

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DOI 10.56461/ZR_2025.KA-ToT

KSENIJA ATANASIJEVIĆ: A TAPESTRY OF THOUGHT — PHILOSOPHY, ART, LITERATURE AND FEMINISM

INTRODUCTION

While a significant number of women in Serbia today hold doctoral degrees across the academic spectrum, just a little over a century ago, such an accomplishment was almost impossible to achieve. It was the philosopher Ksenija Atanasijević who emerged as the inaugural woman to obtain a doctorate from the University of Belgrade in 1922, defending a thesis entitled *Bruno's Doctrine of the Minimum*. A mere two years later, she followed up this academic achievement with another indelible mark: she became the first female university professor in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes when she was appointed Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Philosophy.

Recalling these achievements, this collected volume serves a dual purpose. First, it aims to illuminate Atanasijević's long-neglected theoretical contributions to the interpretation of ancient philosophy. Second, it provides an overview of her extraordinary body of work by delving into intricate interdisciplinary inquiries that reflect her profound contributions to literature, art and feminism. Correspondingly, the collection of essays is divided into two distinct thematic sections: "Ksenija Atanasijević – Themes from Ancient Philosophy" and "Ksenija Atanasijević – Literature, Art and Feminism in Focus."

The first section opens with a chapter from Irina Deretić, with the question "What is philosophy for Ksenija Atanasijević?" Deretić thoroughly examines Atanasijević's unique approach to philosophy, tracing her intellectual progress from traditional metaphysical views to a more ethical and humanist framework. Deretić's analysis offers a comprehensive

survey of Atanasijević's understanding of philosophy, her approach and engagement with philosophical problems, carefully noting Atanasijević's methodological shifts. By illuminating Atanasijević's philosophical journey, the chapter provides a better understanding of her role in the history of Serbian philosophical thought. Deretić thus sets the stage in the volume for a chronological exploration of Atanasijević's perspectives on Pythagoreans, Empedocles, Epicurus and the Stoics. In "Pythagorean Thought in the Modern World: Exploring Atanasijević's Perspective on Its Relevance," Aleksandar Kandić reflects on the influence of Pythagorean philosophy on authors from Antiquity to the modern era, providing novel and independent evidence in support of Atanasijević's views of Pythagorean teaching practices and their relevance for modern scientific theories. The enduring relevance of Ksenija Atanasijević's interpretation of Presocratic thinkers is also clearly demonstrated in Sandra Šćepanović's essay, "Ksenija Atanasijević on Empedocles." Šćepanović highlights Atanasijević's original insights, particularly in understanding Empedocles' concepts of Love and Strife, as well as the interplay between this Presocratic's physics, ethics and theology. The author aligns Atanasijević's interpretations with modern scholarship, underscoring her innovative approach to Empedocles' eclecticism and the complex union of his philosophical and religious ideas. This analysis not only validates Atanasijević's interpretations but also affirms her lasting impact in the study of early Greek philosophy. In "Ksenija Atanasijević on Aristotle's Concept of Friendship," Tamara Plećaš and Marija Petrović examine Atanasijević's analysis of Aristotle's understanding of friendship. They highlight Atanasijević's nuanced approach to Aristotle's views, pointing out that she deliberately refrains from explicitly criticizing his assumptions about gender inequalities. Nevertheless, Plećaš and Petrović underline that Atanasijević's intention was to emphasize the universal importance and transformative potential of friendship. Following, in "Atanasijević on the Divisibility of the Atom in Epicurus and the Early Atomists," Pavle Stojanović assesses Atanasijević's claim that Epicurus' theory of 'the minimum' originated from earlier atomists, Leucippus and Democritus – a notion that met with controversy and harsh criticism from her mentor, Branislav Petronijević. Stojanović contends that Petronijević's objections fail to refute Atanasijević's thesis, while nevertheless highlighting certain weaknesses in her formulation and defense. Petar Stevanović, then, provides a fresh perspective on Atanasijević's views regarding Seneca's consistency between his philosophical theory and political activity, while shedding light on the place of Seneca's thought within the Stoic school of philosophy. Stevanović's "Ksenija Atanasijević on Seneca's Consistency" underscores Seneca's excellent knowledge of human psychology, both illuminating Atanasijević's reading and enriching our understanding of Stoic

teachings, not only in ancient Greece and Rome but also in the modern era, when Stoic philosophy experienced a revitalization.

The contributions from the second part of the thematic compilation take us beyond Atanasijević's philosophical lens, examining her contributions and impact on the fields of literature (Nemanja Radulović, Jovana Ivetić and Tamara Babić), art (Stefan Žarić, Miloš Ćipranić), and feminism (Zorica Mršević). Again, the contributions unfold in chronological order: the chapters open with explorations of Atanasijević's writings on the Middle Ages and progressively advance towards her insights on more contemporary themes. In the first chapter of the second part of the book, "Through Theses on Medieval Literature: Thinking with Confessional Voices," Jovana Ivetić explores Ksenija Atanasijević's perspective on identification in medieval and confessional literature. Drawing on the theoretical foundations of Toril Moi, Rita Felski, and Amanda Anderson, Ivetić illustrates how Atanasijević's feminist criticism deconstructs stereotypical narratives about the Middle Ages. Ivetić asserts that, through her analysis of medieval literature, Atanasijević provides valuable insights into the role of identification in understanding literary characters and challenges prevailing notions about medieval texts. In "Ksenija Atanasijević and Rabindranath Tagore," Nemanja Radulović explores Tagore's reception in Europe in the interwar period, subsequently shifting focus towards the local landscape and the intellectual contributions of Ksenija Atanasijević. Radulović deftly navigates through Atanasijević's nuanced critique of Tagore's ideologies, including both affirming and dissenting perspectives. Furthermore, Radulović explores the intricacies of Atanasijević's discernment of feminist undertones within Tagore's philosophy and the broader realm of Indian thought. In "Ksenija Atanasijević as Interpreter of Njegoš" Tamara Babić illuminates Petar Petrović Njegoš's unique standing among fellow philosophers and poets in Ksenija's studies. Babić makes a compelling case to establish Atanasijević as a valuable source for future interpretations of this remarkable poet. Her exploration of the topic moves in chronological order within the historical context of academic studies of Njegoš, offering insights into her significant intellectual relationships with Branislav Petronijević and Anica Savić Rebac. The chapter by Stefan Žarić, "Visualization of Ksenija Atanasijević in Aleksandra Lalić's Fashion Design," has a two-fold purpose. First, it examines how Ksenija Atanasijević's personality and philosophical ideas influenced Aleksandra Lalić's fashion designs, unveiling interesting connections between Atanasijević's philosophy and the realm of fashion. Second, the paper advocates for the exploration of fashion as a potential academic discipline within a national philosophy, paving the way for future interdisciplinary studies. Žarić's text

takes readers on a journey on the interweaving paths of fashion and philosophy, emphasizing the significance of understanding the former as a notable aspect of cultural expression and its potential role in shaping the latter. Miloš Ćipranić's "A Portrait of Ortega y Gasset" delves into Ksenija Atanasijević's unique approach to creating verbal portraits, focusing on her insightful portrayal of José Ortega y Gasset. Ćipranić highlights Atanasijević's skill in transcending traditional forms of portraiture, offering a rich multidimensional perspective that integrates Ortega y Gasset's philosophical ideologies with his essence. The essay underscores the depth and versatility of Atanasijević's literary mastery, demonstrating her ability to vividly capture and analyze the intellectual spirit of her subjects. In the final chapter of this volume, entitled "Women as the Focus of Ksenija Atanasijević," Zorica Mršević examines the depiction of female characters in Atanasijević's work, highlighting their significance and tragic dimensions. By examining Atanasijević's viewpoint that women, with their inherent complexity, play significant roles in myths and across literature, Mršević demonstrates that Ksenija regarded women as glorious expressions of thought and emotions, affirming their subjectivity and dignity.

This volume seeks to highlight the diverse contributions of Ksenija Atanasijević, spanning the realms of ancient philosophy, art, literature and feminism. Through a wide-ranging collection of essays, the book illustrates Atanasijević's profound impact in each field, providing readers with an illuminating exploration of one aspect after another of this thinker's intellectual legacy. Still, this modest volume catches but a glimpse of her extensive work, fully acknowledging that Atanasijević's enduring legacy will undoubtedly continue to inspire profound philosophical thought.

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Ksenija Atanasijević –
Themes from Ancient Philosophy

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DOI 10.56461/ZR_2025.KA-ToT.13D

WHAT IS PHILOSOPHY FOR KSENIJA ATANASIJEVIĆ?

Abstract: This chapter provides a general discussion of Ksenija Atanasijević, widely recognized as a unique 20th-century Serbian philosopher. Her extensive knowledge of various philosophical fields, including ancient Greek philosophy, philosophies of the East, as well as Slavic and Serbian practical wisdom, combined with her critical, systematic, and resourceful mind, made her prominent in Serbian philosophy and culture. Her philosophical development occurred after the emancipation from the metaphysical thought of Branislav Petronijević, leading her to focus on more relevant questions grounded in the new tendencies of Slavic philosophy and Serbian culture. The chapter explores the relationship between the two different philosophical conceptions in her works before World War II. Despite their differences, I assume that both concepts of philosophy have something in common. This text particularly highlights Atanasijević's philosophical fragments and how, after a significant "turn," she articulated her own philosophical position based on ethics. After an overview of the fundamental claims and arguments of her ethical stance, the chapter provides a critical discussion of them.

Key Words: Ksenija Atanasijević, philosophy, intellectualism/rationalism, ethics, evil, consolation.

I

Ksenija Atanasijević (1894–1981) was a pioneer in various fields. She was the first woman to earn a doctorate from the University of Belgrade, the first female lecturer at the university, and the first woman philosopher in Serbian culture. Apart from her erudition—including her excellent knowledge of almost all periods of the history of philosophy, particularly ancient Greece, Philosophy of East and West, as well as Serbian contri-

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butions to philosophy and culture—Ksenija Atanasijević was a person endowed with boundless curiosity, as well as critical and systematic thought. Despite her remarkable achievements, she faced unjust treatment from her male colleagues, who expelled her from the university due to their envy and her critical spirit. Although Atanasijević rarely spoke about her sufferings, when she did, she approached the subject in a detached and dignified manner.[1] The injustices she encountered illustrate how she paved the way for future female scholars and academics. The life of Ksenija Atanasijević demonstrate that, regardless of adverse circumstances, envy, disputes, and false accusations — sometimes even because of them — one can work productively and eventually gain recognition and respect. Moreover, Ksenija Atanasijević never stopped working on a variety of philosophical issues.

Throughout her long and productive life, she produced a large number of essays and books that presented her ideas to academic institutions in Yugoslavia and across Europe, notably in France. Ksenija Atanasijević became one of Serbia's most prolific authors,[2] publishing books on the history of philosophy in general, and ancient Greek philosophy in particular,[3] *Philosophical Fragments I–II,*[4] as well as countless pieces on morality, religion, and aesthetics. She wrote a vast number of influential literary, cultural, and philosophical critiques, as well as feminist texts.[5] The two volumes of her original work, *Philosophical Fragments*, will be the focus of this paper.

In this chapter, I will endeavor to explain the 'turn' in the philosophical activity of Ksenija Atanasijević. The 'turn' in her intellectual development is the result of her emancipation from Branislav Petronijević's metaphysics. I will not delve into detail about the psychological background of this transition; instead, I aim to investigate the relationship between the two concepts of philosophy in Ksenija Atanasijević's overall work: i) the former is to be characterized as intellectual, grounded in precise and stringent conceptual thinking, while ii) the latter is articulated in her philosophical meditations, with a focus on ethics. First, I will clarify how she understood philosophy in the early stages of her intellectual development, drawing on her critical review of the book *New Humanism*, in which she explicitly states what she considers to be philosophy. Then, I will assess

1 Ilija Marić wrote the best study on Ksenija Atanasijević's expulsion from the University. See Marić, 2014, pp. 39–87.

2 See Aranitović 2006, pp. 325–407.

3 Atanasijević, 1927, 2006; See also Deretić, 2019, pp. 235–237.

4 Atanasijević, 1929, 1930.

5 See my study Deretić, 2016, pp. 93–109 for more on Ksenija Atanasijević's feminist views. Plato was the first author in history, who includes women in the ruling class. Recently, Aleksandar Kandić discussed Plato's views on feminism. See Kandić, 2021., pp. 9–19.

the main points of her brief paper on teaching philosophy at Belgrade University, which, in my opinion, subtly, though partially, introduces her second concept of philosophy. Her second response to the question of what philosophy is will be elaborated in a 1928 article that assesses new philosophical orientations in Serbian philosophy. The fragments by Ksenija Atanasijević contain philosophical and emotional thoughts on God, immortality, evil, forgiveness, solace, and other subjects. These reflections could be viewed as an example of her second philosophical orientation, which I will focus upon here. I will eventually explore the connections between these two concepts of philosophy.

II

Before 1928, Ksenija Atanasijević argued that philosophy should provide a strict conceptual expression that is reasonable, credible and consistent. This commitment is visible in her works on the history of philosophy, as well as in her scathing critiques of philosophical literature. One such example is her brief and biting critique of the book *New Humanism* by Vladimir Vujić and Prvoš Slankamenac, which showcases a rigorous and well-developed approach to philosophy.

The title of the review, "Degradation of Philosophy,"[6] immediately reveals her assessment of *New Humanism*. The real objective of this review is to defend the philosophical orientation at Belgrade University, as well as its prominent, internationally recognized philosopher, Branislav Petronijević. Although she did not mention him by name, it was evident to whom she was referring. The book's authors criticized the rational or "intellectual" approach of the academics at Belgrade University. However, as noted by Atanasijević, the authors did not even comprehend basic philosophical concepts and arguments. Their interpretation of Bergson and James is neither consistent nor compelling, and their arguments are "sloppy" and "in conflict with logic"[7] (Atanasijević, 2006, pp. 193–194).

Atanasijević insists that philosophical endeavors should be "precise" and "scientific." A work is considered philosophical if it meets all three of

6 Atanasijević, 2006, pp. 193–195

7 Regarding Ksenija's critique of the book *New Humanism*, Ilija Mari explained why, even before the "turn," she could have acknowledged some of her opponents' points. She did not respond to the main arguments stated by Vujović and Slankamenac. They criticized the Belgrade philosophical school on two grounds: (i) its detachment from reality, and (ii) its philosophical anachronism. Ksenija did not respond to these arguments, which Marić interprets as her belief in their correctness. See Marić 2006, p. 421.

the following criteria: (i) conceptual clarity, (ii) methodological awareness, and (iii) coherent presentation. Only well-substantiated, credible claims based on clearly defined concepts are considered philosophical. According to Atanasijević, non-conceptual, inconsistent, and incoherent thinking that deals with philosophical themes is erroneous, although it may create the impression of being philosophical.

The most significant works of Ksenija Atanasijević from the first phase include her doctoral dissertation, "Bruno's Doctrine on Minima" (*Brunovo učenje o najmanjem*),[8] and her study "Epicurus' Atomism" (*L'atomisme d'Épicure*).[9] In the 1920s, she authored many studies on ancient Greek philosophy that were well-founded and of excellent quality. Her approach to Greek Philosophy was both interpretative and critical. She was aware of historical distance, the nature of the philosophical problems she explored, and how this subject was relevant for our time. Her study of Epicurus in French is an excellent example of how to engage with past philosophy. Atanasijević begins by investigating every relevant interpretive hypothesis while critically examining Epicurus' atomism. She highlights both its strengths and weaknesses. Her interpretation of ancient Greek Philosophy is comprehensive, consistent and plausible. It demonstrates what she considers philosophy: conceptual clarity, methodological awareness, and coherent reasoning.

The "turn" in the philosophy of Ksenija Atanasijević did not come all at once, but it appears to have been anticipated by her study of both "official" university philosophy and non–academic philosophical works that provide novel ideas. This is demonstrated by her favorable reviews of Vladimir Dvorniković (Atanasijević, 2006, pp. 219–222) and Miloš N. Đurić's (Atanasijević, 2006, p. 235) works on the unique role that Slavs will play in culture and philosophy. In 1928, the year marking her philosophical transformation, Ksenija Atanasijević wrote "Teaching Philosophy at our University."[10] In this paper, she offers her view on how philosophy should be taught at the university level. Ksenija agrees with the "official" concept of philosophy, which investigates what can be known and the boundaries of human knowledge. She contends that universities should foster independent thinking and a critical spirit in students. Logic, she believes, should be prioritized "as a discipline of thinking"[11] alongside methodology. Nevertheless, she highlights the importance of studying new philosophical perspectives rather than engaging with the "dialectical games prevalent in

8 Atanasijević, 1922, 1923.

9 Atanasijević, 1927.

10 See Atanasijević, 2006, pp. 181–183.

11 *Ibid.*, p. 182.

the rationalism"[12] of the "official philosophy" taught at the University of Belgrade during that time. Additionally, she criticized Belgrade University for having too few ethics courses, which she believes should be increased. Her philosophical writings, published soon thereafter as *Philosophical Fragments I* and *II*, will prioritize ethical questions.

III

In 1928, Atanasijević published "Our New Philosophical Orientation," an article that reflects the "turn" in her philosophical approach. According to it, Serbs developed a rationally-based metaphysics, a theory of knowledge and a history of philosophy under the influence of German, French and English philosophies. She contrasts Western systematic philosophy with Slavic and Eastern thought. Formalism and "conceptual games of contemporary German trends,"[13] she believes, have constrained Western thinking, whereas Slavic and Eastern thought often lacks conceptual articulation.

Atanasijević acknowledges the value rational Western achievements in philosophy; however, she argues that they did not provide definitive answers to all eternal questions and that "official" university philosophers have not adequately examined them. The writings of Russian philosophers and Eastern thinkers, on the other hand, are mostly unknown to Serbian philosophers, even though they are "closer to our [Slavic] soul."[14] Furthermore, she appears to believe that symbolic and elliptical formulations include cognitive content worthy of philosophical analysis.

One may object to her brief assessment of German philosophy noting, for example, Edmund Husserl is a German philosopher who created a revolutionary philosophical approach that was prominent and influential in European philosophy. Furthermore, the writings of Russian religious philosophers such as Vladimir Solovyev and Lev Shestov are not conceptually unarticulated. Nonetheless, Ksenija Atanasijević raised an important question for the Yugoslav or Serbian academic community: to what extent can derivative and responsive philosophy effectively address the ethical, cultural, and social concerns of the time?

After Branislav Petronijević retired from his position at the university, academic philosophy in Belgrade, according to Atanasijević, grew detached from its contemporary context and even from German philosophy of the time. Atanasijević argues that "official" Belgrade philosophy lacked the vigor and inventiveness needed to address developmental challenges

12 *Ibid.*, p. 183.

13 *Ibid.* p. 234.

14 Brackets in the original.

within its paradigm, no less than those posed by other traditions, philosophical ideas, or public life in its environment. Although her contribution is more critical than constructive, Atanasijević believed that Yugoslav (and Serbian) philosophy should be dynamic, capable of unlocking a person's creative potential while still being based on tradition. Such a philosophy could address more pressing humanist issues like the questions of the place of the human being in the universe, the human being's relation to God and within society, the questions of good, evil, and consolation.

IV

The two-volume *Philosophical Fragments* were the first texts, Atanasijević wrote after her "turn". At first glance, it comes across as contemplative prose, conveying fragmented[15] thoughts, seemingly unrelated to one another. However, I take a different approach: by analyzing these fragments, one can reconstruct Atanasijević's unique ethical standpoint. Hence, these two volumes of fragments are not only internally consistent but also represent her most original works. These reflective meditations are interesting and thought-provoking. They were created in the middle of the crisis regarding her status at the University, and offer a fresh perspective on philosophical research. However, they are not simply a lamentation over her misfortune; rather, they are motivated by a desire to overcome the limitations of an unproductive academic environment and to explore new philosophical topics and orientations.

Ksenija Atanasijević frequently emphasized that human existence is intrinsically linked to an awareness of mortality. She noted that for some people, death is a relief from life's difficulties. If this were the case, many of us might not fear death as much. The process of dying is very difficult and can be horrifying, and it stimulates our fear of death. Atanasijević vividly depicts the dying individual, highlighting the discomfort, cramping, loss of strength, and breathing difficulties that are normal during the dying process (Atanasijević, 1929, p. 31).

In the metaphysical fragments (Volume I), she does not delve into metaphysical questions directly, but rather discusses how humans relate to them. Atanasijević refrains from providing definitive answers to profound metaphysical questions such as the existence of God, the immortality of the human soul, and the reality of eternity. Logical proof of God's existence

15 In the Preface to *Philosophical Fragments*, Atanasijević writes that she chose the literary form of fragments because it is more appropriate for Yugoslavia's new philosophical orientations. She claims to be inspired by Božidar Knežević, whom she regarded as the most original Serbian philosopher (Atanasijević, 1929, p. 5).

may or may not be persuasive, but it would not satisfy our complete self. Limited human existence may make our lives appear meaningless, but possessing an immortal soul and proving the existence of God, according to Atanasijević, would not make our lives less meaningless. Therefore, she believes that our strongest proof of the existence of God is our innate desire to "cry out" to the Almighty.[16]Atanasijević thinks that philosophy has the purpose is to provide solace to human beings.[17] Having faith in God and in the immortality of one's soul should bring about feelings of calm, tranquility and serenity, or, as she so eloquently puts it, "it is consoling to believe that there is infinity for us beyond his current existence" (Atanasijević, 1929, p. 17). These beliefs are not only beneficial to our human condition but also crucial for our self-awareness and our acceptance of injustice in the world. To illustrate her point, Ksenija Atanasijević poses a series of rhetorical questions: "Is it reasonable to question the existence of God when we are confronted with the constant struggle against corruption and injustice? Do we simply accept that these problems will persist indefinitely? What other options do we have" (Atanasijević, 1929, p. 14)?

The concept of immortality of the soul is tied to the hypothesis that all things in the universe possess life. The assumption suggests that that life is constantly in motion, changing its form without ever ceasing. This theory is supported by the idea that the basis of the universe is spiritual, which means that life has neither a finite beginning nor end. According to Atanasijević (1929, p. 33), the spirit is indestructible and eternal. Without something non-material, the universe would have disintegrated into its material components, resulting in its demise.

The next question, which links metaphysics and ethics, is about fate and its role in our lives. Atanasijević's view on the relationship between destiny and free will[18] is not entirely Christian. Instead, it is similar to how the Stoics viewed it. She frequently mentions that "fate determines what will happen," and that fate is often against what we want or who we wish to be. She even equates fate with the divine, questioning its authority over God.[19] Along with fate, incidents also play a role in our lives, but only in minor, everyday issues.

Atanasijević believed that while fatalism may be theoretically accurate, we act as free-willed agent in our lives. This kind of behavior is pos-

16 Cf. Atanasijević 1929, p. 14.

17 In her interpretation of Ksenija Atanasijević, Marija Petrović argues that the role of philosophy is to partially subdue the egoistic nature of humanity. Cf. Petrović (2021).

18 For more on Ksenija Atanasijević's thoughts on fate and free will, see Atanasijević, 1928, pp. 83–89.

19 Atanasijević, 1929, p. 83.

sible because we are unlimited masters in our internal world; we create our psychic life. However, I have two objections to this account: first, our internal world is to some degree dependent on external affairs, which means that sometimes no shelter can help. Second, if we are "instruments of fate" and our souls are possibly also "instruments of fate" (Atanasijević, 1929, p. 85), then how can we be independent in making our own decisions? Despite these objections, Atanasijević accurately highlights the importance of creating our own inner life and sheds light on how we can and must do so.

V

Ksenija Atanasijević held a pessimistic worldview and believed that there were numerous injustices and evils present in the world. She expounded this viewpoint in her works, particularly in *Philosophical Fragments* and many of her papers, where she expressed her religious and political thoughts.[20]Atanasijević discussed various forms of evil that existed during her time and acknowledged that the "metaphysical roots of evil are deeply ingrained," making it challenging to fully comprehend and then combat it (Atanasijević, 1930, p. 97).

Evil has been present throughout human history and manifests in different ways. Atanasijević identified some sources of evil, including the desire for revenge, selfishness, and the urge for domination. Her observations on evil in the modern world are still relevant today. She noted that material possessions, success, and well-being do not guarantee a moral and just society. Instead, our civilization continues to suffer from moral afflictions, mental disorders, and social offenses (Atanasijević, 2011, pp. 97–98).

Atanasijević seems to suggest that evil is much more prevalent in our world than good (Atanasijević, 1930), and that it appears in many subtle ways. It can manifest through the collective spirit, or in deliberate actions, such as when supposed friends act hypocritically, or when people refuse to help the poor. Choices between two evils contain evil. It can also befall people without them being the cause of it. One unique characteristics of evil is its unpredictability, making it difficult to determine its cause. The perpetrator of evil is not always the same as the cause of it, as in the case of Giordano Bruno, who was condemned by those who did not actually carry out the act of immolation. Nevertheless, she underscores that "without the rare scattered sparks of good, humanity would suffocate in dark-

20 Dragana Dimitrijević appropriately highlights the theological and anthropological components of Ksenija Atanasijević's philosophy as crucial for understanding her ideas (Dimitrijević, 2023, pp. 169–177).

ness inhabited by terrible specters of transgression, sin and irrationality" (Atanasijević, 2011, p. 99).

Furthermore, she believed that humans are alienated from one another and frequently inflict misery upon each other. Humans are typically indifferent to fellow humans, if they are not purposely damaging. She aspires to help individuals who read her work by shedding light on parts of life's fundamental questions, with the pursuit of discovering meaning and purpose in our existence. We must learn, according to Atanasijević, how to persevere and even thrive in a world that is frequently unfavorable to us (Jeremić, 1997, p. 124).

VI

Metaphysical truths are essentially linked with ethical ones, because they provide, among other things, solace in our lives. Atanasijević believed that reason is important not only for explaining the world but also for understanding morality and managing our lives. She agreed with Socrates that intellect is the fundamental driving force in human behavior and that intellect alone can control our vices. Therefore, she argues that a person who lacks intelligence cannot be good, and individuals with bad character are dim and stupid. Nevertheless, she does not entirely concur with Socrates' claim that reason is the only explanation for our actions. For an understanding of human behavior, one must include emotions, spirituality, and religious views.

On the question of whether ethics should be self-oriented or other-oriented,[21] Atanasijević says the following: "If, according to Kant, every human being should be regarded as an end in themselves and not merely as a means to an end. Only those who take themselves seriously and recognize their own worth understand that it is impermissible to harm others."[22] Aristotle argues that "self-love" is the precondition for loving others, but only "self-love" that follows reason (*nous*), which is the best part of us.[23] Individual acts should be guided by one's conscience, and not by what others want us to do. Atanasijević seems to think that we should help others, not only because they are virtuous, but because by helping them we fight the evil that threatens everyone, including ourselves. The causal links

21 See Michaelson and Tosti-Kharas (2019) for more on self-oriented or other-oriented conduct. Susan Obdzalek examines the link between egoism and selfishness (Obdrzalek, 2013, pp. 210–232).

22 Atanasijević, 1930, p. 27.

23 See Book IX of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* for more on self-love and friendship.

between negative and immoral behavior are more compelling than any other (Atanasijević, 2011, p. 101).

What did Atanasijević believe about how one should cope with evil? The answer to this question is more complex than it looks at first glance. She thinks that we should not be passive and allow evil to dominate over us or others. According to Atanasijević, one evil deed should not be returned by another, which includes retaliation against individuals who have done us harm. So, how can we combat those who purposefully or unwittingly damage us? We must actively resist evil perpetrated against us, not out of vengeance, but to eliminate evil that threatens people, society and the entire world. When threatened, one should confront evil if one is in the position to do so. Furthermore, while fighting against evil, one should strive to prevent harm rather than seek retribution. In addition, a person combating evil should not seek vengeance, but rather aim to avert damage or benefit others or oneself. Seeking vengeance for inflicted pain, moreover, is not justifiable for two reasons: one evil cannot be resolved by another, and only transcendent justice can provide equitable restitution for everyone.

Ksenija Atanasijević believed that without transcendent justice, the world would be illogical and unethical. This kind of justice punishes those who do wrong and rewards those who are morally upright and have suffered. By acknowledging the existence of transcendent justice, we can understand the meaning of our lives. Ethically, transcendent justice ensures that all wrongs will be righted in the end by guaranteeing universal retribution.

Additionally, the existence of such justice is necessary because it eliminates all injustices in the world. Often, victims are not adequately compensated for their losses, but a higher form of justice can provide them with the compensation they deserve for their suffering. Holding onto hatred and negativity will not benefit our lives. It is important to move forward with a positive attitude.[24] Moreover, a system that promotes worldwide vengeance for any wrongdoing will lead humanity down a path of cruelty and spiritual bankruptcy. Seeking revenge, even if it seems justified, will only cause more harm and negativity in our world. Instead, we should focus on empathy and forgiveness.

In Atanasijević's ethics, forgiveness is a crucial idea that helps us avoid many sorts of harm in our lives and serves as the foundation for interpersonal interactions. But what exactly is forgiveness? It seems to be a conscious decision to release others from the wrong and harm they have caused us. Moreover, forgiveness is associated with empathy, that is,

24 Atanasijević, 1929, p. 48.

with understanding and sharing the feelings of others. When we forgive a wrongdoer, it can awake their conscience and help them understand the harm they have caused. In other words, a person who does us damage may become conscious that what they did was wrong, leading them to modify their conduct for the better. When someone harms another, it also corrupts their own soul and diminishes their chances for a better life. Instead of taking revenge, the harmed person can focus on positive and meaningful goals, primarily consolation. Against the insurmountable ills of the world, we can utilize imagination to conquer the evils of the world, or even to forget evils done to us,[25] because they may become unimportant in the future, as they frequently do.

Atanasijević repeatedly highlighted that all people have a common origin and are equal in fate. Therefore, "they are all related and part of one universal principle" (Atanasijević, 2011, p. 112). Consequently, "it is their responsibility to live with kindness, forgiveness, compassion, and mercy towards one another and to continuously support each other. Both philosophy and religion present a similar path with different terminologies and a variety of evidential materials that recommend people to follow it together and identically" (Atanasijević, 2011, p. 112).

These considerations have political consequences. Humans must reject wars and conflicts because, as Atanasijević points out, they harm the divine and inextinguishable flame in humans that gives meaning and value to human existence.[26] The discord between people and nations not only destroys the divine in us but can also lead to the destruction of humanity and all living beings. Atanasijević's pacifism is mostly connected with Buddhism, whose teachings she knew well. Additionally, she belonged to the pacifist movement during her life.[27] Nevertheless, Atanasijević considers Christianity higher than all religions, because it teaches that universal and active love is the foundation of every human being.

If we only fought against evil, however, our lives would be nothing but external and internal suffering. Atanasijević does not view our existence as endurance in the face of adversity. The ultimate goal of human existence, according to her, is *self-improvement*. Pride, dignity and gentleness are the three main virtues that promote human advancement. Pride might be characterized as awareness and a feeling of one's own worth and value based on self-esteem. As an ethical concept, pride is associated with dignity, which represents person's self-respect. The presence of dignity in

25 Laughter, according to Ksenija Atanasijević, is also an excellent anti-evil approach (Atanasijević, 1930, p. 41).

26 Atanasijević, 2011, p. 112.

27 Petrović provides a good assessment of Atanasijević's pacifism (2021, pp. 105–107).

every person, even the most unassuming, results in the highest value of human existence. Everything can be taken away from a person by force, except pride and dignity, because how we esteem and value ourselves is entirely up to us (Atanasijević, 1930, pp. 209 ff.).

* * *

In examining Atanasijević's philosophy, it is crucial to explore connections between her earlier and later philosophical understandings. Her writings and books in the history of philosophy were analytic and philosophically coherent, focusing primarily on theoretical philosophy: atoms, minima, atomism, continuity, finitism, and so on.

She did not abandon the critical and explanatory approach to philosophy that she employed in her writings before 1928. Her "turn" in philosophical focus consisted of three activities: (i) expressing ethical views in the form of fragments, (ii) researching Yugoslav and Serbian thinkers and (iii) exploring the Serbian national heritage. After 1928, Ksenija Atanasijević distanced herself from her teacher, Branislav Petronijević, whom she always described positively.[28]

Ksenija Atanasijević was not a dogmatic philosopher. By turning away from "official philosophy", she opened herself up to new themes beyond strict intellectual or rationalist ones, including the exploration of philosophical ideas within artistic forms that are not conventionally philosophical. Her use of figurative, equivocal and elliptical styles allows this type of thinking to convey the truths of the world, God, and our inner existence, which can be found in Serbian literary and cultural heritage. In her later writings, she analyzed these subjects with such conceptual clarity that can only be the envy of many. Does Ksenija Atanasijević, by considering philosophical content expressed in a non-philosophical form, depart from the strictly conceptual philosophy she once ardently advocated during her university career? Her later texts on different themes and methods certainly differ from her earlier problem–hermeneutic studies on Giordano Bruno and Epicurus. In her later work, she set herself the challenge of finding a philosophical character in something that arose from the collective national experience or religious beliefs, rather than philosophical culture. Ksenija Atanasijević managed to find threads that connect different ethical concepts with her own life experience. Achieving this required a flexible mind, refined spirit, and the ability to reconcile seemingly inconsistent thoughts.

28 See Atanasijević, 2006, pp. 96–104.

The ethical thought of Ksenija Atanasijević is compelling because she lived by her principles. Her work, however, is not simply a diary because her ideas and sentiments are philosophical and serve a more general purpose. Having faith in something, rather than solely proving it, can help to soothe our spirits, as it goes beyond mere of logic. Her holistic approach to the human soul indicates that imagination, emotion and belief should be incorporated into the concept of human maturity, its ideals, virtues, and vices. Her profound understanding of the various types of evils, their origins and manifestations enabled her to categorize them dispassionately, affording tremendous insight into the human spirit, its impulses and deeds. Her philosophy is focuses primarily on ethical guidance for achieving peace and consolation. For Ksenija Atanasijević, it is primarily a consolation that helps a vulnerable human being confront his or her fragility; it reminds us that we are not alone in this world full of afflictions, and that we can actively combat evil without resorting to revenge or harming others.

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DOI 10.56461/ZR_2025.KA-ToT.27K

PYTHAGOREAN THOUGHT IN THE MODERN WORLD: EXPLORING ATANASIJEVIĆ'S PERSPECTIVE ON ITS RELEVANCE

Abstract: In her writings on ancient philosophy, Ksenija Atanasijević deals with the most important aspects of Pythagorean thought – the theory of number and harmony, the doctrine of transmigration of souls, as well as Pythagorean protofeminism. Furthermore, she proposes that Pythagorean thought is still very much relevant for the modern world, particularly contemporary science. In this chapter, we offer substantial evidence in support of her claim. The Pythagorean-Platonic thesis that the structure of the world can be explained by harmonious whole-number ratios of physical quantities is very significant, and inspired by musical analogy. Although an aesthetic approach to the study of nature appears to be mostly outdated, it is important to note that it survives in a different, modernized form within some leading scientific theories. Further, the chapter discusses the Pythagorean doctrine of "transmigration of souls." Could Pythagorean *metempsychosis* be an early version of the thesis of the continuity of life? Finally, one of the milestones of Pythagorean practice was to provide philosophical education to gifted women. It could be said that Pythagoreans undertook the first serious steps in the direction of women's emancipation. Atanasijević's thesis that some of the most notable Pythagorean philosophical ideas are represented in modern world appears to be quite plausible and is clearly supported by influential scholars.

Keywords: Pythagoreanism, ancient science and modern world, metempsychosis, protofeminism.

Contemporary academia, usually guided by the maxim "publish or perish!," would not even recognize Pythagoras as a legitimate philosopher. He left no writing, he avoided public appearances and his teachings were quite esoteric, delivered to a handful of selected pupils. Yet, Pythagorean

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philosophy has exerted profound influence on Western thought. Here is a great example, then, of ideas surpassing and outliving the man. What do we know about Pythagoras? Although many details about his life are unknown, most researchers agree that he was born around 570 B.C. at the island of Samos, that he spent as many as 22 years in Egypt studying with the priests (Guthrie & Fideler, 1987), that he moved to Croton in Southern Italy around the age of 40 and founded the first Pythagorean societies. Guthrie & Fideler speculate that Pythagoras might have visited Persia as well, but they consider this doubtful. Supposedly, Pythagoras was the first to coin the terms *philosophy* and *mathematics*, and this led to the claims the he founded or "invented" these disciplines. This is, of course, wrong. Pythagoras merely advanced philosophical and mathematical studies, by building upon the knowledge he acquired during his travels. In scholarly literature, we may find opposing views on the Pythagorean contribution to Western rationalism. For example, Burkert (1972) argues that early Pythagoreanism was, in fact, mystical, irrational and backwards. Yet, he admits that alongside many other scholars late Pythagoreanism, particularly in its Platonic version, paved the way for the development of the modern scientific method which usually rests upon various types of mathematical modelling.

In her writings on ancient philosophy, Atanasijević (2007) deals with the most important aspects of Pythagorean thought – the theory of number and harmony, grounded in musical analogy, the doctrine of transmigration of souls, as well as Pythagorean protofeminism. This includes three short papers "Pythagoras of Samos" (Личност Питагоре са Самоса),[1] "The Pythagorean Theano" (Питагореичарка Тхеана) and "Pythagorean Teaching on the Transmigration of Souls" (Питагорејско учење о селењу душа), and a slightly more extensive treatise entitled "The Pythagoreans" (Питагорејци), which is part of her joint considerations on Pythagorean philosophy, Epicurus and Giordano Bruno and purports to show their relevance for contemporary natural science ("Питагорејци, Епикур и Ђордано Бруно – претходници савременог атомизма и астрономије"). Atanasijević was clearly fascinated with Pythagoras and the myths surrounding him. She explicitly compares him to Buddha (2007, p. 67), mentioning some of the most fantastic stories about him, such as that he was seen at two places at the same time, that his hip was made of gold, or that he foresaw an earthquake (p. 66). However, at the end of "Pythagoreans," which elaborates on Pythagorean philosophy of mathematics and philosophy of nature and cosmology, she proposes that

1 Bibliographical data on Atanasijević's papers on Pythagoreanism is directly quoted from the list at the end of her collected writings on ancient philosophy (2007, pp. 559–561).

Pythagorean thought is still very much relevant for the modern world, particularly contemporary science:

> Pythagoras deeply inspired Bruno with his view that numbers express the essence of things. Through Giordano Bruno's teaching on the monad, it is possible to establish the dependence on Leibnitz' monadology on Pythagorean philosophy. And through Bruno's monadology, Pythagoras influenced contemporary atomists. (Atanasijević, 2007, pp. 478–479)

One of the main goals of our paper is to explore and further develop Atanasijević's thesis that Pythagoreanism is relevant for contemporary science.

The intimate relationship between early Pythagoreanism and the Orphic religion, as well as the scarcity of written sources, led authors such as Burkert (1972, 1985), Cornford (1987) and Gregory (2021) to establish sharp boundaries between the irrationality of number mysticism and the doctrine of transmigration of the early period on the one hand, and mathematical physics, mathematical astronomy and rational psychology of the late period on the other. And although Pythagorean philosophy does contain irrational and rational elements, it is quite difficult to distinguish between them: as we shall see, clear lines cannot be drawn. Judging the rationality of a concept is rarely a straightforward process, and often requires thorough analysis of the socio-historical and linguistic context in which the given concept appears.

While the influences of Egyptian mathematics, astronomy and religion on Pythagorean philosophy are acknowledged by well-nigh every scholar, some authors also recognize the possibility that Pythagoras was influenced by eastern, particularly Indo-Persian and even Chinese philosophy (Atanasijević, 2007, Burkert, 1985, Cornford, 1987, Guthrie, 1962, Marlow, 1954). They, however, offer little or no argumentation for their claims; those given rest upon "loose" parallels between ancient Greek and Eastern philosophical systems, instead of testimonies of ancient writers. The Pythagoreans, both older and younger, conducted gradual "demystification" of the semi-rational theories on the origin of the world and man's place in it, which developed before the 6th century B.C. In general, Pythagorean philosophy can be considered a key link between older philosophical and religious systems of the Middle East, Asia Minor and possibly Persia and India, and subsequent Greek philosophy that sets the foundations for Western rationalism and empiricism. This is why we must distinguish between ancient Pythagoreanism, which encompassed Pythagorean and Neopythagorean schools of antiquity, and Pythagorean tradition in

the broader sense. Pythagorean ideas show up in modern philosophical works, such as Descartes' *Regulae* (Kandić, 2012), or Hegel's *Science of Logic* (Kandić, 2013), they find their place even in contemporary sciences and arts (Kandić, 2018). Perhaps we owe the Pythagoreans much more than we are ready to admit.

In the present chapter, we shall discuss some of the basic tenets of the Pythagorean tradition, and remind ourselves of their presence in the modern world. Most attention will be given to the Pythagorean-Platonic thesis that the structure of the world can be explained by harmonious whole-number ratios of physical quantities. This thesis is inspired by an analogy with music, and is aesthetic in character. Is, then, irrationality at the root of mathematical cosmology? Why should we regard Plato's version of musical analogy rational, and the early Pythagorean one irrational? For the *mathematikoi*, the continuous dynamics of symmetry and asymmetry constitutes a distinction between order (*kosmos*) and chaos (*haos*), a state with "no measure." Also, we will discuss the Pythagorean doctrine of metempsychosis, i.e., "transmigration of souls," adopted by Plato in several dialogues. At the first glance, the concept of metempsychosis appears to be completely irrational. However, it could be understood as an early version of the thesis of the continuity of life. Finally, one of the milestones of Pythagorean practice was to provide philosophical education to gifted women. Although ancient feminism differs in many ways from modern feminism, it can be said that Pythagoreans undertook the first serious steps in the direction of women's emancipation. Thus, we shall see that Atanasijević is right to claim that Pythagorean philosophy influenced modern natural-philosophical and social thought.

Pythagorean natural-philosophical investigations were highly motivated by the discoveries in music and acoustics. The experiments which Pythagoras and his followers conducted on monochord, a single-string instrument, showed that whole number ratios on the string, such as 1:2, 2:3, 3:4 and so on, produced beautiful, harmonious musical tones. Inspired by the musical analogy, the Pythagoreans, as well as other Greek philosophers – particularly Plato – postulated that *sensory qualities correspond to quantitative relationships between physical magnitudes*. Today, this idea is widespread and common in natural sciences. In fact, it is almost impossible to practice physical science without studying numerous quantitative relationships between the elements of complex, dynamic structures. Measurement has become one of the cornerstones of natural science. However, from the standpoint of history and philosophy of science, it is important to note that the very first steps that led to the development of mathematical physics and mathematical modelling in general, were inspired by *aesthetic*,

emotional experiences. If the Pythagoreans had not been emotionally struck by the harmonious tones the monochord produced under particular circumstances, would they have conceived of mathematical cosmology at all? Is, then, Western scientific rationalism paradoxically based on the irrationality of the musical, aesthetic experience, which is itself subjective in character? Surely, there are multiple ways to discover that some sensory qualities can be explained by quantitative ratios. Experiments in chemistry, for example, might easily guide us to this conclusion. Contemporary natural sciences rarely employ musical analogies, as they do not rely on aesthetic criteria. On the other hand, it is evident that the Pythagorean-Platonic notions of symmetry, harmony and proportion, appear not only in the works of influential modern philosophers, such as Descartes, Kant, Hegel, or Schelling, but also within some of the leading contemporary cosmological theories, such as the Big Bang (Brisson & Meyerstein, 1995), or string theory (Pešić & Volmar, 2023). Various conceptions of symmetry, more or less similar to the ancient Greek one, still play a key role in theories of the origin of the world, structure of matter and origin of life.

In the first part of her paper "Pythagoreans, Epicurus and Giordano Bruno – The Predecessors of Contemporary Atomism and Astronomy," Atanasijević recognizes that the Pythagorean system of harmony, theory of number and musical analogy are intimately connected (pp. 472–476). She quotes the famous passage on the Pythagorean teachings from Aristotle's *Metaphysics*:

> Since of these principles numbers are by nature the first, and in numbers they seemed to see many resemblances to the things that exist and come into being – more than in fire and earth and water (such and such a modification of numbers being justice, another being soul and reason, another being opportunity – and similarly almost all other things being numerically expressible); since, again, they saw that the attributes and the ratios of the musical scales were expressible in numbers; since, then, all other things seemed in their whole nature to be modelled after numbers, and numbers seemed to be the first things in the whole of nature, they supposed the elements of numbers to be the elements of all things, and the whole heaven to be a musical scale and a number. (Atanasijević, 2007, p. 473, *Met.* 985b-6a)

Atanasijević elaborates the most important aspects of the Pythagorean conception of number, and credits Philolaus with making Pythagorean esoteric teachings widely available. Things "imitate" numbers and participate in numbers – if there were no numbers, things would be limitless

and unknowable (p. 473). Philolaus considered numbers the essence of eternal being.[2] Unlike material things, numbers are eternal, unchangeable and immovable (p. 473). According to Atanasijević, the Pythagorean claim that numbers are the principle of all things had two main interpretations: numbers are either substance, of which things are made, or model, according to which things are made (p. 474). The key contribution of Pythagorean philosophy is, therefore, the concept of *universal mathematics* (p. 474). Atanasijević also points out that ethical concepts were given mathematical interpretations by the Pythagoreans, and that the first ten numbers were personified (p. 475): Philolaus, for example, associated ancient Greek gods with numbers and geometrical figures.

However, the Pythagorean project of natural philosophy based on the beauty and simplicity of ideal symmetrical ratios, ran into huge obstacles from the beginning. The discovery of irrational numbers, i.e., *asymmetry* (incommensurability), endangered the idea that the world's structure may be explained by the harmonious whole number ratios. It is unclear when this other significant discovery happened. While the earliest ancient Greek proofs of irrationality of diagonal of a square originate in 5th century B.C. (Popper, 2002), it is still possible to speculate that some of the early Pythagoreans, and maybe even Pythagoras himself, knew about mathematical irrationality (which is distinct from psychological irrationality).[3] Esoteric Pythagorean schools, in which the so-called *mathematikoi* held the upper hand, usually operated in secrecy. According to some sources, *mathematikoi* wanted to keep the discovery of asymmetrical ratios away from the public as long as possible. Iamblichus, for example, tells us inconsistent stories about Pythagorean Hippasus, in which he suggests that Hippasus was drowned at the sea because he publicly revealed the existence of asymmetry, along with the construction of a dodecahedron in a sphere (Guthrie & Fideler). However, late Pythagoreans, such as Philolaus, whose cosmological theory was one of the main sources for Plato's *Timaeus*, openly spoke about asymmetry and considered it a necessary and unavoidable aspect of the world's harmonious, geometrical structure; by Plato's time, asymmetry was common mathematical knowledge.

Interestingly, ancient philosophy scholars rarely dwell on this topic, and its relevance for the history of science. On the other hand, Popper (2002),

2 For a discussion of the role of decade in Philolaus' system, see Deretić, Knežević (2020).

3 In his *Timaeus*, Plato attempted to reduce psychological irrationality to the mathematically irrational aspects of the circles of the World soul (the circles of Different), as well as the so-called elementary triangles. Strange as it is, this was one of the first psychophysical theories that employed mathematical modelling.

a renowned historian and philosopher of science, as well as Milanković (1947), the famous Serbian scientist, argue that the discovery of irrationality was of tremendous importance for the development of the natural sciences. Atanasijević notes this as well (2007, p. 472, 475). The apparent "contradiction" between symmetrical and asymmetrical ratios was resolved through *geometrical representation*. The geometry of the sphere, as well as regular polyhedrons, was used by Pythagoreans to portray the supposed relationship between numbers and the cosmos, between the beauty of ideal harmonious ratios and the instability and changeability of the physical world. The significant distinction between order (*kosmos*) and chaos (*haos*), the state with "no measure" (*alogos*), was explained by the continuous dynamics of symmetry and asymmetry. For the learned Pythagoreans (*mathematikoi*), the physical world did not comprise symmetry only, but consisted of the continuous "cooperation" between symmetrical and asymmetrical ratios. This view was adopted and further developed by Plato. In fact, Popper praises Plato highly for the *geometrization of arithmetic* (although this idea was genuinely Pythagorean). According to Popper, Plato's "geometrical atomism," which was mostly based on the geometry of the so-called elementary triangles, saved the Greek cosmology from the pitfalls of irrationality, and even represented an advancement over Democritus' atomistic theory. Through Plato, some of the most important aspects of Pythagorean cosmology were refined and transmitted to the wider public, influencing myriad thinkers from antiquity to the present.

If we switch from the ancient Greek world to ours, what do we see? Although from the point of view of contemporary natural sciences, the original Pythagorean aesthetic approach to the study of nature appears to be mostly outdated, we can clearly see that it survives in a different, modernized form within some of the leading scientific theories. For example, Brisson & Meyerstein (1995), in the book entitled *Inventing the Universe*, argue that the Pythagorean-Platonic notion of spherical symmetry stands at the heart of the contemporary Big Bang model. Similarly to Plato and the Pythagoreans, Big Bang theorists postulate that the structure of the visible, changeable physical world can be explained by combinations of simple, unchangeable mathematical entities that go on to constitute the world's complex, dynamic structure. The notion of beauty is still relevant for contemporary physicists! Late in life, Heisenberg writes

> That these interrelations display, in all their mathematical abstraction, an incredible degree of simplicity, is a gift we can only accept humbly. Not even Plato could have believed them to be so beautiful. For these interrelationships cannot be invented; they

> have been there since the creation of the world. (Hossenfelder, 2018, p. 37)

Another great physicist, Paul Dirac, claimed that the laws of physics must be "mathematically beautiful" (Hossenfelder, 2018, p. 30–31). Furthermore, both Heisenberg and Dirac conceived their successful theoretical models *before* they turned to the Pythagorean-Platonic aesthetic paradigm. These successful models are certainly not "beautiful," in fact, some of their aspects are quite "ugly" and cumbersome. In her book *Lost in Math: How Beauty Leads Physics Astray*, Sabine Hossenfelder argues that the concept of beauty, which is usually associated with the principle of symmetry, obstructs the development of physics and natural science. Similarly to Pythagoreans, contemporary physicists realized that the principle of symmetry has to be complemented with the principle of *spontaneous symmetry breaking*. Perhaps paradoxically, even the theory of supersymmetry (SUSY) has to incorporate asymmetry – otherwise, the mathematical model loses its connection to observable, physical reality. How is it possible that some of the most influential contemporary physical theories are overwhelmed with the "opposition" of symmetry and asymmetry – the very same issue that troubled the Pythagoreans a long time ago? Does this mean that symmetry and asymmetry are fundamental characteristics of our world, or that these notions are somehow fundamental to the human psyche and are thus imposed in our theoretical models?[4]

In the contemporary world, some of the most striking examples of the Pythagorean-Platonic musical analogy can be found in string theory (Pešić & Volmar, 2023), whose theorists occasionally employ musical metaphors. In his popular book *The Elegant Universe: Superstrings, Hidden Dimensions, and the Quest for the Ultimate Theory*, physicist Brian Green explicitly mentions Pythagorean "music of the spheres" (1999, p. 135); Barry Parker compares the vibrations of one-dimensional strings to the vibrations of real violin strings (1987, p. 249); while Kaku & Thompson provide the following explanation of superstring theory:

> The superstring theory can produce a coherent and all-inclusive picture of nature similar to the way a violin string can be used to unite all the musical tones and rules of harmony. ... Knowing the physics of a violin string, therefore, gives us a comprehensive theory of musical tones and allows us to predict new harmonies

4 The psychoanalyst Ignacio M. Blanco established that the functioning of the human psyche mainly depends on the experience of the Same, which corresponds to symmetry, and the experience of the Different, which corresponds to asymmetry. He was influenced by contemporary physics, as well as Plato's philosophy (Blanco, 1975).

> and chords. Similarly, in the superstring theory, the fundamental forces and various particles found in nature are nothing more than different modes of vibrating strings. (1987, p. 5)

Although these metaphors are primarily used to make string theory more accessible to the wider audience, they clearly show that Pythagorean-Platonic cosmological paradigm has its place in contemporary natural science, just as Atanasijević claimed.

In a nutshell, the Pythagoreans, as well as the majority of Greek thinkers, did not differentiate between psychological and natural philosophical concepts very well, the aesthetic and the real were often confused, and thus the beauty of mathematical ideal became the basis of their natural science. Such issues persist even in our times, though to a lesser extent.

Next, we will consider the doctrine of metempsychosis or the transmigration of souls – one of the key concepts of Pythagorean psychology. Since Pythagoreans believed that the principles of mathematics were the principles of all things (Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 995a), the soul, or *psyche*, also shared an intimate relationship with numbers, symmetry and harmony (Luchte, 2009). And since mathematical entities were considered by Pythagoreans divine and eternal, the soul was, consequentially, immortal and distinct from the mortal body. Of course, if they believed that things *are* numbers and that numbers are eternal, one can only wonder why Pythagoreans subscribed to a dualist worldview. For Plato, mathematical entities were transcendent archetypes, but for the early Pythagoreans, they were equal to physical objects. Yet, in their opinion, only the soul possessed immortality, while the physical body was called "the tomb of the soul" from which we must free ourselves (Plato, *Phaedo*, 81c-d). From a contemporary point of view, this Pythagorean-Platonic conception of mathematical cosmology often 'feels' rational and pragmatic, even though it is based on the irrationality of the aesthetic experience. On the other hand, the doctrine of metempsychosis appears to be completely irrational, and plagued with unresolvable inconsistencies. What can we make of it?

First of all, the concept of metempsychosis is not originally Pythagorean. It was adopted from earlier religious systems. Herodotus claimed that Pythagoras learned about metempsychosis from Egyptian mythology, but scholars such as Guthrie, Burkert, Marlow and Luchte, disagree with this, since the Egyptian religion did not include beliefs in reincarnation. Atanasijević (2007, p. 72–73) suggests that Pythagorean metempsychosis originates in Hinduist religions. Burkert, Cornford and Marlow also suggest that religious and philosophical systems which developed on Indian subcontinent, such as Hinduism or Buddhism, may be the true source of Pythagorean conception of metempsychosis. This is, of course, diffi-

cult to prove. Ancient writers do not mention that Pythagoras traveled to India and Persia, nor that he studied Hinduist or Buddhist religious texts anytime during his life. But metempsychosis *does* share numerous similarities with reincarnation. In his paper "Hinduism and Buddhism in Greek Philosophy," Marlow (1954) draws parallels between Greek and Indian literature, mythology and philosophy. Not only Pythagoreanism, but also the philosophical systems of Anaximander, Heraclitus, Empedocles – and most importantly – Plato, share numerous similarities with Indian thought. According to Marlow, some of the most famous passages in Plato, usually considered Pythagorean in origin, possess adequate correlates in older, Indian thought: the aforementioned idea that the body is the tomb of the soul can be found in *Phaedo*, the idea of rebirth in *Phaedrus, Phaedo* and the *Republic*, including the famous allegory of the cave which suggests that true reality exists behind appearances. Thus, the hypothesis that Pythagorean concept of metempsychosis comes from India, though difficult to prove, seems plausible. Through the oral tradition, which was transmitted by *akousmatikoi*, the doctrine of transmigration spread across the Greek world, and was even incorporated into Plato's ethical and psychological theories.

Atanasijević argues that although the possibility that Pythagoras learned about metempsychosis from Indian religion, which might have spread through Persian conquests of Asia Minor, cannot be excluded, it is more likely that this concept originated in Orphic teachings. In support of this thesis, she enumerates four similarities between Pythagoreanism and the Orphic religion: the belief that the soul is of divine nature and that it outlives the body; awareness of pain as one of the key aspects of existence; belief that divinity is just and good, and acts with intention to help people; and finally, belief in salvation through the union of human and divine (2007, p. 73). She mentions fantastic stories about Pythagoras remembering his previous lives. Also, she notes that Plato's eschatological myths are influenced by Pythagoreanism to a great extent, providing the example of *Gorgias*, in which Socrates reveals to Calicles that "we are now dead, and the body is our tomb" (493a). Due to the oddness of the concept, some ancient writers ridiculed Pythagorean metempsychosis. However, the most interesting aspect of Atanasijević's interpretation of metempsychosis, or *palingenesis*, is, perhaps, the comparison with Nietzsche's famous theory of eternal recurrence. Atanasijević even quotes the most relevant passages from *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, and compares them to the words of the late Pythagorean Eudemus (2007, p. 75).

According to Burkert "the doctrine of transmigration presupposes that in the living being, man as animal, there is an individual, constant

something, an ego that preserves its identity by force of its own essence, independent of the body which passes away" (1985, p. 300). It appears that Pythagoreans were concerned with the same, or very similar issues as modern philosophers, psychologists and biologists. These are the issues of personal identity, selfhood, mind-body relationship, as well as generation of living things from non-living matter. However, the scientific and philosophical vocabulary the Pythagoreans and other ancient Greek thinkers had at their disposal was quite different from ours, and also quite limited in scope. Many physical and biological phenomena were poorly understood or undiscovered. Today, mostly due to the specialization of scientific disciplines, the psychological notion of mind and the biological notion of life have almost nothing in common. Mental processes, particularly thoughts and emotions, are usually studied independently from biological processes.[5] For the Greeks, however, the terms *psyche* and *bios* were quite interconnected. *Psyche* did not denote only mental processes, the inner life of a person, but also life force in general, the animating principle of life, and sometimes even 'breath'. Etymologically, *psyche* is derived from *psukho*, which literally means 'I blow'. As we have pointed out, the ancient Greeks did not differentiate between psychological and physical concepts clearly, they often believed that the psychological principles were the principles of the natural, physical world. Could the doctrine of transmigration be understood as one of the early, "rough" formulations of the thesis of *the continuity of life*, prominent in modern biology? If that is the case, then the notion of metempsychosis is not irrational, since it is based on correct observation that *something persists in the transformations of biological organisms*. It is the Pythagorean *explanation* of metempsychosis that is indeed irrational, given that it thrives on various abstract, mythical and religious concepts.

In a debate on the nature of the self, the biologist Jean-Pierre Jacquot talks about the provocative relationship between the ancient belief in metempsychosis and contemporary biology:

> Metempsychosis is a belief that a soul can exchange bodies, that after death you can retransform yourself into a completely different human being, animal or even plant. I do not know if souls exist but biology tells me that indeed we transform ourselves constantly into plants and micro-organisms in ways that are similar to metempsychosis. Apparently in eastern beliefs metempsychosis does not necessarily require the notion of a soul, but we could possibly transform the word *metempsychosis* into *metemsomasis*, the soma

5 The emerging, interdisciplinary fields of research such as psychophysics, neuropsychology, or biopsychology, aim to bridge the apparent gap between mind and body.

> being more or less the bodily part of a human being. In this sense, yes, I believe in metempsychosis. (Jacquot & Pouivet, 2023)

The cyclical, repetitive nature of living processes is explanatory cornerstones in biology. The cycles of water, carbon or nitrogen ensure the continuity of life on our planet. When a biological organism dies, it decomposes into smaller parts, and these parts may be incorporated into other organisms through nutrition. And if some of these parts contain critical biological information, such as DNA molecules, then yes, certain aspects of our personal identities 'survive' death and become parts of other living beings. Unlike the irrational Pythagorean explanations that employ unverifiable or, as Popper would say, unfalsifiable concepts, the materialistic explanations of modern biology could be tested in laboratory experiments. That is the key difference. Still, the Pythagorean belief in metempsychosis is not *entirely* irrational. Jacquot's suggestion that today, instead of "metempsychosis," we rationally believe in "metemsomasis," seems quite reasonable.

Finally, we will address Pythagorean "feminist," or protofeminist ideas. This is the least explored aspect of Pythagorean philosophy. In Pythagoreanism, even gender differences were explained by mathematical principles – in the Pythagorean table of opposites, the male was associated with odd numbers, the female with even (Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 986a). Since the very same table associated female with "evil" and "darkness," some scholars labeled Pythagoras a male chauvinist. However, in her book *Pythagorean Women*, Pomeroy (2013) dismisses Aristotle's account on the table of opposites, arguing that Pythagoras and Pythagorean societies were the first in the Greek world to include women among their disciples. Their number was small. For example, Iamblichus lists 235 Pythagoreans, of which only 17 women. Although much of the history of early Pythagoreanism is controversial, Pomeroy manages to find numerous reliable sources which confirm that women in Pythagoreanism played an active role. They were not only disciples, but also teachers and philosophers. Pomeroy lists Theano, Cheilonis, Tyrsenis, Myia, Damo and Aspasia among the most influential Pythagorean women who possessed philosophical education. Theano was, supposedly, Pythagoras' wife, and Myia their daughter. It is interesting that many of the Pythagorean women were from Sparta. Sparta was one of the rare Greek states in which women had the right to participate in social and political activities. Yet, their education was quite limited in scope, and mostly concerned the duties and responsibilities of looking after the home. For Spartan and other Greek women, joining Pythagorean societies presented a rare opportunity to engage in philosophical studies, on an equal footing with men. While Pythagoreans did not

allow women into governing positions, they allowed them to acquire the knowledge of the *mathematikoi*.

Atanasijević appears to be fascinated with Theano – perhaps to the same extent as with Pythagoras. In her brief paper on Theano, she considers the three letters, supposedly, preserved by ancient biographers. However, Atanasijević was aware that the sources on Pythagorean women were problematic (2007, p. 69): some authors ascribe the letters to Theano from the 6th century B.C., some to Theano II – as Pomeroy calls her – who most probably lived between 4th and 3rd centuries B.C. Nevertheless, it is important to see how Atanasijević imagines Theano on the basis of the content of these letters, which mostly concern various ethical and social issues, such as education of children, marriage, adultery and the treatment of female slaves (pp. 69–71). The first letter puts forward several ideas about the education of children: mothers, who should develop temperance in their children, should also be able to do hard work, as well as bear hunger and thirst. Herein, Atanasijević recognizes Spartan influences. The second letter is a consolation for a jealous woman. She is desperate because her husband supports another woman. Theano suggests that the virtue of the wife is to bear and tolerate the husband's vices, and that the husband will come back after he grows bored of his lover; only passion connects them, and passion is short-lived. The third letter is, possibly, most important for the history of feminism. Atanasijević points out that Theano clearly argues that female slaves, or servants, possess human nature, and thus should be treated in a good manner. They should not be severely punished, because this may corrupt their nature. According to Atanasijević, apart from her stance on the role of women in marriage, Theano's views represent an advancement over traditional ancient Greek beliefs (p. 71).

Unlike Athens, Sparta and Pythagorean societies provided at least some rights to women, and thus possibly influenced Plato who put forward his famous argument in favor of gender equality in the fifth book of the *Republic* (Kandić, 2021). In Plato, Pythagorean protofeminism is elevated to much higher levels. Plato's ideal state is supposed to provide the best philosophical education to gifted women from the guardian class, and then, if they are up to the task, place them into governing, ruling positions – something even the Pythagoreans did not dare to do. In my discussion on Plato's protofeminist ideas, I point out the key differences between the Pythagorean and Platonic conceptions of women's 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. (Kandić, 2021, p. 12)

Though they have rights and are treated equally as men, women in Plato's society are nothing but the tools of the state, used to achieve various political, economic and military goals.

While Atanasijević published a paper on the social role of women in Plato's *Republic*, she did not explore its relationship to Pythagoreanism ("On the Emancipation of Women in Plato," О еманципацији жена код Платона). Atanasijević considers Plato's social theory a milestone in the development of women's rights, as it clearly goes against traditional beliefs and practices held by historical Athens. She proposes that Spartan views on women were the model for Plato (2007 p. 275). In her paper, she points out all of the most important aspects of Plato's protofeminism: his famous argument that female nature is not different to the male, that women should perform all tasks as men even though they're physically weaker, that talented women should receive the highest possible education and take governing positions in the state. Atanasijević concludes that Plato was the first thinker who systematically proved that the difference between men and women is "only quantitative and not qualitative" (2007 p. 278).

However, all versions of ancient (proto)feminism are *instrumental* in character. The reasons for inclusion of women were neither emancipatory nor liberal in the modern senses of the word. The period between 6th and 4th century B.C., during which Pythagoreanism developed, was incredibly dynamic not only in ancient Greece, but also in other parts of the world, such as India, Persia, and China. It was a time of massive intellectual, economic, and military development which necessitated expansion of work force. Each member of society became valuable resource, including women. For the Ancients, in the case of gifted women, the primary biological function to bear offspring became less relevant than before. According to Pomeroy and Atanasijević, Pythagoreans were among the first in the Greek world to recognize the importance of

engaging women in social activities, providing them with philosophical education. Still, it is important to point out that ancient societies did not view women as an oppressed minority whose social position had to be improved as a matter of justice. While contemporary feminism is closely related to libertarian philosophy, this was not the case with ancient feminism. Pythagoreans and Plato did undertake important, first steps towards female emancipation, but their motives were quite different from those of modern social architects. There are, of course, many examples of the instrumentalization of women in modern times as well. We must not forget that the inclusion of women in the military is not always libertarian in character, rather a consequence of difficult security contexts some modern states face.

Pythagorean philosophy appears to remain relevant even in our times. It is impossible to disagree with Atanasijević on this. The Pythagorean tradition comprises much more than the Pythagorean and Neopythagorean schools of antiquity, including numerous authors and thinkers who share some Pythagorean ideas – even if they were not acquainted with genuine ancient Pythagoreanism. Pythagoras and his followers adopted mathematical, philosophical and religious teachings of older Middle Eastern, and possibly Eastern civilizations. They managed to express them in Greek, and make them familiar to the Greek world, which would go on to influence Western civilization. Thus, by transforming the irrational and semi-rational theories of antiquity into the theoretical basis of Western scientific rationalism, the Pythagoreans played a significant role in the development of modern philosophical and scientific thought. Still, it is considerably more difficult to distinguish between rational and irrational elements in Pythagorean philosophy than at the first glance. Furthermore, some of the issues that plagued Pythagorean and ancient Greek thought, persist even in contemporary sciences. The demystification of early Pythagorean teachings on the nature of man and the cosmos is a gradual process which is, perhaps, still taking place. Although at first glance contemporary science appears to have very little in common with Pythagorean philosophy, we may suddenly realize that some of the most important theoretical concepts in physics, biology and psychology, and even ethics, represent new, heavily modernized versions of the old Pythagorean-Platonic philosophical paradigms. Regardless of whether we consider Pythagorean thought rational or irrational, Atanasijević's thesis that some of the most notable Pythagorean philosophical ideas are represented in the modern world, particularly in contemporary science, appears to be very plausible and is clearly supported by influential scholars.

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DOI 10.56461/ZR_2025.KA-ToT.45S

KSENIJA ATANASIJEVIĆ ON EMPEDOCLES

Abstract: The chapter discusses three publications from 1925 that Ksenija Atanasijević dedicated to Empedocles' life and work. It focuses on two interpretative problems addressed by scholars of the late 19th and the early 20th century: the status of the two motive forces, Love and Strife, and the relationship between Empedocles' physics and his ethics and theology. By examining Atanasijević's take on these two interpretative questions, this article points to her original philosophical insights and highlights their validity for contemporary scholarship on Empedocles.

Keywords: Empedocles, motive forces, material principles, physics, ethics and eschatology

During the third decade of the 20th century, Ksenija Atanasijević published a series of articles dedicated to early Greek philosophy.[1] Thematically, a majority of them were concerned with the doctrines of particular philosophers, from Heraclitus and Xenophanes to Pythagoras and Pythagorean theory of the transmigration of the soul, to Parmenides' doctrine of being and Democritus' ethics. Such broadly formulated topics (and titles)

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1 "Heraklitova filozofija" [Heraclitus' Philosophy], *Misao* 1922; "Demokrit kao etičar" [Democritus as an Ethicist], *Srpski književni glasnik* 1923; Prve filozofske hipoteze Jonaca [First Philosophical Hypotheses of the Ionians], *Misao* 1924; "Ličnost Pitagore sa Sama" [Pythagoras of Samos as a Person], *Misao* 1925; "Empedokle iz Agrigenta" [Empedocles of Agrigentum], *Misao* 1925; "Eleaćanin Ksenofan" [Xenophanes of Elea], *Misao* 1925; "Pitagorejsko učenje o seljenju duša" [Pythagorean Doctrine of the Transmigration of Souls], *Nova zora* 1925; "Empedoklovi religijski fragmenti" [Empedocles' Religious Fragments], *Kalendar Vreme* 1925; "Eleaćanin Parmenid, tvorac učenja o biću" [Parmenides of Elea, the Founder of the Doctrine of Being], *Volja* 1927; "Stara grčka atomistika" [Ancient Greek Atomism], *Misao* 1927; "Komediograf i filozof Epiharm sa Kosa" [Epicharmus of Kos, Comic poet and Philosopher], *Misao* 1927; "Počeci filozofiranja kod Grka" [The Beginnings of Philosophy among Greeks], *Rad JAZU* 235 (1928).

discussed on a relatively small number of pages, point to summary expositions; nevertheless, taken together, the titles also reveal a comprehensive approach to the earliest period of Greek philosophical thought. Moreover, these discussions demonstrate Atanasijević's familiarity not only with the works of the philosophers in question but also with relevant scholarship of the time. Most importantly, the articles contain Atanasijević's original scholarly insights, and, as I will try to demonstrate in the case of her account on Empedocles, have generally stood the test of time.

Ksenija Atanasijević published three articles about Empedocles of Acragas (in *Misao* 1925 (3/4), pp. 699–702 and (5/6), pp. 891–905, and in *Kalendar "Vreme"* 1925, pp. 64–65), which discuss his life as well as his natural philosophy and religious views. In these articles, Atanasijević presents her own translations of a number of extant fragments, which she uses as a basis for her insightful interpretation of the philosopher's doctrine.[2] In addition, in her concise exposition of Empedoles' theories Atanasijević places Empedocles' life and work in a broader socio-historical context, relying on the idea of intellectual interconnectedness of early Greek thinkers. This approach is reflected in the two interpretative theses that can be gleaned in Atanasijević's discussion of Empedocles' philosophical work. Both can be linked to the exegetic tendencies recognizable in the Empedoclean scholarship around the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century. However, it is important to note that, in connection with each of these theses, Atanasijević offers her unique perspective, and her original approach differentiates her views from those of the scholars of her time. The aim of this article is to show the innovativeness of Ksenija Atanasijević's interpretation of Empedocles and clarify how her understanding of the philosopher's person and poetic work fits in with current scholarship. It is important to note that recent literature has the advantage of possessing an additional, substantial piece of Empedocles' work – verses found on the Strasbourg papyrus, published at the very end of the twentieth century.[3]

First interpretative thesis – Empedocles' eclecticism

According to Atanasijević (1925b), Empedocles' work was considered eclectic already in antiquity (p. 902), and this opinion is shared by historians of philosophy more or less contemporary with Atanasijević. This

2 Atanasijević translates around fourty fragments, some of which only partially. To my knowledge, these were the only translations of Empedocles' verses into Serbian prior to publication of Marjanca Pakiž's translation in 2021 (in Šćepanović, 2021).

3 See Martin & Primavesi, 1999.

eclecticism reveals itself in the following features of Empedocles' natural philosophy:

a) *Empedocles adopted Parmenides' theory of being*[4]

Concretely, this remark concerns Parmenides' teaching about the impossibility of coming to be out of nothing and perishing into nothing,[5] which is taken up by Empedocles in the fragments of the so-called "Eleatic set."[6] Some of these verses closely resemble Parmenides' and it is widely recognized that Parmenides' claim that there cannot be absolute generation and destruction is of crucial importance for the development of Empedocles' own cosmological system. However, Empedocles does not subscribe to all the consequences of this claim: in his world, unlike that of Parmenides, there is qualitative diversity and change, for he introduces four different material principles – fire, air, earth and water – which ceaselessly combine under the influence of two motive powers, Love and Strife, and thus create perishable things.[7] The six basic entities of Empedocles' universe are un-generated, imperishable and homogeneous within themselves, like Parmenides' one Being.

b) *Empedocles' explanation of the world of phaenomena rests on Heraclitus' idea of eternal change* (DK22 B31)[8]

Among Atanasijević's predecessors and contemporaries, Empedocles' alleged indebtedness to Heraclitus was particularly strongly advocated by Eduard Zeller (1856, p. 696).[9] John Burnet, on the other hand, pointed to the difficulty of detecting obvious traces of Heraclitus' doctrine in Empedocles' verses. He therefore viewed Empedocles' cosmology as an original attempt to reconcile Eleatic doctrine with our everyday sensory experience (Burnet, 1892, pp. 238–239). The importance of sensory evidence for Empedocles' choice of the four basic elements of the cosmos can hardly be exaggerated, which the philosopher himself indicates in his verses,[10] but when it comes to his discussion of cosmic change, it is indeed possible

4 As Inwood remarks, Empedocles' acceptance of Parmenides' conclusions about being is selective (Inwood, 2001, pp. 26–30). So, for example, Empedocles clearly does not subscribe to Parmenides' monism or to his denial of motion.

5 See Parmenides DK28 B8.1–21 (especially verses 12–15).

6 Trépanier, 2004, p. 67ff. The fragments in question are DK31 B9–15 and they come from two ancient sources, Plutarch's *Adversus Colotem* and Pseudo-Aristoteles' *De Melisso Xenophane Gorgia*.

7 See e.g., B21.8–11, B26. 3–7, B35.7 and 16–17.

8 Cf. Empedocles' fr. B16.

9 Cf. more recently Inwood, 2001, pp. 23–24.

10 See especially B21 and B38.

to recognize connections with other early philosophical accounts on the topic, including Heraclitus'.[11] This, however, does not take away from the originality of Empedocles' detailed explanation of all change by means of global cyclical repetition of mixing and separating of the four basic materials of the universe.[12]

c) *The concept of primary matter is something Empedocles inherited from his predecessors*

According to Atanasijević (1925b), Empedocles' originality lies in the fact that he combined four primary matters already mentioned individually by his predecessors (p. 893). However, the statement that earth has that role in Xenophanes and Parmenides is unwarranted. Actually, Aristotle pointed out that Empedocles added earth as the fourth element to the three elements already mentioned by earlier natural philosophers, water, air and fire (*Metaph*. 984a8). Besides, as I have already noted, Empedocles himself underscores that the presence of the four elements can be observed in the world around us, both in the great masses of sea, earth, sun and sky, and as constitutive parts of other things. In her brief overview of Empedocles' philosophical thought, Atanasijević does not elaborate on the above statement, but she does make an important remark in this connection, which warrants a detailed discussion. She tells us that the greatest innovation of Empedocles' cosmology, as compared to those of his predecessors, is his explicit distinction between motive powers (Love and Strife) and material principles (water, air, earth, and fire; Atanasijević, 1925b, pp. 893 and 904).

How original is Empedocles' cosmology?

Some influential scholars at the end of the 19th century ascribed to Empedocles a "fully developed hylozoistic system" (Rohde, 1894, 491)[13] and suggested that his four elements should be considered to be themselves 'alive'. This claim is based on the fragments that point to the apparent immanent tendency of the elements to group according to type (the so-called principle of attraction of like to like[14]). Atanasijević (1925b) rejects this suggestion as an "arbitrary deduction" (p. 904), but the question

11 For a linguistic parallel see Šćepanović, 2022.

12 Cf. Atanasijević, 1925b, p. 905.

13 Cf. Gomperz, 1896, p. 127.

14 This principle has a broad application in Empedocles, who refers to it in cosmological fragments (e.g., B37 and 62) as well as in those which explain sensation and thought (e.g., B109, 113, 114).

of how the influence of Love and Strife on the elements relates to their tendency to group according to kind has continued to attract scholarly interest to this day.[15] Here I will briefly reassess the issue as reflected in Empedocles' cosmological fragments.

In the central and most elaborate fragment of Empedocles' cosmology, the philosopher explains how the powers of Love and Strife affect the four roots: Love brings them together into one and Strife separates them into many (B17.7–8, 16–18). In constantly combining – joining and separating – the elements in this way, the two forces contribute to coming to be and passing away of the wide variety of perishable things (B17.34–35, B21.7– 12). Love is responsible for harmonious compositions of the elements, Strife breaks these structures up (B20 DK, the example of living beings). In addition to this, Empedocles occasionally also talks about each of the elements being drawn to its own kind, apparently without any external stimulus. So, in fragment B37 we read: "Earth increases its own kind, and aether aether" (transl. Laks & Most, 2018). In B62 "fire separating off" (κρινόμενον πῦρ) is said to move upwards "wishing to reach what is similar to it" (θέλον πρὸς ὁμοῖον ἵκεσθαι).[16] This is believed to refer to the macrocosmic phase of gradual separation of each of the elements from their global mixture.[17] For, periodically, all the elements come together into one, under the increasing influence of Love and form a harmonious composition. Strife then destroys the harmony and starts to distribute the elements into four individual masses. Thus, the movement of the elements towards their own kind mentioned in B37 and B62 may be said to accord with the effects of their gradual separation from the cosmic one, brought about by Strife.[18]

In fragment B22, however, Love (Aphrodite) is said to make things similar (ὁμοιοῦν), but this seems to concern 'assimilation' of *different* elements and also of their combinations: thanks to Aphrodite, some things are "rather prone to mixing" (κρᾶσιν ἐπαρκέα), whereas Strife makes certain things hostile to one another (συγγίνεσθαι ἀήθεα). Between the 'extreme' cosmic stages, while one of the forces gradually increases and the other diminishes, both powers make the elements constantly recombine. Some of the elements, and also some of the perishable things composed of

15 See e.g., Primavesi, 2013, pp. 698–700.

16 In the process, fire "drew upward ... saplings of men and women" (B62.2). For a discussion of the creation of human beings see Solmsen, 1965, pp. 133–135 and McKirahan, 2010, pp. 278–280.

17 Ancient testimonia (Euseb. 1.8.10, Aet. 2.6.3) also mention separation of fire from the harmonious mixture ruled by Love.

18 Cf. Inwood, 2001, p. 50: "Thus strife works in conjunction with natural tendency of each element to unite with itself, the principle of 'like to like.'"

them, mix easily with one another (water and earth, for example), while others do not combine (e.g., oil and water).[19]

All the described movements of the elements can be explained by the effects of Love and Strife, but Empedocles' descriptions, as Aristotle notes (*Metaph*. 950b23), lack consistency (οὔτ' ὁμολογούμενον ἐν τούτοις εὑρίσκει). For, even though Love is supposed to be the factor of joining and Strife of dividing, Aristotle remarks that each of Empedocles' motive powers is said to do both – bring together and separate:[20] on the macrocosmic level, Love periodically gradually *brings* different elements *into one* even mixture and, at the same time, *dissolves* elemental masses, and Strife *breaks up* the mixture while, at the same time, starting to *collect* the elements into four distinct masses.[21]

While this apparent 'inconsistency' is easy to explain, there are further difficulties arising from the way in which Empedocles speaks about Love and Strife that have to do with the ontological status of the two forces. Questions of whether they are corporeal and, if they are, how they physically relate to the four elements have been addressed since antiquity. Empedocles himself (B17.18–20) describes Strife as being "separate from the elements" (δίχα τῶν) and Love as being "in them" (ἐν τοῖσιν) "equal in length and in breadth" (ἴση μῆκος τε πλάτος τε). This led Aristotle to conclude (*Metaph*. 1075b1) that Love is both a principle of motion, because it combines, and a material principle, as it is a part of the mixture (αὕτη δ' ἀρχὴ καὶ ὡς κινοῦσα, συνάγει γάρ, καὶ ὡς ὕλη, μόριον γὰρ τοῦ μίγματος). Similarly, Theophrastus (*Phys*. *Dox*. fr. 3) claims that Empedocles views the powers sometimes as efficient causes (ποιητικὴν δίδωσι δύναμιν) and sometimes as similar to the elements (τοῖς τέσσαρσιν ὡς ἰσόστοιχα). Aristotle's commentator, Alexander of Aphrodisia (*In Metaph*. 62.15–16), explains that Love and Strife are in the elements, but are not material. The inconclusive evidence of the fragments and the confusing testimony of later ancient authors has led to conflicting modern interpretations too: some scholars take it that Love and Strife are not material,[22]

19 See B91, 92, 93.

20 See Atanasijević, 1925b, p. 894 (esp. n. 3)

21 *Metaph*. 985a24–29: πολλαχοῦ γοῦν αὐτῷ ἡ μὲν φιλία διακρίνει τὸ δὲ νεῖκος συγκρίνει. ὅταν μὲν γὰρ εἰς τὰ στοιχεῖα διίστηται τὸ πᾶν ὑπὸ τοῦ νείκους, τότε τὸ πῦρ εἰς ἓν συγκρίνεται καὶ τῶν ἄλλων στοιχείων ἕκαστον· ὅταν δὲ πάλιν ὑπὸ τῆς φιλίας συνίωσιν εἰς τὸ ἕν, ἀναγκαῖον ἐξ ἑκάστου τὰ μόρια διακρίνεσθαι πάλιν.

"[Empedocles] in many places mentions Strife as uniting and Love as separating. So, when Strife starts dissolving cosmic mixture into elements, each of them gradually forms a homogeneous whole. When Love again starts mixing them gradually, it breaks up these elemental masses."

22 E.g., Wright, 1981, pp. 33–34 and Schofield, 2007, pp. 290. According to these authors, Empedocles is primarily concerned with the equality between the powers of

while others see them as corporeal.[23] Atanasijević's (1925b) insistence on Empedocles' "explicit separation of Love and Strife from the elements" (p. 904), as pointed out above, is directed against the claim that the elements have an inherent tendency to group with their own kind.[24] On the other hand, she does not discuss the question of whether the two motive powers are material. It seems reasonable to suppose, with Inwood (2001), that their separate existence would imply corporeality.[25] As for the attraction of like to like mentioned above, Empedocles also uses this principle in his explanations of perception and thinking.[26] The effect that this kind of attraction has on the elements does not contradict the influence of Love and Strife, but a clear distinction between them is nevertheless not to be found in the extant fragments. If we take into account relevant ancient testimonies too, it is safe to conclude, together with Atanasijević, that Empedocles' poetic language lacks precision and is to blame for the existence of different interpretations of the nature of his cosmic principles.[27]

Despite pointing to the lack of clarity in Empedocles' poetic descriptions of key concepts of his cosmology, Atanasijević (1925b) stresses the philosopher's originality in introducing both a complex material principle and distinct motive powers that produce movement and change. She argues (1925b, p. 905) that in doing so, Empedocles manages to preserve Parmenides' ground-breaking idea about impossibility of absolute becoming and perishing, while at the same time accounting for the reality of the perceptible world of variety and change. Atanasijević particularly stresses Empedocles' effort to explain a wide range of natural phenomena by means of these basic principles and she singles out his innovative idea of four different cosmic phases and the different stages in the development

Love and Strife and the elements. This equality, Wright believes, consists in the fact that they are all uncreated, unperishable and unchangeable.

23 E.g., Burnet, 1892, pp. 245–246 and, more recently, Inwood, 2001, p. 51.

24 According to Aristotle (Arist. *de An*. 404b12 and 410b1–15), Empedocles' elements are ensouled. Trépanier suggests that Aristotle's and Theophrastus' criticism is to be blamed for the fact that the doxography ignores Empedocles' hylozoism (Trépanier. 2017, p. 168, n. 72).

25 Inwood, 2001, p. 51: "There can be no serious question about their corporeality. If Empedocles is vague about the meaning and implications of corporeality and speaks at times as though love or strife was an incorporeal power, that must be put down to the conceptual naivety of his day. It is unreasonable to expect a clear conception of the corporeal and its nature until the incorporeal is invented to contrast with it."

26 See n. 14. Cf. also fr. B90, B107 and 110. All six fundamentals seem to be included in these explanations too (see Wright 1981, pp. 233–235).

27 She labels Empedocles' expression "mythically obscure" (Atanasijević, 1925b, p. 894). In *Rhet*. 1407a31–35 Aristotle tells us that ambiguity of Empedocles' poetic expression covers for the lack of actual content.

of living beings that go along with them.[28] The two cosmic powers, Love and Strife, anticipate the modern scientific concepts of the forces of attraction and repulsion, and, according to Atanasijević (1925b), by introducing these two principles, Empedocles transferred the two main human emotions to the cosmic level (p. 905).

In the following section, I will discuss Atanasijević's view of the relationship between human and cosmic realms in Empedocles' philosophy.

Second interpretative thesis – Empedocles' natural philosophy and his religious doctrine are not connected

Various ancient sources mention two titles in connection with Empedocles' verses, and Diogenes Laertius in his biography of Empedocles talks about seemingly two poems entitled Περὶ φύσεως and Καθαρμοί (D.L 8.77).[29] Together, he says, they encompassed five thousand hexameters, of which less than a tenth has been preserved. The cosmological content described above, along with various astronomical explanations, as well as Empedocles' detailed account on human physiology and on the composition and functioning of plants and animals, has been connected with the title *On Nature*, whereas *Purifications* is believed to have contained Empedocles' account on ethics, theology and eschatology, which is characterized by the philosopher's belief in reincarnation. Due to the obscure nature of a smaller number of fragments classified under the second title, and their apparent connection with Orphic and Pythagorean mystical movements and ideas, which were current around the same time,[30]

28 Atanasijević (1925b, pp. 896–898) does not explain how she understands the relationship between the cosmic phases and different stages of Empedocles' zoogony (for the relevant explanations see McKirahan, 2010, pp. 267–280 and Primavesi, 2016, pp. 18–26). Importantly, however, she supports the idea of double cosmogony within each cosmic cycle – one during the increase of Love, the other during the increase of Strife – despite the lack of direct evidence. This is the predominant view in the contemporary scholarship on Empedocles (see e.g., Primavesi, 2008, pp. 12–15).

29 Apart from Diogenes, the first title, sometimes in the form of a thematic description, is mentioned by Hippocrates (*VM* 20) and Galen (*De elementis ex Hippocratis sententia* 9.27); and according to Diogenes already Theophrastus ascribed this title to Empedocles' philosophical poem (D.L. 8.55). The second title is mentioned by Aristotle's pupil Dicaearchus (D.L. 8.63), by the grammarian Herodianus (*Prosod. cath.*, Cod. Vind. hist gr. 10) and Diogenes Laertius (8.54). For more information about thematic differentiation of the two groups of Empedocles' fragments see Šćepanović, 2021, pp. 33–37 and pp. 39–41 for an overview of the discussion about the number of Empedocles' poems.

30 See Šćepanović, 2021, pp. 126–128.

the predominant view in the scholarship of the 19th and early 20th century was that the 'rational' *On nature* and the 'mystical' *Purifications* are so different[31] that they can only be products of different stages of Empedocles' life. The scholars could not agree, however, whether Empedocles' religious views or his natural philosophy belong to his mature phase.[32]

Atanasijević (1925b) agrees with the prevailing view that Empedocles' natural philosophy and his religious views are not connected (p. 901). However, she notes evidence of the philosopher's 'mysticism' in both poems (albeit more in the *Purifications*)[33] and, unlike her contemporaries, argues that rational and mystical currents *coexisted* in Empedocles and that he let them both develop and expressed them "without trying to connect or reconcile them" (Atanasijević, 1925a, pp. 701–702). She grounds this remark on the idea of complexity of Empedocles' character (Atanasijević, 1925b, pp. 902–903).

In the second half of the twentieth century, however, scholars started to re-evaluate the thesis about a strict division between Empedocles' natural philosophy and his ethics and theology. The publication of the Strasbourg papyrus at the end of the century, furthermore, opened up a path for new interpretations not only of Empedocles' philosophy but also of his philosophical personality.

The unity of Empedocles' philosophy

The most evident connection between Empedocles' natural philosophy and his ethical and theological account is found in a fragment quoted by several ancient authors and described by Plutarch as belonging to "the beginning of Empedocles' philosophy" (Plut. *De exil*. 607C). In the fragment Empedocles recounts the punishment envisaged for the long-lived *daimones* (δαίμονες οἵτε μακραίωνος λελάχασι βίοιο), whenever one of them commits a crime (εὖτέ τις ἀμπλακίῃσι ... φίλα γυῖα μιήνῃ), in which case the *daimon* is destined to wander "away from the blessed ones" (ἀπὸ μακάρων), among the four hostile elements (στυγέουσι δὲ πάντες) of the physical world. In the process, the fallen *daimones* come to assume different forms of mortal beings (φυομένους παντοῖα ... εἴδεα θνητῶν). Em-

31 Rohde (1894), Burnet (1892) and Jaeger (1947) argue that the two poems contradict each other (Wright, 1981, p. 57, n. 1).

32 Diels (1898) and Wilamowitz (1929) believe that Empedocles' religious views reflect his maturity, unlike Bidez (1894) and Kranz (1935). See Wright, 1981, p. 57, n. 1.

33 From the numeration of the fragments, we can conclude that Atanasijević uses Diels' edition of the fragments. She also mentions the editions of Sturz, Karsten, Stein and Mullach (Atanasijević, 1925, p. 702, n. 6).

pedocles inserts himself into this context as one of the fallen *daimones* (τῶν καὶ ἐγὼ νῦν εἰμι), an "exile from the gods" (φυγὰς θεόθεν) who relied on raving strife (Νείκει μαινομένῳ πίσυνος). Elsewhere too Empedocles speaks of his earlier incarnations (B117) and of a former bliss (B119 and 128). The mention of strife in fragment B115.14 and the description of the fallen *daimon*'s wanderings between earth, sea, sun and aether (B115.9–11) are evocative of the eternal components of the universe – water, air, earth and fire, and their movers Love and Strife. In Empedocles' *physics*, they are said to be responsible for coming to be and passing away of all "mortal beings" (γένεα θνητῶν), including "long-lived gods" (θεοὶ δολιχαίωνες, B21). These, on the other hand, are believed to be equivalent to the "long-lived *daimones*" mentioned in B115. Its story of sin and punishment in the form of banishment from the gods, and the mention of various reincarnations of the fallen *daimones* reflects Empedocles' *ethics and theology*.

This apparent linking of Empedocles' religious doctrine with the prominent features of his cosmology in B115 motivated some scholars to re-examine the fragment's positioning in Empedocles' philosophical work, which had been strictly divided into two distinguishable poems.[34] Moreover, a revision of this division was suggested in the second half of the twentieth century.[35] Finally, at the very end of the century, the publication of a papyrus containing Empedocles' verses[36] brought to light such a combination of already recorded and previously unknown hexameters that supported the view of unity of Empedocles' philosophical work.[37]

In an only partly legible group of hexameters ("ensemble d") of the Strasbourg papyrus (*P. Strasb*. d.1–14), a couple of verses condemning consumption of meat, which are also quoted in Porphyrius' treatise *De abstinentia* (*Abst*. 2.31.5), appear to be placed in the context of Empedocles'

34 See in particular Van der Ben, 1975. Sedley (1989, p. 275) argues that Plutarch's explanation that B115 belonged to the beginning of Empedocles' philosophy could refer to any of the two Empedocles' philosophical works (cf. Trépanier, 2004, p. 36 and Primavesi, 2013, p. 689).

35 Osborne, 1987a.

36 According to the report of Otto Rubensohn, who bought the papyrus in Egypt, it was found folded into a collar placed on a mummy. At the time of its restoration in the Strasbourg library, the papyrus was broken into over fifty pieces. The text found in them has now been grouped into five textual wholes ("ensembles a–f"), while ten pieces have remained isolated (e–k). Some of the reconstructed verses had already been familiar from quotations in other authors, while others are completely new. See Primavesi, 2008, pp. 5–9.

37 Here I leave aside the question of the number of Empedocles' philosophical poems, which is not necessarily connected with the issue of unity of his philosophy as a whole.

cosmic cycle. It is Empedocles' belief in reincarnation that makes meat-eating ethically unacceptable (cf. B136, 137, 139). The speaker regrets his own consumption of meat (d 5 ⟨οἴ⟩μοι ὅτι οὐ πρόσθεν με δι⟨ώλεσε νη⟩λεὲς ἦμαρ, /⟨πρὶν⟩ χηλαῖς ⟨σχέ⟩τλι᾽ ἔργα βορ⟨ᾶς πέρι μητ⟩ίσα⟨σθαι·⟩): "Alas that the pitiless day did not destroy me,/ before I contrived terrible deeds about feeding with my claws!" (transl. Laks & Most, 2018).[38] This lament is uttered with regard to the apparent upcoming period of death and destruction ([Ἅρ]πυιαι θανάτοιο ... [ἤδη παρέσ]ονται "Harpies of death ... will soon be present"), which is to follow after the phase filled with love (d 3–4 Φιλίην ... νυν ἔχουσιν "for us ... now full of Love"). This is reminiscent of the cosmic stage mentioned above, in which Strife disturbs Love's dominance and increases its own influence over the four elements, gradually separating them into four distinct masses. At the end of this process, all mortal creatures, including the long-lived *daimones*, are inevitably destroyed.[39]

Do the cosmic and daimonic cycles coincide?

The above interpretation of the papyrus verses, along with the content of fragment B115, may be taken as an incentive to revisit particular questions that have been asked about the relationship between Empedocles' cosmology and his ethics: should the fall of the *daimones* from the divine realm, described in B115, be taken to coincide with the cosmic stage in which Strife gradually takes over the rule over the elements from Love?[40] And is the return of the fallen *daimones* to the divine bliss, for Empedocles clearly envisages this possibility (B146),[41] to be placed during the opposite cosmic process, when Love begins to rise and eventually prevails, bringing all of the elements into a single even mixture (called Σφαῖρος)?[42]

Although these and related questions became prominent only in the second half of the twentieth century, when the relationship between the two supposedly distinct segments of Empedocles' philosophy started to

38 The quotation in *De abstinentia* is somewhat different from the verses on the papyrus. The quotation mentions the sin of touching meat with one's lips (χείλεσι), the papyrus of tearing it with claws (χηλαῖς).

39 Primavesi (2008, pp. 59–60) believes that the verses refer to the cosmic period of increasing influence of Strife and that they announce the future destruction of living beings. His reconstruction of the damaged text also includes mention of vortex (v. 8), which occurs in the cosmological context of fragment B35.

40 Osborne, 1987b.

41 Laks (2005, p. 266): "Since the banishment of the culprit divinity is said to last 30,000 seasons (115.6), the divinity must recover its primitive status once this period is over."

42 See B27 and 28.

be re-examined, a couple of remarks that Atanasijević made about this relationship may be shown to still be relevant. First, Atanasijević notes that Empedocles' explanation of the world is *mechanistic*.[43] This remark undoubtedly stems from the fact that Empedocles' cosmos has its immanent order, which rests on the "broad oath" established between Love and Strife (fr. B30). They exchange their powers regularly, without any external influence, and the exchange is continuous (B26.8–12). Second, Atanasijević is confused as to the exact cause of the fall of *daimones*.[44] This confusion may be taken to refer to the vagueness of the statement about Empedocles' "trust in raving Strife." Is it to be understood in terms of the crime of "murder" (φόνῳ) mentioned in B115.3? If the crime coincides with the breakup of the perfect cosmic harmony ruled by Love, some scholars wonder whose blood is there to be shed, for nothing is distinguishable in the *Sphairos*?[45] And, if the crime happens after the breakup of cosmic unity,[46] as the influence of Strife increases, the question remains, are all *daimones* bound to fall? The language of fragment B115 seems to indicate that *daimones* have a choice (Empedocles' "trust" in Strife), and Laks convincingly distinguishes between "an absolute necessity" ("necessity no matter what") that regulates the cosmic cycle, and "a hypothetical necessity" of the *daimonic* cycle.[47] Moreover, the determinism of the cosmic cycle does not fit well with the idea of punishment for the culpable deity. What is the purpose of the correction if the *daimon* will return to the state of bliss anyway? And then, since the cosmic cycle ceaselessly repeats, will the *daimon* commit a crime again?[48] As Warren (2007) notes, "there seems to be no alternative course of action than simply waiting for the cycle to come around. Nothing the *daimōn* does will affect that, just as perhaps it was inevitable that as Strife exerted a cosmic influence, the *daimōn* might be led to transgress

43 Atanasijević (1925b, p. 902) makes this brief remark to stress the difference between Empedocles' cosmology and his dramatic depiction of the consequences of animal sacrifice (B137).

44 Atanasijević (1925b, p. 901) seems to confuse the fall of humans (allegedly suggested by fr. 119) and the fall of *daimones* (fr. 115). This is not surprising, as the relationship between the two categories of mortal beings is not clear. If Empedocles, a human, is actually a fallen *daimon*, are all humans fallen *daimones*? (For different responses see Laks, 2005, pp. 274–276; Warren, 2007, p. 151 and Šćepanović, 2021, p. 122).

45 Warren, 2007, p. 148 and n. 17.

46 For this kind of interpretation see McKirahan, 2010, pp. 285–289.

47 Laks, 2005, p. 273: "whereas the beginning of a new cycle is prompted, in the cosmic cycle, by the disruption of Sphairos by Neikos, the beginning of a new demonic cycle is prompted by the crime of a divinity."

48 Laks (2005, p. 273) argues that, if the two cycles coincide, the necessary repetition of crime would make the punishment for the fallen *daimon* redundant.

the gods' decree" (p. 149).[49] The scarcity of the relevant evidence and the inconclusiveness of the extant fragments resulted in different explanations of the *daimonic* cycle. But, although modern scholars explain the relationship between the *daimonic* and cosmic cycles differently, they no longer consider them to be strictly separated.[50] At the same time, the mechanistic nature of the cosmic cycle makes it difficult to fully and confidently integrate the *daimonic* story of sin and purification into it.[51] Its main focus is to define human responsibility and action and it also appears to be strongly connected with religious practice (see e.g., fr. B136 and 137).[52]

* * *

In keeping with the common understanding of Empedocles' philosophy in the scholarship of her time, Atanasijević holds the view that Empedocles' natural philosophy is completely separate from his ethics and theology. However, she correctly insists on the "richness of Emepedocles' spirit," which motivated him to offer an explanation of reality "from two different points of view" (Atanasijević, 1925a, p. 702). We could say that in modern scholarship this statement would be modified to suggests that Empedocles' doctrine presents us with a comprehensive explanation of different aspects of the same reality: he teaches, on the one hand, about the origin and composition of the natural world, including the generation and functioning of human beings, and, on the other, about the rules of life (and afterlife) for human beings, thereby following the same pattern.

Concluding her overview of Empedocles' philosophy, Atanasijević claims that one should not expect to find a clear explanation of the nature of the two motive forces, Love and Strife, in his verses, nor a straightforward connection between an explanation of the world and doctrine about the afterlife. This 'lack of clarity' in Empedocles' presentation of the two topics or, more precisely, in the evidence that we possess of them, is at the same time an indication of their continuing appeal and relevance. Moreover, it is in connection with these topics that we can fully appreci-

49 McKirahan (2010, pp. 288–289) suggests that the fallen *daimon* does have a limited influence on its circumstances in the perishable world.

50 For the view that the *daimonic* cycle is not to be integrated into the cosmic one, see O'Brien, 2001, p. 138ff. and Laks, 2005, p. 270ff. For the integration view, see the following note.

51 See, however, Inwood, 2001, p. 61ff. and McKirahan, 2010, pp. 287–289.

52 Laks, 2005, p. 277: "what Empedocles is doing by setting up two structurally distinct although related stories is articulating the problem of the relationship of (human) responsibility and action (ethics) with the objective course of events (physics)."

ate Atanasijević's knowledge of early Greek philosophy and her scholarly insight: she rightly stresses the importance of Empedocles' distinction between causes of motion and material causes, and she convincingly clarifies that there is harmony in the complexity of Empedocles' philosophical doctrine.

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DOI 10.56461/ZR_2025.KA-ToT.61P

KSENIJA ATANASIJEVIĆ ON ARISTOTLE'S CONCEPT OF FRIENDSHIP

Abstract*:* In this paper, we examine Ksenija Atanasijević's interpretation of Aristotle's views on friendship, presented in her article "Aristotle's Understanding of Friendship" (*Aristotelovo shvatanje prijateljstva*). We first outline Aristotle's tripartite framework of friendship—based on virtue, pleasure, and utility—emphasizing his view that only the friendship of virtue constitutes a complete, reciprocal bond. The analysis then shifts to Atanasijević's critique, which highlights both the inherent self-interest underpinning most human relationships and the problematic nature of unequal friendships, particularly in gendered contexts. While acknowledging Aristotle's profound psychological insights, Atanasijević implicitly challenges his endorsement of hierarchical, male-dominated relationships. We interpret her deliberate omission of a direct critique of gender inequality as a strategic choice aimed at foregrounding the universal, transformative power of friendship—a concept she believed had the potential to enhance both individual lives and broader social reality.

Keywords: women, human nature, virtue, gender equality, feminist critique

Introduction

Aristotle discusses the concept of friendship in several of his works, including *Rhetoric*, *Politics*, *Eudemian Ethics*, and perhaps most importantly in books VIII and IX of *Nicomachean Ethics*.[1] In her 1928 article

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1 This paper was realised with the support of the Ministry of Science, Technological Development and Innovation of the Republic of Serbia, according to the Agreement on the realisation and financing of scientific research 451-03–136/2025–03/ 200025.

"Aristotle's Understanding of Friendship" (*Aristotelovo shvatanje prijateljstva*) Ksenija Atanasijević gives a detailed overview and analysis of these sections of *Nicomachean Ethics*. Her article, originally published in the *Serbian Literary Herald* (*Srpski književni glasnik*), appeared a full three decades before Radmila Šalabalić's Serbian translation of the *Nicomachean Ethics* in 1958, making it one of the first introductions to Aristotle's ethical theory for a broader Yugoslavian audience. At the time of Atanasijević's publication, *The Poetics* was the only one of Aristotle's works available in Serbo-Croatian, thanks to Croatian translations by Armin Pavić (1869) and Martin Kuzmić (1902). Thus, Ksenija Atanasijević was among the first to translate and interpret a Greek text that had a significant influence on later philosophy and subsequent understandings of friendship.

In the next section of this paper, we will begin by outlining Aristotle's original framework from the *Nicomachean Ethics* and other works. This section will clarify his distinctions among friendships based on utility, pleasure, and virtue, and set the stage for understanding the ethical and psychological dimensions he ascribes to genuine friendship. Next, we will examine how Atanasijević reads Aristotle through the lens of her own philosophical commitments. We analyze her criticism of Aristotle's position on the complexities and rarity of genuine friendship, emphasizing the pervasive role of self-interest in human interactions. Further, we consider her response to the unequal nature of certain relationships, especially in the context of gender, where she omits to challenge the patriarchal assumptions underlying Aristotle's framework. To fully grasp the conspicuous avoidance of a deeper critique of Aristotle's conception of unequal friendship, we explain the fundamentals of Atanasijević's philosophy, particularly the ethical foundations of feminism. Finally, we reflect on why Atanasijević refrained from a direct critique of Aristotle's views on women, proposing that her omission was a deliberate strategy to foreground the universal and transformative power of friendship—one that resonates with the practical purpose of philosophy in improving human and social reality.

Aristotle's Position, or What Can Be Said About Friendship?

Friendship, as Aristotle describes it in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, is not only necessary but also morally valuable in the life of every individual. Consequently, "without friends, no one would choose to live, even if he possessed all other goods" (Arist. *Eth. Nic.* 1155a). Everyone, whether

In this paper, we use established abbreviations for citing classical works, most of which can be found in the fourth edition of *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*.

happy or unhappy, needs friends. Friendship should be regarded as a special type of love that exists not only in relationships between people but also in the relationship with oneself. It is a reciprocated affection felt mutually between friends, ensuring that this kind of feeling is familiar to both parties involved.

In the *Rhetoric* Aristotle similarly states that a friend is "one who loves and is loved in return; and people think they are friends when they think they are both this way" (Arist. *Rh.* 1380b-1381a). Friendship, therefore, must be reciprocal, unlike erotic love, where one person may love another without that love being reciprocated in the same way, or at all. If we claim someone is our friend, it goes without saying that this person must also consider us their friend. An important condition, as Aristotle emphasizes, is that friends are aware of their mutual friendship, that is, the intention of friendship must be expressed.

In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle distinguishes three kinds or forms of friendship. "The forms of friendship, then, are three, equal in number to the things that are lovable; in accord with each is a reciprocal love that does not go unnoticed, and those who love each other wish for the good things for each other in that respect in which they love each other." (Arist. *Eth. Nic.* 1156a). Those forms are a) complete/ideal/genuine/true friendship or friendship of virtue, b) friendship based on pleasure, and c) friendship based on mutual benefit or utility (see also Plećaš 2019). Since reasons for fondness of certain people vary, forms of friendships between individuals also differ, and the object of love can be a) what is good (virtue), b) what is pleasant and encourages enjoyment (pleasure), or c) what is useful (utility).

People who love each other and are aware of that love (the epistemic condition is fulfilled) wish each other well according to the motive of that friendship (Arist. *Eth. Nic.* 1156a). Friendships based on utility endure as long as one person can benefit from the other. Friendships that arise from pleasantness or pleasure and continue for the sake of enjoyment or erotic love are most common among young people. According to Aristotle, both forms of friendship are inherently short-lived and impermanent because, in neither case, is the person loved for who they are, but rather for the benefit or enjoyment they provide to the other. For this reason, such friends are not *truly* friends to each other, and these kinds of friendships "appear not to be friendships" at all, when compared to complete or virtuous friendships (Arist. *Eth. Nic.* 1158b). Complete or ideal friendship exists only between those of excellent (virtuous) character. Such friendships are rare and cannot be sustained with many people (Arist. *Eth. Nic.* 1158a). Aristotle writes:

> "Yet friendships of this sort are likely to be rare, since people of this sort are few. Further, there is also need of the passage of time and the good simply and the pleasant simply habits formed by living together; for as the adage has it, it is not possible for people to know each other until they have eaten together the proverbial salt, nor is it possible, before this occurs, for them to accept each other and to be friends until each appears to each as lovable and is trusted. Those who swiftly make proofs of friendship to each other wish to be friends but are not such unless they are also lovable and know this about each other. For a wish for friendship arises swiftly, but friendship itself does not." (Arist. *Eth. Nic.* 1156b)

Moreover, "a friend is necessarily someone who shares in one's pleasure at good things and in one's pains at painful ones, not because of something else, but because of oneself" (Arist. *Rh.* 1381a). Friendships based on utility or pleasure are only like complete or genuine friendship, as good people can both be pleasant to one another and offer mutual benefit. However, true friends in the absolute or complete sense are those who treat their friends as they treat themselves.

> "Now, friendships are threefold, as was said in the beginning; and in each case, there are friendships consisting in an equality, others based on a superiority. For those who are similarly good become friends, or a good person befriends a worse one; and those who are pleasant and those who are useful become friends in like manner, whether they are equal in the benefits they confer or different. Those who are equal ought to love each other equally, in accord with the relevant equality, whereas those who are unequal ought to render to each what is proportional given the relevant superiorities" (Arist. *Eth. Nic.* 1162a-b).

Friendships based on superiority occur within families or between rulers and subjects, where justice requires that the superior person be loved more than they love in return. Aristotle considers the friendship between a man and a woman to be one of these unequal friendships.

Moreover, it is self-evident to Aristotle that no one would choose to live alone, no matter how self-sufficient or happy, because friendship is founded on community (Arist. *Eth. Nic.* 1159b). People form associations for various reasons, and each type of community corresponds to a particular form of friendship, with a distinct principle of justice governing each. Aristotle considers the friendship between a man and a woman to be *aristocratic* in its form. In an aristocracy, virtue is the distinguishing standard, meaning that the better or superior member (in this case, the man) holds

a larger share of the goods and, as the more virtuous, exercises authority over the woman in matters where he is more competent. When the man insists on deciding everything, the relationship between spouses becomes *oligarchic*. Conversely, in households where everyone does as they please, the relationship resembles a *democracy* (Arist. *Eth. Nic.* 1161a). Interestingly, this dynamic—whether aristocratic, oligarchic, or democratic—exists regardless of the state's political system. Even in democratic Athens, Aristotle maintains that the relationship would remain aristocratic because men and women are not considered equals. Thus, government in the house belongs to one person (the man), or as Aristotle says, "household management is monarchy (for every household is run by one alone), while political rule is over free and equal persons" (Arist. *Pol.* 1255b). Finally, friendly relations are most evident in a democracy, despite it being the least ideal form of government, because in a democratic system, male citizens, as equals, have much in common (Arist. *Eth. Nic.* 1161b).

Therefore, Aristotle believed that there are several forms of friendship based on various human relationships, with complete or ideal friendship being possible *only* among a few virtuous and equal individuals. Unlike Socrates and Plato, Aristotle also recognized the value of relationships between people whose moral character is less than perfect. However, like Plato, he maintained that the highest form of friendship—complete friendship—requires exceptional moral character and equality.

Aristotle's Position Through the Lens of Ksenija Atanasijević

In accordance with the general principles of her theoretical framework, Ksenija Atanasijević opens the article with a somewhat idealized portrayal of ancient Greek society and philosophy while simultaneously critiquing the intellectual climate of her own era. This is unsurprising, given that her conception of philosophy and the role philosophers should play in society was largely shaped by ancient Greek thought (Petrović, 2011, p. 103). As she introduces the reader to the context of Aristotle's discussion on friendship, she rightly references other ancient Greek philosophers and philosophical schools. After all, Aristotle builds on the works of his predecessors, including philosophers like Plato and Heraclitus, as well as to varying degrees on ancient Greek poets such as Homer, Hesiod, and Euripides (Murr, 2020, p. 567). Among the philosophers, besides Plato, the Pythagoreans are noteworthy for their emphasis on the idea that "friends have all things in common" and that "friendship is equality," or that a friend is "another self" (see Diog. Laert. 8.1). Atanasijević also high-

lights this point, emphasizing that "a moral human being treats the one they love as they treat themselves" (Atanasijević, 1928, p. 361).

Most of the text is dedicated to a systematic presentation of Aristotle's words. The author meticulously conveys her arguments, section by section, offering only occasional commentary of her own. Since the key tenets of Aristotle's understanding of friendship have already been outlined in the previous passage, we will not repeat them here. Instead, the remainder of this text will focus on Atanasijević's commentary—why she criticized Aristotle's conception of friendship and what aspects she chose not to critique in this text.

1) On the Occurrence of Friendship or Why Does Atanasijević Criticize Aristotle?

Atanasijević credits Aristotle with deep psychological insight, though she also finds him at times wanting. She considers him naive for believing that even a person of low morality "does not love himself, because there is nothing in him that can inspire affection" (Atanasijević, 1928, p. 361). Furthermore, she argues that Aristotle is mistaken both in failing to recognize friendship as one of life's great rarities and in categorizing relationships based on utility and pleasure as friendships at all.

She criticizes Aristotle's view that virtue and benevolence are the foundations of human relations (Atanasijević, 1928, p. 358), as she believed friendship is not a fundamental attitude that individuals naturally adopt towards one another. This perspective aligns with her broader pessimism about human nature. Central to her philosophy is the belief that selfishness, rather than goodwill, defines interpersonal relationships and that conflict and competition, not harmony, shape human interactions (Atanasijević, 2011, p. 29). In her view, it is evil, not benevolence, that characterizes human connections, and the pursuit of self-interest—not altruism—primarily motivates human actions (Atanasijević, 2011, p. 41). Contrary to Aristotle's idea that community arises from humans' social inclinations, Atanasijević contends that mutual affection is not an innate aspect of human nature (Atanasijević, 2011, p. 31). Instead, she suggests, individuals come together purely out of self-interest, forming communities as a means to more effectively advance and protect their selfish goals (Atanasijević, 2011, p. 29).

However, as previously noted, Aristotle refers to friendships based on utility or pleasure as friendships *in name only*. In this sense, both he and Atanasijević ultimately agree that genuine, complete friendship is rare. While Atanasijević criticizes his categorization of lesser relationships as friendships, Aristotle himself distinguishes them from genuine friendship,

emphasizing that only virtue-based friendships embody the highest form of human connection. Thus, Atanasijević's critique that Aristotle fails to recognize friendship as one of life's great rarities does not hold, because, according to Aristotle's thought, genuine friendship *is* the rarest form of friendship.

2) On Unequal Friendships or Why Should Atanasijević Have Criticized Aristotle?

Although Aristotle acknowledges that there is love and a certain degree of virtue even between spouses, he views men as superior. Spouses can be friends in the *basic* sense, as they are members of the same family and share some mutual responsibilities, but they are not *equals* in a political or intellectual sense. A woman is a friend in much the same way that a slave or a daughter can be a friend—since they are all members of the same household, under the care and authority of the man, the *pater familias*. Of course, we could be benevolent toward Aristotle, arguing that he was merely describing the societal norms of his time. In this view, Aristotle might simply be pointing out that a woman was considered a political minor compared to a man, as she could not participate in the political community in the same way, especially compared to a full-fledged Athenian male citizen. From a legal perspective, a woman had neither a public voice nor the ability to act actively in political life (even though certain women did influence Athenian politics, though they were not citizens of Athens themselves; see Plećaš, 2021). However, we might also take a less benevolent interpretation of Aristotle. After all, he explicitly claims that women lack a sufficiently developed intellect (Arist. Pol. 1260 a-b; Plećaš, 2021, p. 27). Moreover, from Aristotle's perspective, it seems that a woman is incapable of ever fully developing her intellect.[2] Aristotle describes the friendship between spouses in the following manner:

> "The friendship between a husband and a wife seems to be in accord with nature. For a human being is by nature more a coupling being than a political one, inasmuch as a household is earlier and more necessary than a city and the begetting of children is more common to animals. Among the other animals, then, community exists to that extent; but human beings live together not only for the sake of begetting children but also for the sake of the things that contribute to life, for the tasks involved are divided immediately, those of the husband being different from those of the

2 Aristotle grounds his argument for political inequality between men and women in physiological differences, asserting that these distinctions arise as early as the fetal stage (see Petrović, 2023, pp. 105–106).

> wife. They assist each other, then, by putting their own things in the service of what is in common. For these reasons, both what is useful and what is pleasant seem to be found in this friendship, though there would be such a friendship also on account of their virtue, should they be decent. For there is a virtue belonging to each, and they would delight in a person of a comparable sort. Children too seem to be a common bond; hence childless couples break up more readily, since children are a good common to both parents, and what is common holds things together.
>
> How a husband must live in relation to his wife, and, in general, a friend in relation to a friend, appears no different a thing to inquire into than how it is just to do so, for the just does not appear to be the same thing for a friend in relation to a friend as it is in relation to a foreigner, a comrade, or a schoolmate." (Arist. *Eth. Nic.* 1162a)

Surprisingly, Atanasijević dwells only briefly on Aristotle's discussion of unequal friendships. She provides a rather dry and uncritical summary, merely restating Aristotle's words. Atanasijević notes that these friendships are characterized by the supremacy of one person over another, reflecting the hierarchical structure between a ruler and the ruled. She also references Aristotle's examples, including friendships between father and son, older and younger individuals, and between a man and a woman. Given her broader critique of gender inequality, it is safe to assume that Atanasijević did not share Aristotle's view that women are naturally subordinate to men. Atanasijević explicitly argues that within the family, husband and wife should be equal: "Man's methods of rule within the family have proven problematic, as have all forms of coercion. Hence, the demand for woman to be a fully equal member of the family, as she bears responsibility of raising both spiritually and physically healthy offspring" (Atanasijević, 2008, p. 22). Although she is less direct in her criticism of Aristotle here, she subtly challenges his stance by describing the distinction between equality in legal relationships and friendships as "inconspicuous" (Atanasijević, 1928, p. 359).

Atanasijević is equally reserved in analyzing sections X and XI of Book VIII, where Aristotle draws parallels between classifications of political systems and their corresponding relationships. Aristotle explicitly argues that what is just and "in accordance with virtue" in a friendship between a man and a woman is for the man, who is "the better," to receive "more of what is good" (Arist. *Eth. Nic.* 1161). Instead of providing a more detailed analysis or a serious critique, Atanasijević simply dismisses his discussions

in these sections as "witty comparisons" that "do not contain any significant thought" on the topic of friendship (Atanasijević, 1928, p. 360).

Atanasijević does not further problematize Aristotle's views on women, even though she strongly believed that women, like men, are equally capable of forming friendships and that these friendships should be understood as equal rather than unequal (see Atanasijević, 2008, pp. 167, 177; see also Plećaš, 2021). Nevertheless, in the following section, we will examine the feminist position Atanasijević maintained throughout both her theoretical and activist work.

Atanasijević's Perspective on Women and Their Intellectual Potential

In *The Ethical Foundation of Feminism* (*Etička podloga feminizma*), Atanasijević argues that it is "absurd" to believe one sex should rule over the other (Atanasijević, 2008, p. 22). One of the most important ontological and ethical premises of her philosophy is that all human beings are equal by nature, as they all possess identical souls; therefore, the personhood of both men and women must be equally respected (Petrović, 2021, p. 106). Men and women share the same essence and moral capacities, meaning there can be no difference in the virtues or flaws they can possess (Atanasijević, 2008, p. 30). Like Aristotle, Atanasijević acknowledges significant differences in both the moral and intellectual capacities of individuals, but she firmly rejects the idea that such differences could be based solely on gender, as men's and women's psychological capacities are equivalent (Atanasijević, 2008, pp. 30–31).

> "Thinkers of the ancient world, almost without exception, attributed to women a different and lower nature than that of men, and on this basis assigned them to a subordinate rank in social and family life. Many venomous epigrams remain, in which poets maliciously ridicule women's traits and cruelly exaggerate their flaws. Nearly all the views of Greek philosophers on women are negative and hostile. Only Plato, the greatest mind of antiquity, held an opinion entirely contrary to the prevailing beliefs of his time—an opinion so far-sighted that even today it remains interesting, progressive, and relevant." (Atanasijević, 2008, p. 82)

Ksenija Atanasijević possessed extensive knowledge of ancient philosophy and literature and was well acquainted with the status of women of the time. A significant portion of her work was dedicated to analyzing

female figures in Greek tragedies, portraying esteemed women of the time, and examining attitudes toward women within ancient philosophy itself. In this regard, she pointed to Plato and Musonius Rufus as rare voices holding a more progressive view of women.

Atanasijević asserts that men and women are equal in their nature, sharing the same essence. Women possess the same strengths and weaknesses as men, with the only difference being physiological. In other words, Atanasijević believes that both women and men have an equal capacity for morality and moral action. This perspective was also advocated by the Stoic philosophers during antiquity, particularly in the Hellenistic period (see Atanasijević 2008, pp. 163–165; Plećaš, 2021; Plećaš, 2023). Musonius Rufus explicitly argues that women should be educated and are capable of virtue, just like men:

> "When someone asked him if women too should study philosophy, he began to discourse on the theme that they should, in somewhat the following manner. Women as well as men, he said, have received from the gods the gift of reason, which we use in our dealings with one another and by which we judge whether a thing is good or bad, right or wrong. [...] Moreover, not men alone, but women too, have a natural inclination toward virtue and the capacity for acquiring it, and it is the nature of women no less than men to be pleased by good and just acts and to reject the opposite of these. If this is true, by what reasoning would it ever be appropriate for men to search out and consider how they may lead good lives, which is exactly the study of philosophy, but inappropriate for women?" (Muson. 3)

In other words, we can say that women are as rational as men, and that "gender does not play a role in whether and to what extent we can attribute rationality to someone" (Plećaš, 2023, p. 66). This is the main reason why Atanasijević praises this Stoic philosopher. Furthermore, in her article "Female Poets and Philosophers of Ancient Greece" (*Pesnikinje i filosofkinje stare Grčke*), Atanasijević unequivocally recognizes certain women as philosophers and poets, thus equating them intellectually with their male counterparts (Atanasijević, 2008, 115–116). Among these women are Sappho, the Pythagoreans, the Cynic Hipparchia, and Hypatia of Alexandria (see Deretić, 2016).

Finally, in her article discussing women's education from 1935, "Considerations on the Upbringing of Women" (*Razmatranje o vaspitanju žena*), Ksenija Atanasijević argues that there are two distinct standards for educating male and female children. Male children are raised to prepare

for an independent life, with the goal of developing their natural dispositions as fully as possible. In contrast, the upbringing of female children, as a subordinate and dependent part of humanity, focuses on making them obedient and submissive. This approach erases the "original moral principle that a woman is also a human individual who, like a man, has the right to free expression and the development of her being" (Atanasijević, 2008, p. 35). Yet, Atanasijević believed that women are entirely equal to men in spiritual, moral, and social terms. For this reason, she implicitly criticizes Aristotle's notion that women are intellectually inferior (a belief still prevalent in the political reality of her time—recall that women in Yugoslavia gained the right to vote only after the Second World War), while explicitly praising Plato and the Stoics for their emancipatory ideas. Emancipation, after all, means liberation from guardianship—in this case, male guardianship (see Plećaš, 2023; Krstić, 2022). And although much remains to be done for the full emancipation of women, it is essential to believe in ideals and norms so that they may one day become our reality.

Concluding Remarks or Why Did Atanasijević not Criticize Aristotle?

The question naturally arises as to why Atanasijević—otherwise notably outspoken and unequivocal in her feminist views—did not more sharply critique Aristotle's understanding of friendship, particularly his stance that women cannot form ideal friendships. It is more than evident she did not share his views on women having lesser intellectual capacities than men, making her refrain from directly critiquing his views seem inconsistent with her established philosophical stance that emphasizes the equality of men and women.

One possible answer to this question might come from understanding that Atanasijević's notion of philosophy greatly aligns with the idea that philosophy is not only a formal discipline or discourse, but also a *way of life*, as the ancient philosophers believed (see Sellars 2009; Hadot 1995). She believes that the purpose of philosophy is to "reexamine human existence and make everyday life better, more valuable, and humane" (Petrović, 2021, p. 104), thereby improving both human and social reality. This would suggest that answer to the question asked at the beginning of this section has to do with the practical purpose of the article. Rather than engage in a lengthy analysis of unequal friendships, Atanasijević chooses to emphasize the importance of friendship, as one of the most precious connections a person can form (Atanasijević, 1928, p. 363)

Her deliberate omission appears to be a strategic choice aimed at highlighting the universal aspects of friendship—unity, mutual respect, and genuine human connection—rather than engaging in a direct confrontation over gender biases. In her analysis, Atanasijević even praises Aristotle, noting that "no new words of the coming times" will capture the essence of friendship as he did, and that neither medieval nor modern thinkers have surpassed his insights (Atanasijević, 1928, p. 363). This admiration underscores her intent to leverage Aristotle's authority to resonate with her contemporary audience and emphasize the enduring relevance of his thoughts on friendship.

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DOI 10.56461/ZR_2025.KA-ToT.75S

ATANASIJEVIĆ ON THE DIVISIBILITY OF THE ATOM IN EPICURUS AND THE EARLY ATOMISTS

Abstract: In 1927, Ksenija Atanasijević published her book *L'Atomisme d'Épicure* in Paris. It offered a systematic and insightful analysis of Epicurus' philosophy. Among its original contributions was the claim that the origins of Epicurus' theory of 'the minimum' (τό ἐλάχιστον) can be found already in the views of the earlier atomists, Leucippus and Democritus. At the time, this was a bold, rare, and controversial claim. Indeed, one of the early critics of Atanasijević's interpretation was Branislav Petronijević, her former professor and mentor. The task here will be to explore Atanasijević's thesis and the arguments she used to support it, as well as to evaluate Petronijević's criticism. My analysis will aim to show that Petronijević's objections fail to present a serious challenge to Atanasijević's thesis. On the other hand, it will also reveal certain weaknesses in the way Atanasijević formulated and defended her thesis.

Keywords: Epicurus, Ksenija Atanasijević, Branislav Petronijević, 'the minimum' (τό ἐλάχιστον)

Epicurus held that there are only two types of things in the universe, atoms and void. Atoms are tiny, imperceptible bodies that form larger, perceivable compound bodies around us. The reason for believing in the existence of atoms was that it is impossible to endlessly divide bodies into ever smaller pieces. Therefore, as their very name suggests, atoms are 'uncuttable' (ἄτομοι), in the sense that it is impossible to further break them down physically into smaller bits of matter. However, in his *Letter to Herodotus*, Epicurus discusses another type of division:

> [...] we must not only do away with cutting into smaller and smaller [bits] to infinity, so that we may not make everything

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> weak and in our conceptions of the compounds be compelled to grind away things that exist and let them go to waste into the non-existent, but also we must not suppose that in finite bodies there is traversal to infinity, even if [the bits] get smaller and smaller.
>
> [...] οὐ μόνον τὴν εἰς ἄπειρον τομὴν ἐπὶ τοὔλαττον ἀναιρετέον, ἵνα μὴ πάντα ἀσθενῆ ποιῶμεν καὶ ταῖς περιλήψεσι τῶν ἀθρόων εἰς τὸ μὴ ὂν ἀναγκαζώμεθα τὰ ὄντα θλίβοντες καταναλίσκειν, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὴν μετάβασιν μὴ νομιστέον γίνεσθαι ἐν τοῖς ὡρισμένοις εἰς ἄπειρον μηδ' ἐ<πὶ> τοὔλαττον. (Epic. *Her.*, DL 10.56 = LS 9 A_{2-3})

Epicurus here makes a clear distinction between the infinite physical division of bodies on the one hand, and the 'traversal' (μετάβασις) or the theoretical[1] division into infinity, on the other. He denies the possibility of not only the former, but of the latter as well, and based on the arguments in §57, it appears that the latter was rejected because denying only the former was not sufficient to solve certain complications caused by the paradoxes famously attributed to Zeno of Elea. Namely, first, if compound things consist of an infinite number of parts, then as sums of these parts they would be infinite in size, which they clearly are not. Second, in order to cross a certain distance, one needs to cross an infinite number of smaller component distances (i.e., to reach the goal, one first needs to cross half the distance, then half of the remaining half, then half of the remaining quarter, and so *ad infinitum*), which is impossible. Finally, even if this were somehow not problematic on the physical level (for instance, because of the existence of physically indivisible atoms), it still seems that infinite theoretical divisibility would remain an issue because one would need to complete an infinite number of mental operations by counting partial distances to infinity in order to be able to conceive reaching the final destination in one's mind.[2]

Epicurus appears to have been motivated by such concerns when he argued that theoretical divisibility must also have a limit:

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1 Here I follow Furley (1967, pp. 3–6) in using the term 'theoretical' to include all the alternative expressions (such as 'notional', 'mathematical', 'geometric') that have been employed by other scholars to refer to this sort of divisibility in this context.

2 For a classical analysis of the link between Zeno of Elea's paradoxes and Epicurus' discussion in *Her.*, DL 10.56–7 see Long and Sedley's commentary on LS 9 A (LS vol 1, p. 41). As they point out, the first two problems roughly correspond to Zeno's paradoxes in KRS 316 and 318, while the third is found in the pseudo-Aristotelian treatise *On indivisible lines*, starting at 968a18; while the author of the text attributes this argument too to Zeno, this attribution is uncertain.

> For it is impossible to conceive how [there could be traversal], once someone says that something contains an infinite number of bits or bits of whatever size you like. And how could this magnitude still be finite? For obviously these infinitely many bits are themselves of some size, and however small they may be the magnitude consisting of them would also be infinite. And since the finite body has an extremity which is distinguishable, even if not imaginable as existing per se, one must inevitably think of what is in sequence to it as being of the same kind, and by thus proceeding forward in sequence it must be possible in such a way to reach infinity in thought.
>
> οὔτε γὰρ ὅπως, ἐπειδὰν ἅπαξ τις εἴπῃ ὅτι ἄπειροι ὄγκοι ἔν τινι ὑπάρχουσιν ἢ ὁπηλίκοι οὖν, ἔστι νοῆσαι· πῶς τ᾽ ἂν ἔτι τοῦτο πεπερασμένον εἴη τὸ μέγεθος; πηλίκοι γάρ τινες δῆλον ὡς οἱ ἄπειροί εἰσιν ὄγκοι {καὶ}οὗτοι. ἐξ ὧν, ὁπηλίκοι ἄν ποτε ὦσιν, ἄπειρον ἂν ἦν καὶ τὸ μέγεθος. ἄκρον τε ἔχοντος τοῦ πεπερασμένου διαληπτόν, εἰ μὴ καὶ καθ᾽ ἑαυτὸ θεωρητόν, οὐκ ἔστι μὴ οὐ καὶ τὸ ἑξῆς τούτου τοιοῦτον νοεῖν καὶ οὕτω κατὰ τὸ ἑξῆς εἰς τοὔμπροσθεν βαδίζοντα εἰς τὸ ἄπειρον ὑπάρχειν κατὰ τοσοῦτον ἀφικνεῖσθαι τῇ ἐννοίᾳ. (Epic. *Her.*, DL 10.57 = LS 9 $A_{4–6}$)

Even if we assume that matter is not infinitely divisible physically due to the existence of atoms, one could still conceive of the atoms themselves being composed of 'bits' or parts, in which case the Zenonian problems mentioned above arise again, this time on another level. Epicurus therefore argues that a finite magnitude cannot contain infinitely many parts, but must instead consist of a limited number of constituent magnitudes. In other words, there must exist an absolute 'minimum' (τό ἐλάχιστον), the theoretically smallest possible magnitude. Thus, although atoms, as the smallest physically indivisible objects, can be thought of as containing smaller theoretical parts, these parts cannot be infinitely small but must have that minimal theoretical magnitude. This ensures that, first, compound things are not infinite in size, second, that it is possible to complete crossing any distance, and finally, that we avoid initiating an endless mental process each time we think about compound things.

One of Atanasijević's most original and controversial claims in her book is that this 'doctrine of the minimum' ('la doctrine du minimum') was not invented by Epicurus, but that it was already in some form, explicitly or implicitly, present in – and taken over from – his atomist predecessors, Leucippus and Democritus. Extant sources sadly do not explicitly attribute such a view to these earlier philosophers, and since absence

of evidence is not conclusive evidence of absence, the case both for and against this claim must unavoidably be indirect. Undeterred, Atanasijević makes an effort to bolster her case and offers two main arguments to support her thesis.

First, she points out that for Leucippus and Democritus atoms are not mathematical points (Atanassiévitch, 1927, p. 36). By this, she appears to mean that atoms are not partless, and that they are spatially extended, i.e., have a certain magnitude. The early atomists believed that atoms have many different shapes and sizes, so they must have also believed, just like Epicurus did, that the atoms consist of smaller parts which, although not separable physically, can be distinguished theoretically (Atanassiévitch, 1927, pp. 36–7). Presumably, the idea here is that if, for instance, we have an angular-shaped atom, it is possible within it to distinguish in thought (although not physically to separate) a vertex from the arms of one of the atom's angles.

Second, Atanasijević argues (Atanassiévitch, 1927, pp. 38–9) that her case is further confirmed by the fact that Epicurus tried to refute Democritus' position that there is an infinite number of shapes and sizes of atoms by invoking the existence of minima in the atom. Namely, unlike Epicurus, for whom the size of atoms must always be below the threshold of our ability to directly perceive them, Democritus allowed for the possibility of a single atom being as large as a world, which is taken to be a logical consequence of the thesis that the number of shapes and sizes of atoms is unlimited. Epicurus apparently reasoned in the following way. If there is a minimum theoretical constituent magnitude in the atom, then the only way to produce infinitely many shapes of atoms is to infinitely increase the number of these constituent magnitudes. If there is an infinite number of shapes of atoms, then some of them will inevitably be large enough to be perceivable. However, atoms cannot be that large, so the number of different shapes of atoms must therefore be finite, which in turn implies that the number of constituent parts in the atom must also be limited (Lucr. 2.478–99). What is crucial here according to Atanasijević is that in arguing this, Epicurus "did not create a new theory; he only limited the number of parts in the atom" ("n'a pas créé un nouvelle théorie; il a seulement limité le nombre des parties de l'atome," Atanassiévitch, 1927, p. 38).

At this point, it would be beneficial to pause and revisit Atanasijević's thesis in order to clarify it better. Namely, Epicurus' theory of the minimum can arguably be broken down into the following three ideas:

(1) although indivisible *physically*, atoms admit to being divided *theoretically* into smaller constituent parts;

(2) although divisible theoretically, atoms still cannot be divided into infinity: there is a *limit* that is the smallest conceivable magnitude, the minimum (τό ἐλάχιστον);
(3) this minimum also applies in the case of the structure of space, time, and motion.

Though interrelated, these claims are distinct because it is possible to accept (1) without holding – and even while rejecting – claims (2) and (3), as well as to hold (1) and (2) jointly without *eo ipso* subscribing to (3). Obviously, any proper evaluation of Atanasijević's thesis, that the fundamentals of Epicurus' doctrine of the minimum can already be found in Leucippus and Democritus, would require elucidating which of these claims exactly she has in mind. This would determine not only the nature of evidence needed to argue her case, but also the strength and substantiality of the thesis itself.

Now, Atanasijević is quite transparent in respect to (3), readily admitting that it is in all likelihood Epicurus' original development (Atanassiévitch, 1927, p. 39). However, among the remaining claims, it is not as clear whether she attributes to the early atomists both claims (1) and (2), or only claim (1). Her first main argument, that Leucippus and Democritus conceived of atoms as having parts, can only be used to establish that they (explicitly or implicitly) subscribed to claim (1), but nothing more. The point of the second argument seems to be that the early atomists already maintained (1), and that Epicurus merely built on that existing foundation by adding (2). This suggests that Atanasijević's thesis actually attributes to Leucippus and Democritus only claim (1), that atoms are theoretically divisible into smaller constituent parts, without ascribing to them claim (2), which would be Epicurus' later development, just like claim (3). If so, then it would be somewhat misleading to formulate this as the strong claim (which we may call the Strong Interpretation) that Epicurus inherited from the earlier atomists his doctrine of the minimum; rather, a more modest claim (let us call it the Weak Interpretation), that Epicurus inherited from them the idea of the theoretical divisibility of the atom, would seem more appropriate. Still, adequately proving even this latter claim would be a significant and valuable contribution to our understanding of Ancient atomism. Which of these two versions of her thesis Atanasijević actually intended unfortunately remains uncertain because her arguments and formulations are not precise enough to make a clear determination.

One of the harshest critics of Atanasijević's book, as we have mentioned before, was Branislav Petronijević, and the main point of contention was precisely the thesis discussed above. In a rather scathing review

of *L'Atomisme d'Épicure*, Petronijević rejects Atanasijević's claim that Epicurus' doctrine of the minimum has a predecessor in early atomism. Petronijević's argument is worth quoting in full:

> As it has become known recently, the main difference between Epicurus and Democritus' atomist doctrine consists in the following two points: (1) while according to Democritus atoms are indivisible (in the sense of being undivided), according to Epicurus atoms are composed of minima which represent indivisible mathematical points, and (2) while according to Democritus there is an infinite number of atomic shapes, according to Epicurus that number is finite.
>
> Acknowledging the originality to Epicurus on the second point the author denies the originality on the first point claiming that the doctrine of the minimum can be found already in the old atomists, either explicitly or implicitly.
>
> This sort of a claim, however, can only be made by someone who is not clear on the concept of a spatial continuum. For Democritus, the extended atom is physically indivisible because it represents a spatial continuum in which there are no *separated* parts, a continuum which is mathematically (divisible but) *undivided*. However, for Epicurus, the atom is (just like for Democritus) physically indivisible, but mathematically (not only divisible but also) *divided*, i.e., composed of indivisible mathematical points (minima). Because they are mathematically undivided, Democritus' extended atoms can have infinitely many shapes; while Epicurus' extended atoms have a limited number of shapes precisely because they are mathematically divided and composed of a limited number of minima. Lacking the understanding of the concept of the undivided continuum, the author was not capable of noticing this logical connection, which is why she arrived at the thought of separating doctrines which logically cannot be separated. Therefore, it is not surprising that for her mistaken thesis the author could not find any historical proof. (Petronijević, 1928; emphasis in the original, translation by Pavle Stojanović)

Petronijević begins by focusing on what he believes is the main difference in the respective doctrines of Democritus and Epicurus: the first one being that for the former the atom is not divided, while for the latter it is divided into minima; and the second, that for the former atoms can have an infinite number of different shapes, while for the latter this number is limited. Petronijević then proceeds to explain why he thinks that

Atanasijević's interpretation that Epicurus' theory of the minima is borrowed from Democritus is mistaken. Namely, Democritus conceived of the atom as a spatial continuum that has no separate parts, which is to say that it is mathematically divisible but not divided. On the other hand, for Epicurus the atom is divided since it is composed of indivisible mathematical points, i.e., the minima. Petronijević's point seems to be that Atanasijević's interpretation is wrong because she misunderstands the difference in the way Democritus and Epicurus conceived of the nature of the spatial continuum of the atom. In other words, she fails to see that Democritus' view that the number of atomic shapes is infinite is logically implied by his conception of the atom as actually undivided, while Epicurus' claim that the number of atomic shapes is finite is logically implied by his conception of the atom as actually divided into a finite number of minimal parts. Thus, there can be no continuity between these two positions.

How good is Petronijević's objection? The first thing to note is that it relies heavily on his distinction between the concepts of a *divisible* and a *divided* continuum. The dichotomy seems to correspond to the difference between something being divided actually and being divided only potentially.[3] Accordingly, Petronijević's point apparently is that, speaking of 'mathematical' (which I take to mean theoretical) divisibility, for Democritus the atom can be *potentially* divided although it is not *actually* divided; while for Epicurus the atom is not only *potentially* divided but also *actually* divided, and for this reason, atoms for Democritus can have an infinite number of shapes, while for Epicurus that number is limited. But, if this is correct, then Petronijević misses his mark, and doubly so. First, the objection leaves Atanasijević completely unscathed if she intended the Weak Interpretation of the thesis as we have described it above, according to which Democritus implicitly or explicitly held that atoms can be divided theoretically into smaller constituent parts. There seems to be no tension between this claim and Petronijević's contention that for Democritus atoms are mathematically divisible but not actually divided. Second, Petronijević's objection is not effective against the Strong Interpretation of Atanasijević's thesis either. Namely, Democritus' view that there is an unlimited number of atomic shapes and sizes is in fact compatible with the claim that atoms are composed of minimal magnitudes, because while the idea of the minimum precludes the infinite divisibility of the atom into ever smaller parts, it does not on its own prevent the existence

3 This language is oddly similar to Aristotle's approach to infinite divisibility in his *Physics*, and it is questionable whether it is generally useful for trying to understand the views of the atomists, regardless of other specific concerns regarding Petronijević's objection.

of an atom consisting of an infinite number of minimal magnitudes (i.e., it does not set an upper limit in size of the atom).[4] Therefore, Petronijević's criticism of Atanasijević appears to fail entirely, and even seems needlessly *ad hominem* in tone.

Nevertheless, this does not mean that Atanasijević ultimately has a conclusive case. We have already seen above that there is some ambiguity regarding the precise content of her main thesis, and the difference between its Strong and Weak versions is not insignificant. An even more serious problem for Atanasijević, however, is that she offers little textual evidence in support of her thesis, relying mostly on contextual and speculative arguments. While she does refer to several passages in various sources to bolster her case, a more detailed and comprehensive analysis of primary texts would have done a much better service to her overall argument.

Still, Atanasijević does deserve some credit for being possibly the first, or at least among the pioneering historians of philosophy, to propose the thesis that Epicurus' theory of the minima had its origins in earlier atomism. Although disputed and even somewhat neglected by the scholarship of the day,[5] her contribution was eventually vindicated at least to a degree by the fact that the same or similar thesis was later endorsed and defended by a number of prominent scholars, such as Luria (1932), Heath (1949), Mau (1957), Vlastos (1965), Furley (1967, Study I, Ch. 6), Guthrie (1969), and Stokes (1971).

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4 Thus, Epicurus' setting the upper limit to the size of the atom below the threshold of perception is not logically entailed by the existence of the minima, and should be viewed as an independent tenant of his doctrine probably motivated by his view that no atom has ever been directly perceived (see, for example *Her.*, DL 10.55–6 = LS 12 A).

5 A very useful overview of the immediate impact of Atanasijević's book on the scholarship is provided by Марић 2022, pp. 117–121.

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DOI 10.56461/ZR_2025.KA-ToT.85S

KSENIJA ATANASIJEVIĆ ON SENECA'S CONSISTENCY

Abstract: The aim of this chapter is to examine how consistent Seneca was in his Stoic philosophy and in what sense his teaching is "free from the strict regulations of older Stoicism", as Ksenija Atanasijević writes. To do so, we are going to compare Seneca's philosophical teaching with historical facts about his political activity and everyday life. Following Seneca's inner path, we are going to emphasize self-scrutiny as the key to his evolution into a Stoic sage and "the best connoisseur of psychology among the Stoics", as Atanasijević describes him. Ultimately, we will examine how this pioneer of non-radical Stoicism completed his evolution by achieving ultimate harmony with his inner ideal at the moment and in the famous scene of his death. We will try to deepen Ksenija Atanasijević's conclusions on similar topics and, based on that, improve our understanding of Seneca and his place within the Stoic school of philosophy.

Keywords: Seneca, wealth, consistency, self-scrutiny, non-radical Stoicism

Introduction

The life of Lucius Annaeus Seneca, one of the most significant representatives of the late Stoa, is widely considered to be inconsistent with his own philosophical beliefs.[1] In this chapter, we will examine the alleged discrepancy between Seneca's teachings on moral philosophy and his everyday political actions, in order to see to what extent Seneca was consistent with his own Stoic thought. According to Griffin "The life of the moral philosopher, especially if he offered one doctrine as the means to salvation and did not merely describe different views, was expected to conform to

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1 I would like to thank prof. Aleksandar Dobrijević and Dr. Tamara Plećaš for their practical advice and valuable suggestions.

what he wrote" (1992, p. 8). Seneca himself stood for the practical application of learning, which we can see from his advice to "let our thoughts be in harmony with life" (Sen. *Ep*. 75. 4). The first question that we will try to answer is – did Seneca violate any of the Stoic rules for a happy life? And if so, we will examine to what extent is the aforementioned discrepancy between Seneca as a philosopher and Seneca as a politician responsible for the potential 'violation of Stoic rules'. This will improve our understanding of Seneca and his place within the Stoic school of philosophy, as well as ancient philosophy in general.

In order to engage in such an analysis of Seneca as a whole (both as a philosopher and as a politician) we must first examine the historical facts about Seneca and his everyday life. Based on an external source, primarily Tacitus, who is considered the most relevant historiographer of the period of Roman history in which our interest lies, we can formulate a partial picture of the historical context in which Seneca's political life unfolded. Engaging in politics resulted in Seneca's exile, but also becoming a senator, an imperial adviser and finally, one of the most powerful people in Rome.

Seneca: A Historical Overview

As Tacitus noted, Seneca was expelled from Rome in 41 AD during the reign of emperor Claudius, allegedly at the instigation of Claudius' third wife Messalina, and because of accusations of adultery with Julia, sister of Caligula. He returns to Rome in 49 AD thanks to Agrippina, Claudius' fourth wife, who interceded for him. Agrippina was confident that the people would be pleased with such a move, considering Seneca's fame as a writer. Also, as reported by Tacitus, she believed that Seneca would help realize her imperious hopes with advice, while at the same time remaining loyal to her out of gratitude and hating Claudius because of the injustice the emperor had done to him. Particular attention should be paid to this part about the gratitude that Seneca owed (or should have owed) to Agrippina, as it will later be important for our understanding of their relationship. Agrippina finally hired Seneca as the tutor of her son from her first marriage, Nero, the future emperor of Rome (Tac. *Ann.* 12. 8). That is when Seneca's political rise and alleged philosophical decline begin.

Agrippina, confirming her "imperious hopes", attributed to her by Tacitus, kills emperor Claudius with poison. Nero succeeds Claudius on the throne, instead of Britannicus, the son of Claudius and Messalina. From then on, Seneca was not only the teacher of the young Nero but also his adviser in the exercise of power. However, this function, as stated by Griffin, was not official (1992, p. 67). The official adviser to the emperor

was Burrus, a man of great military experience, with whom Seneca got along well (Tac. *Ann.* 13. 2). It is not completely clear what Seneca's powers were, and to what extent he participated in the government (there are different views on this[2]). We should emphasize what Griffin notes: "Seneca must have been aware that if Nero's good deeds were attributed to him, Nero's bad deeds would also be attributed to him" (1992, p. 68), which we can conclude from the fact that Tacitus reports that one of the reasons why Seneca later asked to be dismissed from Nero's service is to "avoid the stain" (Tac. *Ann.* 15. 45). We will not deal any further with the extent of Seneca's influence, because there are no conclusive arguments for any of the positions. At the same time, the degree of influence of the ruler's advisers is not known even in today's political world, so that question remains open, and the degree of Seneca's responsibility for Nero's actions is certainly questionable. However, as we will see, the period of Seneca's cooperation with Nero will be considered the period in which Seneca particularly moved away from Stoic ethical teaching. As Atanasijević notes: "Engaging in politics damaged the reputation and cost the life of this eminent moralist..." (2017, p. 9).

Wealth

Tacitus conveys the opinion about Seneca that existed in Rome at the time, from which we can see that people primarily resented his enormous wealth and were not sure "by what kind of wisdom or maxims of philosophy had Seneca within four years of royal favor amassed three hundred million sesterces" (Tac. *Ann.* 13. 42). Embracing many historical sources, Griffin paints a picture of that wealth: "Undeniably, Seneca was very rich. He inherited a respectable fortune from his father, and he received from Nero estates in Egypt, capital that earned him interest, and money to buy at least one extra villa" (2008, pp. 54–55). Before we try to find an answer to Tacitus' caustic question of how Seneca came by his wealth, we will address the question of the relationship between wealth in general and Stoic ethics – does Stoic teaching generally prohibit material wealth or perhaps consider it undesirable?

Although his answer would be negative, Arthur Schopenhauer would also probably add that Stoicism *should* consider wealth undesirable, which we conclude from his, as Ksenija Atanasijević (2007) considers, unfavorable criticism of Stoicism. He argued that Stoicism unnaturally modified the teachings of Cynicism, from which it arose. The Cynics believed that a

2 *See* Griffin (1992)

person would achieve a painless existence only by completely renouncing earthly goods, while the Stoic is aware of the transience of material goods and will therefore be indifferent to their loss – their indifference allowing them to leave everything behind at any moment. What makes this kind of modification unnatural, according to Schopenhauer, is the fact that everything a person gets used to becomes a need and cannot be abandoned without mourning. Ksenija Atanasijević does not agree with Schopenhauer on this issue. She believes that the eminence of stoicism lies precisely in the fact that it "allows a person to be happy", in contrast to cynicism, which "grossly simplified life" (2007, pp. 351–352). Therefore, the Stoic teaching has nothing against the possession of material wealth, provided that we are aware of the transience of this wealth and are ready to give it up at any moment without losing our happiness.

In one part of his work *De vita beata*, Seneca speaks in defense of wealth and presents himself as indifferent to it. He claims that his wealth, even when it disappears, "will not take away anything but itself" (Sen. *Vit. Beat.* 22). At the same time, he believes that a Stoic can have wealth and that it can be useful, but he emphasizes that it is not good – because then it would also make others good. Money should not be prohibited for philosophers, because "no one has yet condemned wisdom to poverty" (Sen. *Vit. Beat.* 23). Seneca's point is that there is nothing wrong with possessing wealth, but also that the way we view wealth is important.

This, however, is Seneca's theoretical teaching on wealth. As far as the practical application of Stoic teaching is concerned, it is, as Mann notes, reflected in everyday life, and even in every aspect of life: "the difference between the fool and the wise person will manifest itself in virtually every aspect of their lives, as part of all of their everyday behavior" (2006, p. 120). For Seneca, as we have already mentioned, the practical application of ethical teaching is much more important than mere theorizing – in Seneca's opinion, we choose those who teach with their lives and when they say what should be done, they prove it. He advises us to choose one whom we will admire upon seeing him in action, not while we listen to him (Sen. *Ep*. 52. 8).

The next step in examining Seneca's consistency will be to consider, with the help of external sources, whether and to what extent Seneca practically applied the rules that can be found in his books. In the context of everything previously said about Seneca's theoretical teaching on wealth, we will address the question of whether Seneca was aware of the transience of his wealth and was ready to give it up at any moment.

Tacitus noted: after Burrus, Nero's second adviser, died in 62 AD, Seneca's influence on Nero weakened significantly, and the emperor "falls

under the influence of the worst" (Tac. *Ann*. 14. 52). They attack Seneca, attributing to him various moral failures, most of all that of accumulating wealth with which he wants to surpass the emperor himself. Seneca, hearing of these accusations, seeks an audience with Nero during which he asks to be dismissed from the imperial service and utters the following words:

> It has been fourteen years, Caesar, since I was called to prepare you for what was then only a hope, it has been eight years since you became an emperor; during that time, you showered me with so many honors and wealth that my happiness lacks only one thing: measure in it. (Tac. *Ann.* 14. 53)

In this very important (almost apologetic) part of the *Annals*, we see that Seneca himself questions the conformity of his daily life with his Stoic principles and realizes that his life is not fully devoted to them: "Where now is that spirit satisfied with the little" (Tac. *Ann.* 14. 53) asks Seneca? Tacitus believes that Seneca's words were sincere and that he honestly saw the discrepancy between his own life and what his theoretical teaching about life advocated.

Nero refused to release Seneca. He explained his decision by saying that the people will not see Seneca's modesty in Seneca's retirement from service, but the fear of Nero's cruelty, and it would not serve the philosopher's honor to gain fame by bringing his friend into disrepute (Tac. *Ann.* 14. 56). Although he did not officially leave the service, Seneca withdrew into himself and rarely left the house after that, under the excuse of ill health and philosophical research. Thus, Nero preserved his reputation, or what was left of it, at the expense of Seneca's.

The answer to the question of Seneca's practical application of his own teaching on wealth is that, even if Seneca's consistency was not at the highest level at every moment of his ministry, he eventually managed to spot the inconsistency and correct it, both for himself and in the eyes of citizens of Rome. The moment of admitting his inconsistency before the emperor and asking to be dismissed from service is an example *par excellence* of rational self-criticism, freed from any despondency and self-love, which we will discuss in more detail in the next section.

Self-scrutiny

Admitting one's own mistakes and self-criticism is not foreign to Seneca, as we see. "Teaching through one's own life" advocated by Seneca and (increasingly popular) "philosophy as a way of life", as formulated by Fitch, "leads to an interest in those exercises or techniques designed to

transform the self by repeated training; one such exercise is the daily self-scrutiny" (2008, p. 9). Such daily self-criticism does not mean a constant pathological dissatisfaction with oneself and one's behavior, but rather a regular review of one's actions and their conformity with what a Stoic philosopher should be – "you should delve into yourself, and observe" (Sen. *Ep*. 16. 2), but also be the plaintiff and defendant towards yourself (Sen. *Ep.* 28. 10). In Seneca's letters we can find an example of this kind of self-criticism which tell us our eyes should not be dry at the loss of a friend, but tears must not flow in streams – we should cry, not sob. At the same time, Seneca remembers that he mourned his dear friend Aeneas so excessively, that against his will he served as an example to those overcome by grief. But at the time of writing *Epistulae Morales ad Lucilium,* he condemns his action realizing that he was so sad above all because he had never thought before that his friend could die before him (Sen. *Ep.* 63).

In some parts of his *Epistulae Morales ad Lucilium*, Seneca writes as if thinking out loud. Seneca was aware that he was not always consistent, and he honestly admits it, to quote Ksenija Atanasijević (2007): "I speak of virtue, not of myself, and when I stand up against vice, I first have my own in mind..." (p. 345–346). He does not present himself to us as an ideal Stoic, following 'the rulebook' perfectly, but as an ordinary man who is genuinely trying to improve all those aspects of his life that he thinks can be better, and more consistent with what he would like to become. As Catherine Edwards states, referring to Foucault: "The object of this minute self-scrutiny, as Foucault has emphasized, is not punishment, nor is there much emphasis on cultivating feelings of guilt. Rather the goal is self-transformation" (2008, p. 92). We could transfer this understanding of self-scrutiny to Seneca's original thoughts on this topic: he writes that not only is he getting better, but that he is simply changing. An exact sign of improvement in a person lies in them seeing mistakes they were not aware of until then (Sen. *Ep*. 6.1).

Seneca praises Lucilius because, leaving all else aside, he concentrates only on making himself a better man every day (Sen. *Ep*. 5. 1). A Stoic should not compare themselves with others, but with the person they would like to become. In this sense, man is the product of hard work [on themselves] – made, not given (Sen. *Ep*. 52). We can approach this problem in the following way: when a parent teaches their child to insert toys of a certain shape (triangle, circle, square) into the openings of the corresponding shape, the parent can do that on the first try and without error and then leave the child to repeat the same. Unless the child has followed the process very carefully, it is unlikely that they will be able to repeat it without error. A child will likely try to insert, for example, a triangle-

shaped toy into a circle-shaped opening. When they fail to do what the parent did just a few seconds ago and realize that something is not right, they will remain confused and probably think that the parent has some kind of superpower doing what, from the child's perspective, is impossible. Now let us imagine a different scenario: the parent understands the level of the child's abilities and, accordingly, tries to insert a triangle-shaped toy into a circle-shaped opening. When it is clear to the child that this attempt by the parent is not successful, the parent tries to insert the same toy in every opening. When the parent finally manages to find the right shape, he repeats the process with all the toys. We can almost certainly expect that the child will not get confused later when they fail to insert the toy into the right opening on the first try. Taught by the mistakes of their parent, they will try to correct their own attempts and modify them to reach the desired goal.

A moral philosopher offering their doctrine may, similar to what the parent did in the first scenario, do so by reciting their version of the "rules for the good life," and leave the reader to follow that list as if commandments. However, Seneca chooses to show his "children" his fallible side. In a way, Seneca sacrifices the picture of himself as a moral exemplar, which is unreflexively and without good reason often attributed to moral philosophers, in order to make his moral lessons more effective. The reader of Seneca's works realizes that Seneca is an ordinary man who makes mistakes. Therefore, the reader becomes more inclined to do as his moral teacher transform themselves into what they want to become. A philosopher who only presents a list of rules to the readers creates an image of themselves as a superman whose footsteps would be impossible to follow: if it is impossible to live in complete harmony with the moral principles that this philosopher advocates, then why should one even try? With Seneca, there is no false aura that distances the moral teacher from his students.

This analogy, however, can be objected to as follows: a parent who puts toys in the wrong openings does so on purpose, while Seneca cannot be said to have deliberately made mistakes in life so he could teach his students more efficiently, because it is obvious that he regrets those mistakes. Seneca indeed regrets the mistakes and inconsistencies he made, and that is why we cannot say that he made them intentionally. However, he did deliberately write his texts. If Seneca had so wished, the readers of his works, especially those who did not know him personally, could have lived under the delusion that Seneca was an ideal Stoic of impeccable virtue – it would have been enough if Seneca had chosen to present himself as such in his works. However, as we have seen, he places the importance

that his works, as they are today, can have for readers above his reputation: "Our words should not entertain but be useful. (...) The patient does not seek an eloquent doctor", as he puts it (Sen. *Ep.* 75. 5–6.). By his (deliberate) portrayal of himself as imperfect, Seneca chooses to seem more like a parent who purposely puts toys into the wrong openings than a parent who has superpowers. As Griffin puts it, he prefers to be a "healer of souls" rather than a "model of virtue" (2008, p. 58). This is the reason why Atanasijević is fascinated by Seneca's life, which she believes was imbued with his ethical principles, and even addresses him as "the teacher of an unshakeable and saving morality" (2007, p. 356).

Political controversies

Some events in Seneca's life could be used as an argument against the claim that Seneca's morality was so unshakeable. Namely, it is not only the amount of Seneca's wealth that caused damage to his reputation in Rome, but also who he got the wealth from and, finally, what Tacitus questions in general – whether Seneca deserved it. The biggest blemish on the career of Nero's advisor is the lack of reaction to Nero's murder of his half-brother Britannicus, son of Claudius, and Nero's mother Agrippina, all during an unscrupulous struggle for power.

It cannot be said that Nero's reign was just a continuous series of cruel and evil moves. Just before the above-mentioned fatal events took place, Nero showed gentleness in his demeanor – from small nice gestures to pardoning former senators exiled for adultery (Tac. *Ann.* 13. 11). It seems that Seneca's lessons were manifested in Nero's nobility. However, Nero's love for a freedwoman named Acte greatly angered his mother Agrippina, who, out of fear that she might be replaced, began to threaten the emperor – Britannicus was the true and, in Agrippina's opinion, worthy heir to his father's throne, now occupied by Nero, the insidious adoptee, and from which he abuses his own mother (Tac. *Ann.* 13. 14). Agrippina no longer even hid the love of power that Tacitus hinted at earlier.

As for Britannicus, Nero first seriously considered him a pretender to the throne when Britannicus, during the Saturnalia festival, sang to a drunken audience a song that alluded to him being deposed from his father's throne. The intoxicated audience reacted, as Tacitus reports, with compassion towards the would-be emperor. The already mentioned outbursts of his mother, as well as Britannicus' temper flare-ups reinforced Nero's paranoia, which, after the events of Saturnalia, "erupted into hatred" (Tac. *Ann.* 13. 15). That is why Nero ordered the poisoning of Britannicus. The absence of a reaction from his advisors, Burrus and Seneca,

can perhaps be attributed to the rich gifts that, as reported by Tacitus, Nero gave his closest friends, who "hastily plundered the palaces and land" (Tac. *Ann.* 13. 18). The only question that remains is whether Tacitus considered Seneca and Burrus Nero's "closest friends".

After the murder of Britannicus, Agrippina allegedly began gathering allies from the Roman army and the city itself, hoping to overthrow Nero because, as Tacitus reports, she knew that, after Britannicus, "it was her turn" (Tac. *Ann.* 13. 16). Agrippina secretly attempted on several occasions to regain power in Rome, which was harming Nero's already damaged reputation, whereupon Nero decides to murder her as well (Tac. *Ann.* 14. 2–3). A freedman named Anicetus suggests a plan for the murder of Agrippina: a ship is to be prepared for Agrippina which, at some point during the voyage, would sink – this would certainly look like an accident at sea and no one would blame Nero for her death. However, this plot was unsuccessful because it was not executed well, and Agrippina survives. Nero, hearing that Agrippina is alive, is terrified of the possibility that she might take revenge on him. Both Burrus and Seneca were quiet for a while, before Seneca asked if Burrus should give the order to kill Agrippina. Burrus replies that the praetorians were bound by an oath to the entire imperial family, which is why the murder should be carried out by Anicetus (Tac. *Ann.* 14. 5–7), the freedman whose original plan failed. Meanwhile, Agrippina realizes that Nero tried to kill her by shipwreck, and decides to flee Rome to save herself. She sends a message to Nero and gets ready. Anicetus uses the arrival of Agrippina's messenger to carry out his plan: accusing the messenger of seeking to kill Nero in revenge, Anicetus has Agrippina's villa surrounded and then kills her, while disseminating the story that Agrippina attempted to kill her son and then has taken her own life out of shame. (Tac. *Ann.* 14. 8).

We have given the whole story of the death of Agrippina and Britannicus in order to understand probably the biggest stain on Seneca's political life. The murder was indeed ordered by Burrus, at the suggestion of Seneca, and therefore it must be said that Seneca is in some way guilty of the death of the woman to whom he was in-debted. If we wanted to defend Seneca, we could do so by saying that, as adviser to the emperor, he 'only' brought up the possibility that Agrippina be killed, which Burrus accepted. But Burrus, and especially Nero, could always decline this possibility.

However, this defense of Seneca seems far-fetched, so Ksenija Atanasijević defends Seneca in a different and probably more effective way, referring to the power that Nero had: "although many crimes were committed before Seneca's eyes, it is certain that he was not able to pre-

vent them" (2007, p. 344). Indeed, Seneca might even have not suggested the murder of Agrippina, but he could hardly have opposed it. In playing Seneca's lawyers, we can also refer to the Stoic principle that we should concentrate on what we can do, while we should be indifferent to what we cannot influence. After all, what would stop an emperor who kills his own family from killing one of his advisors?

Death

Which is exactly what Nero did when Seneca was accused of plotting against him. As in the cases of Britannicus and Agrippina, he reacted violently and unscrupulously – he sent a centurion to convey to Seneca his death sentence. Burrus had already died, as Tacitus notes, which also broke Seneca's power (Tac. *Ann.* 14. 52.). At that time, Seneca lived on his estate near Rome, where he was spending his 'unofficial' retirement. Upon the arrival of the centurion, Seneca received the verdict with dignity. He asked for a testament, and when it was refused, he bequeathed to his friends "an example of his life" (Griffin 2008, pp 58–59). The centurion cut Seneca's veins. Even with death slowly coming, Seneca kept calm and composed. He was taken to a steam bath to end the torture.

In his works, Seneca says that a person who has learned to die has learned to be free. For that person, death is nothing more than the last place of retreat. The dungeon, the guard, and the lock on the door are not a concern for him – he [always] has a way out (Sen. *Ep*. 26. 10). When we compare Seneca's practical actions during the pronouncement of the death sentence and the occurrence of death itself with his theoretical teaching about death, we can conclude that Seneca was indeed, as Fitch says, "doing philosophy" (2008, p. 3) in his last moments. Not only in the sense of the practical realization of the Stoic ideal but also of bequeathing the "example of his life" to the friends present. Seneca takes a completely indifferent attitude towards death, as an impending and inevitable fate. Such behavior at his dying hour, besides being admirable, is more importantly the Stoic ideal to which Seneca aspires in his works. All mistakes and deviations from his teaching, as well as their correction through the act of self-criticism, led Seneca to perfect his practical action to be fully harmonized with his teaching. He writes:

> Man is constantly different, and, in my opinion, it is the most shameful thing if he is not always equal to himself. Consider it something big to represent only one personality. But besides the philosopher, no one else represents only one man, all the rest are constantly changing. (Sen. *Ep*. 120. 22)

He reaches the desired harmony only at the moment of death, when he achieves the Stoic ideal, as Edwards formulates it: "harmony with oneself" (2008, p. 98). That is why Seneca's death is much more than a good example of calmness and composure – it is the moment when Seneca becomes one with himself, i.e., when Seneca– the– man becomes identical with Seneca– the– Stoic– ideal, to which he aspires in all his works.

Conclusion

The fact is that Seneca was an extraordinary Stoic. Claims that he was "never a man of rigid principles" (Griffin, 1992, p. 135), and that, as an advisor to one of the worst emperors in the history of Rome, he often had to make, as Griffin calls it, "compromise with evil" or even become an "instructor in tyranny" (*tyrannodidaskalos*) (2008, p. 54) are not unfounded. As we have seen, Seneca owes part of such inconsistency to his political involvement. In the balancing act between politics and philosophy, Seneca's death represents the tipping of the scale in favor of his adherence to Stoic philosophy, nicely summarized by Atanasijević (2017):

> Engaging in politics damaged the reputation and cost the eminent moralist his life. But Seneca's death threw a clear light on the essence of his character and redeemed all his earlier wanderings and inconsistencies in Stoic philosophy. Because Seneca died as a true Stoic sage (...). Seneca's death is decisive proof of the authenticity of his Stoicism and dispels all doubts about the correctness of his character and all accusations that he was vain, avaricious, and pliable to tyrants. (p. 9)

At the same time, Tacitus, as reported by Griffin, was 'fascinated' (2008, p. 39) by Seneca's combination of talent and flexibility in situations that required balancing between philosophy and politics. Such flexibility is an indicator of how Seneca fits in with the rest of the Stoic school. Ksenija Atanasijević believed that Seneca's ethical teaching is free from the strict regulations of older Stoicism (2007, p. 345), concluding that Seneca's doctrine also took human nature into account. Instead of putting a person's behavior into the matrix of strict Stoic doctrine, it should be possible to tailor Stoicism to the individual, to achieve the positive effects of Stoicism, as easily and painlessly as possible. The grace and understanding shown by Seneca are the reasons Atanasijević emphasized his excellent knowledge of human psychology. Such free-thinking is unique within the Stoic school, and at the same time represents the main characteristic of self-styled moderate Stoicism, of which Seneca was, without a doubt, a

pioneer. These conclusions give us a new perspective when it comes to the relationship of Seneca's philosophy to Stoic and ancient philosophy in general. The unexpected combination of strict Stoic rules and receptivity that Seneca offers, opens the door to a greater spread of the Stoic doctrine, which has indeed experienced a sudden revitalization in recent years.

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Ksenija Atanasijević –
Literature, Art and Feminism in Focus

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DOI 10.56461/ZR_2025.KA-ToT.99I

THROUGH THESES ON MEDIEVAL LITERATURE: THINKING WITH CONFESSIONAL VOICES

Abstract: This chapter aims to examine the role of identification as a foundational concept in the interpretive framework of Ksenija Atanasijević, specifically within the context of medieval (and) confessional literature. Atanasijević's theses on medieval literature are dispersed across a range of essays, fragments, reviews and portraits, necessitating a comprehensive examination. To undertake this analysis, I will adopt the typology and theoretical foundations articulated by scholars Toril Moi, Rita Felski and Amanda Anderson in their post-critical study triptych *Character. Three Inquiries in Literary Studies*, which explores the reader's perspective on literary characters. This approach marks a departure from formalistic literary analysis, wherein subjective inquiries in literature are tabooed. It is worth noting that Atanasijević's work serves as a pre-formalist precursor to this approach. By introducing the concept of confessions within literature, Atanasijević foreshadows the idea of an implicit author. Employing this strategic framework, Atanasijević elevates medieval texts to the same level as canonical European literary works, spanning antiquity to modernism and encompassing various literary forms, including poetry and novels. By presenting her theses on medieval literature through the lens of feminist criticism, Atanasijević skillfully deconstructs stereotypical narratives about the Middle Ages.

Keywords: confession, identification, character analysis, feminist essay, female portrait, medieval studies, interwar feminist criticism

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the examination of the theses on medieval literature found across the essays of the philosopher Ksenija Atanasijević. More precisely, the assertions are made through a wide range of genres and structural forms, spanning mere fragments of texts on unrelated topics to

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essays, reviews and literary portraits. These theses serve as a potential thematic unit in her body of work. Medieval figures, literary characters, and texts related to them (which are contemporaneous with the author) are often situated on the periphery of her oeuvre. Additionally, these medieval entities themselves frequently originate from the transitional period between the medieval era and previous or subsequent epochs.

In this study, I have chosen to emphasize the significance of their presence rather than the limited number of these texts. For the purposes of this work, I will establish a temporary thematic unit within Ksenija Atanasijević's body of work, specifically her writings about the Middle Ages, and assess the relevance of such a corpus. By examining her interpretations of medieval, confessional and medieval confessional literature, I aim to highlight one of her interpretive strategies: identification with confessional voices, which may provide a foundational element in her writing.

Atanasijević's selection of texts from the very early and very late medieval period is predominantly confessional in nature. Therefore, the reference to "confessional voices" in the subtitle refers, with the exception of Amanda Anderson's chapter in *Character: Three Inquiries in Literary Studies*, to voices that originate from the author, traverse the texts and resonate with the reader. When engaging with these texts, we are confronted solely with "the speaker, the voice within the text, the bearer of expression" (Zlatar, 2000, p. 157).

Academic interest in Ksenija Atanasijević's literary criticism and interpretative aspects has identified several significant thematic units within her oeuvre. Scholars have explored her "critical-essayist interpretation" of Serbian literature (Svirčev, 2020), delved into feminist interpretations of the ancient literary and philosophical canon (Šijaković Maidanik, 2021; Lončarević, 2021), conducted analyses of character representation in ancient tragedians (Milinković, 2022, p. 145), and engaged in investigative writing about women from the past (Koh, 2015). Of particular note is the special attention given to the author's writings concerning Teresa of Ávila, a 16th-century Spanish mystic and nun (Savić, 2020; Bašić, 2020).

Researchers have also drawn attention to the parallels between Ksenija Atanasijević's life and the biographical female portraits she authored, emphasizing compassion as a central theme in her work (Bašić, 2020). Additionally, parallels have been made with the life of Giordano Bruno, about whom she wrote her doctoral dissertation (Sekulić, 2020), and with the life of Teresa of Ávila (Savić, 2020). Biographic parallels are another clue for considering the role of identification as interpretive strategy. In this study, I aim to contextualize this autobiographical aspect of the author's writing within a character theory framework inspired by the works

of Toril Moi, Rita Felski and Amanda Anderson. Specifically, I will explore how Atanasijević's writing, by identifying points of connection, drawing parallels and establishing empathetic connections within texts, contributes to the development of a profound interpretative theory, as described by Svirčev (as cited in Juvan, 2020).

Middle Ages in feminist genres

The absence of a specific notion of the potential medieval thematic unit or opus in Ksenija Atanasijević's work is not entirely surprising. However, the Middle Ages stand out as a distinctive thematic entity in Atanasijević's body of work, as a literary period that exhibits a unique blend of metaphysical richness and deficiency in artistic autonomy, given that it predominantly serves a functional and non-fictional purpose (Anguševa, 2009, p. 17). In this paper, I direct the attention to several specific texts, or segments of individual texts, that pertain to this thematic realm. These include the text about Teresa of Ávila, a review of a monograph on the Spanish saint, a review of a collection of legendary texts about Joan of Arc, and finally, a text addressing confession in literature. In the latter, alongside a discussion of St. Augustine, the author provides a theoretical explanation of her understanding of confession in literature, the nature of literature itself, and the prerequisites for identification with a work of art. She delves into the relationships between the author, the work, style, form and more. Additionally, she asserts that formal properties and what she terms the depersonalization of writing are aspects that she finds less relevant, or more challenging to identify with.

All four of these texts are rooted in Ksenija Atanasijević's feminist activism, either as a way of documenting women's history, analyzing the portrayal of women in literature (particularly by male authors) or offering a unique perspective on literature itself. In this capacity, they have contributed significantly to "the formation of a local feminist essayist community with a philosophical character" (Koh, 2015, p. 224). These texts primarily fall within the realm of feminist, contextual and periodical genres, particularly the genre of female portraits (Barać, 2015), as well as feminist essays. Atanasijević's engagement with the Middle Ages, therefore, aligns with the broader aim of documenting women's history and addressing the need to "fill the void in thinking and writing about women in culture and society" (Koh, 2015, pp. 213–214).

The genre of the feminist essay, as described by Koh, has evolved into "a repository of collective memory for the achievements of women" (Koh, 2015, pp. 213–214). This particular variant of the genre has provided

female authors with a platform to reflect on their past and present realities and to interpret both (Koh, 2015, p. 212). These essays often carry a gendered perspective, given that they are typically written in the first person singular (Koh, 2015, p. 213). Moreover, they frequently adopt an "oppositional stance towards doctrinal, logocentric 'scholarly' opinions" (Koh, 2015, p. 213).

This methodological aspect is pivotal in Ksenija Atanasijević's approach to interpreting the Middle Ages, one that resists conforming to stereotypical discourses, particularly in her understanding of the link between confession and literature. Her approach within the feminist essay genre is developed in opposition to conventional knowledge and could, perhaps, equally be a reaction against traditional methods of studying literature. Consequently, it aligns typologically with post-formalist and post-critical theories found in works such as *Three Inquiries in Literary Studies* and other studies by its authors (Moi, Felski, Anderson, 2019).

Atanasijević poses similar questions to those raised by Moi, Felski, and Anderson, albeit she does so in a context that predates the formalist tradition in literary studies. Her questions are anticipatory and emerge within a different framework – a tradition of studying literature that has not yet been decisively shaped by formalism, depersonalization, and scientism. It can be argued that based on this foundation – feminist genres and feminist criticism that prompt considerations of the personal significance of the texts under examination – something productive also emerges for medieval studies. In essence, a distinct interpretive practice rooted in the identification with characters and texts evolves, guiding the selection of texts and enabling interpretations that steer clear of the pitfalls associated with stereotypical discourses about the Middle Ages.

Exceptions or paradigm?

In the context of the thematic entity under examination, it is crucial to highlight that Ksenija Atanasijević's writing on this topic diverges from the prevailing image of the Middle Ages during her time. This deviation contrasts with the prevalence of various medievalisms and narratives rooted in misconceptions about the *nature* of the Middle Ages. Atanasijević deliberately selects medieval texts that exist at the temporal fringes of the era – authored by figures such as Teresa of Ávila or St. Augustine. These texts, originating from the end and the beginning of the Middle Ages, often possess confessional and/or autobiographical qualities. Autobiographical discourse, while subject to change across epochs, consistently

embodies an "idea of humanity" (Zlatar, 2000, p. 37). This stands in stark contrast to the Middle Ages, which typically exhibit a poetics characterized by a desire for anonymity, functionality, and purposefulness – as a rare domain of subjectivity during that period.

Ksenija Atanasijević's second thematic choice pertains to the portrayal of female characters within the classical tradition, which notably includes her writings about Joan of Arc. Throughout history, legends surrounding the French warrior have offered fertile ground for subversive interpretations. Joan of Arc has been interpreted, among other, as a "saint, heretic, zealot, witch, prophetess, adolescent lunatic, androgynous proto-feminist, class equalizer, Marxist liberator," (Broome Saunders, 2009, p. 80). This intriguing and paradoxical figure holds much historical significance in the realm of women's writing, serving as an inspiration for women to explore their own social and political perspectives (Broome Saunders, 2009, p. 81).

The choice of themes from medieval literature is guided by two fundamental branches of feminist criticism, as outlined by Kolarić (2021). The examination of Teresa of Ávila's writings, at a specific juncture, constitutes an exploration of women's writings. This endeavor serves to introduce Teresa to Atanasijević's readership (Savić, 2020). On the other hand, the discussion of a female medieval warrior, who challenges gender stereotypes and whose portrayals allow for diverse and subversive interpretations, falls within the realm of criticism focused on the representation of female characters.

Confession and identification

In examining the theme of identification within Atanasijević's writing, I draw upon the typology and theoretical foundations elaborated in the triptych study, *Character: Three Inquiries in Literary Studies*, by Toril Moi, Rita Felski, and Amanda Anderson. Within this triptych, Rita Felski, in her chapter "Identifying with Characters," explores the notion of "a sense of affinity or shared response," which describes the connections we establish or experience with literary characters. While identification is a natural and inherent aspect of our engagement with characters, it often remains unspoken and carries a certain stigma. In the realm of literary theory, identification has been both taboo and stereotypically depicted as naive, sentimental, or lacking in reflexivity (Felski, 2019, p. 83). Remarkably, "there is a rich vein in cultural studies – especially its feminist variant – that is devoted to the complexities of how audiences identify" (Felski, 2019, p. 80).

The central idea proposed by the three authors is that the foundations of identification should undergo thorough reexamination, as this term has acquired a certain taboo status within the tradition of formalist literary theory. It has come to be seen as a potential pitfall and even as the antithesis to critical thinking (Felski, 2019, p. 79). As articulated by Toril Moi (2019), formalism here is defined as the belief that professional literary scholars should implicitly justify their engagement with a text based on its formal aspects rather than their personal relationship with it, thereby giving primacy to form over content. Moi's deconstruction of the representation of identification as naive or sentimental, and the associated taboos surrounding discussions of identification, challenges this perspective. Moreover, it underscores the significance of not only the act of identification itself but also what one identifies with and how that identification unfolds. Identification can take on various dimensions, ranging from irony to sentimentality, from ethical to emotional, and this process can shape a reader's ideas and values (Felski, 2019, p. 77). Ksenija Atanasijević's (1968) questions resonate with contemporary approaches, echoing the ongoing discourse on the complexities and nuances of identification in literary studies:

> In the realm of confessional literature we are faced with one question that cannot be ignored: why would it be necessary to consistently distance oneself from oneself and one's own subjectivity? Is it even necessary to always neglect oneself, to pass over oneself, as over a quantity that is neglected? Is it reprehensible to be true to oneself and sometimes to feel the impulse towards a pure confession clouded by no extraneous influences, as a way of relieving oneself of one's own joys or sorrows? Why should it represent superiority or, even, merit, to transfer oneself on every occasion to a neutral plane, in life and in literary creation? (Atanasijević, 1968, p. 41)

Various forms of identification become apparent within the conceptualization of confession, particularly in Ksenija Atanasijević's text of the same name. Confessional and intimate literature hold significant relevance within the discourse of interwar feminist creativity and the ideals associated with the 'new woman' (see Milinković, 2022). Importantly for our current discussion, "the hermeneutic context of confessional literature is shaped by metaliterary genres in which this type of literature is 'theorized'" (Milinković, 2022, p. 150).

Through her examination of the phenomenon of confession in literature, Ksenija Atanasijević positions St. Augustine alongside the canonical works

of European literature, primarily in conjunction with realist and modernist novels. But how does she establish this connection? For Atanasijević, confession is not tethered exclusively to documentary prose, intimate narratives, or first-person writing. It transcends genre and narrative situations, maintaining independence from these conventional boundaries. As articulated by Žarka Svirčev, the choice of authors she wrote about was not confined by generic frameworks (2020, p. 298), encompassing poetry, non-fiction, novels and drama as examples of confessions. Rita Felski provides insight into the relationship between confession and identification, emphasizing that personal stories resonate with others when they transform into paradigms or parables, thereby achieving transpersonal connection (2019, p. 82). This notion aligns with Atanasijević's observations regarding various deconstructive interpretations: "instead of interpreting, they pollute, and instead of enlightening, they grossly desecrate" (1968, p. 188). Atanasijević's approach seeks to ground interpretation in identification as the primary avenue for understanding.

Confession is not inherently self-referential, nor is it confined to the narrative level – it can manifest within heterodiegetic storytelling and across diverse literary genres, irrespective of the text's fictional status. As Anderson (2019, p. 132) suggests, literary narratives serve as conduits to diverse forms of existence and illuminate various modes of being through intricate formal solutions – an idea underscored by Ksenija Atanasijević as well. Moreover, some of the examples she mentions, such as Kafka and Rousseau, are considered "paradigmatic autobiographical texts within the European tradition," a category to which Augustine also belongs (Zlatar, 2000, p. 158).

Furthermore, the concept of confession, established in this manner, serves as the foundation for identification. The crucial question that arises is: identification with what precisely? Is it with the author, the work or the style (Felski, 2019, p. 93)? It appears that what Ksenija Atanasijević eloquently and anticipatorily discusses is the notion of an implicit author, abstracted from each of the aforementioned literary modalities. As an illustration, Atanasijević contends that Dostoevsky "pours out his credo in order to improve other people's lives" (1968, p. 47), essentially confessing himself in works like *The Gambler*. He also projects elements of himself onto characters like Prince Myshkin, Alyosha Karamazov and old man Zosima. For Rousseau, Atanasijević observes that his reservations disrupt the dominant discourse of confession; she asserts that Marcel Proust's work is constructed upon the foundation of confession; and adds that a more profound confession than Kafka's may never be written. In contrast, Beckett emerges and expresses himself through the actions and words of mentally

and physically impaired characters. According to Felski (2019, pp. 85–86), characters can merge with real individuals and possess a certain degree of nonfictionality, as identification with the character can blend into an association with the author. As Felski's essay implies, it is not solely the characters but also the actions, motivations, and the broader storyworld that contribute to this identification. Given the implied distinction between the author and their literary-styled confession, it is reasonable to label this as a proto-implicit author. According to Abbott (2009, p. 356), the implicit author represents "the image the reader constructs of the author while engaging with the narrative. In intentional interpretation, the implicit author embodies the sensibility and moral consciousness that readers gradually formulate to comprehend the narrative's intended effect and meaning, as envisioned by the author."

This conception does not align with a simplistic positivism; instead, it embodies an exegetical awareness that situates the concept of the implicit author within a humanist interpretation of literature, emphasizing its most optimistic potential for both authors and readers. Here, we witness the evolution of an originally formalist concept, which has taken on an anticipatory non-formalist, or humanist, character. This evolution is highlighted through an exploration of the fundamental question: why is the text significant to the author, and what exactly does she identify with? The author explicitly and articulately defines her relationship with literature as one of identification. In doing so, she delves into the essence of what makes literature meaningful to both the creator and the audience. Felski (2019) poses the question specifically regarding her reading of Thomas Bernhard:

> What exactly am I identifying with? Bernhard? Bernhard's first person? The characters? The seductive-coercive pull of his incantatory sentences? It seems impossible to nail down any definite answer. Author, characters, and words blur together to form a composite site of attachment. (pp. 104–105)

It becomes, in a sense, the entire realm of the works with which the reader and interpreter identify, and it is within this expansive territory that Atanasijević locates the author.[1] Given the understanding of confession in literature as an existential element that transcends the purely literary realm – aligning with the interpretation of literature in interwar

1 The blurring of the boundaries of autobiography and fiction will be characteristic of the second wave feminism (Felski, 2019, p. 85), while Atanasijević's vision can be connected to contemporary (quasi) autofictional novels, such as those of Dubravka Ugrešić or Karl Ove Knausgård.

feminist periodicals – the concept can also encompass modernist authors like Proust. In Proust's works, characters are deconstructed, dissolved, and swept away as unity yields to a multitude of shifting and unstable identities (Felski, 2019, p. 92).

Fiction, depersonalization and medieval confession

The typological affinities within Atanasijević's theoretical discourse, which predate the enduring formalist tradition, become notably apparent when examining her analysis of the Middle Ages. This historical period is often depicted as a complex and elusive literary terrain; whether approached with affirmation or criticism, it is seldom studied in isolation but rather through the cultural and interpretive constructs collectively known as medievalism.

Medieval confessions inherently carry the intention of being presented to others. And a prevailing theme within medieval literature is the transfer of authority and legitimacy from author to text. The very act of writing is regarded as a guarantee of the truthfulness and authenticity of the content. This literary poetics notably rehabilitate autobiographical discourse through the genre of confessions (Zlatar, 2000). Hence, it comes as no surprise that Atanasijević selects confessional voices from this particular historical era as the lone bearers of authenticity, with whom the reader can identify. She aligns the non-fictional medieval confessional narratives with antiquity, where confessional voices may have manifested in poetry, and modernism, where they take on novelistic forms. Atanasijević draws comparisons between medieval literature and other periods, such as likening Sappho's expressions to an "incomparably rapturous confession" of Teresa of Ávila and equating her inspiration to Sappho's, albeit channeled differently due to the differing eras in which they lived (1968, p. 42). Furthermore, she suggests that "Teresa fundamentally touches on the question that troubles both mystics and philosophers," inviting readers to contemplate the significance of life experiences, adding that "if we carefully examine the course of our life, each of us will see from experience how little we need to take into account the pleasures or the miseries that make up that life" (Atanasijević, 2008, p. 42).

Confession, as an authentic creation imbued with the persuasive power of lived experience, stands apart from fiction, which may lack the same sense of immediacy and freshness, even if it exhibits formal craftsmanship. In Atanasijević's eyes, fiction thus assumes the character of existential fiction: anything that does not emerge from genuine, lived experi-

ences. This perspective sheds light on what she likely finds captivating in the poetics of medieval literature: the inherent connection between poetics, history and truth, namely the intention to convey something that is existentially true. As Atanasijević writes, "The fundamental wisdom of the saint regarding the world and life finds expression in succinct perspectives, unquestionably etched with the highest level of experience and truthfulness" (2008, p. 169). What readers encounter in the works of selected medieval authors is not merely historical authenticity; it is instead an existential authenticity that possesses universal resonance. In contemplation, meditation and mystical ecstasy, personal distinctions dissolve, and the self transcends into a broader, collective realm. Within the framework of the medieval confession, "one's own self-development becomes a general concern, applicable to all and serving as an example for all" (Zlatar, 2000, p. 93). Although the theme of confession pertains to personal spiritual growth, it extends beyond the individual soul of Augustine to encompass the universal soul (Zlatar, 2000, p. 93).

Types of identification

Felski's writings highlight the multifaceted roles of fictional beings, portraying them as alter egos, ideal types, negative exemplars, moral guides, objects of desire, and even imaginary friends (2019, p. 91). This diversity becomes especially significant in the engaged writings of Ksenija Atanasijević, where the careful selection of characters from the past transcends the mere realm of literary constructs or a series of signifiers. In her readings, the establishment of identification with these characters unfolds through several avenues: allegiance, recognition and empathy are pivotal components of the author's interpretations. However, it's important to note that the fourth concept introduced by Felski, alignment, which pertains to the formal means by which texts shape a reader's or viewer's access to character (2019, p. 95), is explicitly rejected by Atanasijević. Her concept extends beyond the confines of specific narrative situations or the presence of narrativity within the texts she interprets.

Identification, as seen through the lens of allegiance, pertains to how ethical or political values – in essence, acts of evaluation – draw audiences closer to certain literary figures (Felski, 2019, p. 95). This principle aligns with the choices made by Ksenija Atanasijević when selecting examples from the tradition she wrote about. Allegiance becomes apparent whenever readers find themselves aligning with a character and embracing their perspective. In the analysis of texts about the Spanish saint, the term 'complicity' is employed (Savić, 2020). In the context of Teresa of Ávila,

Ksenija Atanasijević explores the significance of the societal framework within which an individual must develop, emphasizing that during the era in which Saint Teresa lived, this framework was crucial. In that historical period, initiative by women was primarily permitted within the realms of family or the monastery (Atanasijević, 2008, p. 170). She perceives medieval literature, in part, as historically determined. This perspective establishes a clear continuity between the concept of darkness that envelops the Spanish mystic and the challenges faced by women in Atanasijević's time. As noted by Barać, Atanasijević's writings delve into the enduring issues faced by women, including distrust, rivalry and underestimation by men. In response to these challenges, she crafts a group portrait of her female predecessors (2015, p. 127).

Recognition, as a form of identification, is noticeable in moments when the narrator, character or voice of the confessional discourse gains self-awareness or a deeper understanding of the world around them (Felski, 2019, p. 101). This is a prevalent approach in writing about the confessional discourse. However, perhaps the most distinctive form of identification in Atanasijević's writing is empathy – experiencing and responding with concern to someone's feelings. As Felski says, this concept splits into two parts: feeling with someone and feeling for someone (2015, p. 95). Empathy is particularly evident in Atanasijević's interpretation of the legend of Joan of Arc. It becomes conspicuous when the tragic aspects of Joan's story weigh especially heavily on the narrative, and when Atanasijević is emotionally carried away (Atanasijević, 2008, p. 208). Likewise, in the case of Augustine, the author describes how intensely he felt the aspirations and inexorable vibrations of his soul (Atanasijević, 1968, p. 43). Atanasijević also problematizes ironic identification with aesthetically problematic texts, such as Kafka's, by writing about their simultaneous unattractiveness and authenticity (Felski, 2019, p. 96).

Feminist Essay and Rumination?

The last form of identification, or "thinking with the characters," which we will briefly discuss, is the concept of rumination, borrowed by Anderson from psychiatry and introduced as a literary concept (2019, p. 128). Anderson defines rumination as a form of obsession that can result from moral shock or disturbance. Involving an attempt to come to terms with these situations, often entailing acute ethical dilemmas, it operates within a framework of 'moral time', a slow processing of profound experiences (2019, p. 128). Atanasijević was drawn to such modes of thinking, particularly highlighting them within the confessional discourse of

figures like Teresa of Ávila or St. Augustine. For instance, Augustine was wholly immersed in the search for some form of transcendent support, experiencing the contradictory aspirations and irremovable vibrations of his soul with intense depth (Atanasijević, 1968, p. 43).

Confessional discourse is akin to the expansive prose form of the novel, which is particularly well-suited for conveying the concept of rumination (Anderson, 2019, p. 133). Atanasijević also identifies elements of rumination, akin to preoccupation, within Teresa's writings, drawing on Teresa's thoughts for her own reflections. Atanasijević thus notes, "She fundamentally touches on the question that troubles both mystics and philosophers," and asserts that "we all think with her" (Atanasijević, 2008, p. 169). The complexity of rumination as a form of moral reflection (Anderson, 2019, p. 135) becomes evident through the passage Atanasijević cited in this brief essay: it is a prolonged process that permeates her various texts. The central focus is on the attitude toward a hostile environment and the moral quandaries it entails, such as the inner life's dramatic elements (Anderson, 2019, p. 139), a facet that Atanasijević particularly underscores.

Concluding Remarks

The confluence in Atanasijević of writing women's history and exploring the Middle Ages has engendered a dual shift. First, it involves probing into the lives and experiences of women during the Middle Ages, aligning with the discourse of the 'new' or 'modern' Middle Ages. Qualification of 'new' or 'modern' depends on whether we perceive her writing as an emphasis on the continuity between those eras and Atanasijević's contemporary context or as an investigative inquiry into marginalized facets of the period, such as women's lives in the Middle Ages. By selecting texts that carry discursively or thematically subversive potential and interpreting them through the lenses of two branches of feminist criticism, the author positions medieval texts alongside European classics. These chosen texts deviate from the prevailing images of the Middle Ages, which often rely on various medievalisms and narratives rooted in misconceptions about the era. It is noteworthy that the adoption of feminist genres allowed for the exploration of questions that only gained traction in the 1970s (Melve, 2017, p. 29).

The author undertakes a deconstruction of the narrative surrounding the romantic Middle Ages when delving into the portrayal of Joan of Arc, simultaneously introducing a narrative of the 'new Middle Ages' by shed-

ding light on the story of Teresa of Ávila. In her readings related to the Middle Ages and her subsequent dismissal of conventional interpretations due to the distinct nature of its poetics, Ksenija Atanasijević's approach to confession emerges as particularly enlightening. Her concept of confession aligns closely with literary theoretical paradigms, notably anticipating Wayne Booth's notion of the implicit author (2009, p. 356).

The concept of confession in literature serves as a unifying thread for various forms of identification, ranging from empathic to ironic. All the texts Atanasijević analyzes hold personal significance for her. Joan of Arc, among other figures and characters, can be particularly situated within this category, offering opportunities for subversive and existentially meaningful interpretations.

Medieval literature, which both encompasses a broader field and differs from the modern notion of literature, becomes amenable to this mode of interpretation through the lens of reading grounded in identification with the textual world, revealing the implicit author lurking behind it. Furthermore, the author's interpretation of medieval literature owes much to interpretive potential of her feminist criticism. While her selection of texts may not always follow the canon, it aligns perfectly with the explicit questions she poses: why should the Middle Ages hold significance for us, and which texts from it bear importance for me?

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DOI 10.56461/ZR_2025.KA-ToT.113R

KSENIJA ATANASIJEVIĆ AND RABINDRANATH TAGORE**

Abstract: Ksenija Atanasijević published no fewer than five articles on Rabindranath Tagore. The last one is among her final published articles, and appeared in a special issue of the journal dedicated to her. Atanasijević's interest in the Bengali poet has remained under-researched. It should be understood within the context of the poet's interwar image, in which he was hailed as a world teacher and universal messianic figure, a phenomenon referred to as Tagorism. Atanasijević contributed to this image of the poet in Serbian culture. Her views were, however, peculiar in some aspects since she tried to assess Tagore through his potential importance for feminism; at the same time, she criticized his version of Buddhism, defending what she saw as the purity of Buddha's message.

Keywords: Tagorism, messianism, feminism, Buddhism

Ksenija Atanasijević published five articles on Rabindranath Tagore. Even considering her prolific and varied opus, it is not an insignificant number. Moreover, one of her last articles, from 1970, is about the Bengali poet. It was published in a special issue of the journal *Philosophical Studies* that commemorated her work—and her choice of topic for this occasion was Tagore. All this calls for better understanding what Tagore meant to her. For a full comprehension of Tagore's significance in Atanasijević's writings we have first to contextualize the reception of Tagore in Europe, in Serbia and then relate it to other aspects of her work.

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** The paper appeared as a part of a larger chapter (in Serbian) in my book "Gde ruža i lotos cveta. Slika Indije u srpskoj književnosti i kulturi 19. i 20. veka" [*Where the Rose and Lotus Bloom. The Image of India in Serbian Literature and Culture of the 19th and 20th Centuries*], Belgrade: Fedon, 2023

The story is well-known: awarding the Nobel Prize in 1913 to Tagore caused sensation in Europe that surpassed a purely literary event. In the words of his secretary and biographer, "It was received everywhere with a shock of surprise and turned Rabindranath from an individual into a symbol—a symbol of the West's recognition of Asia's neglected humanity and its potential resurgence. Tagore was the first[1] to impress vividly on the intellectual consciousness of the West the fact—now amply demonstrated—that the 'mind' of Asia was living and would have to be reckoned with as a vital entity and not merely as an interesting specimen in a museum" (Kripalani, 1961, p. 121). Tagore himself understood his philosophical writing as a tool for familiarizing the West with living India, as he famously stated it in the preface to *Sadhana* (a Vedantic work published the same year he was awarded the Nobel), "For western scholars the great religious scriptures of India seem to possess merely a retrospective and archælogical interest; but to us they are of living importance" (Tagore 1913). The peak of his glory came after 1918, with Tagore's travelling and lectures around the world. Not only were authors like Yeats and Pound, Rolland and Gide, Zweig and Juan Ramón Jiménez, Frederik van Eeden and Jurgis Baltrušaitis, the composer Leoš Janaček and artist Nicholas Roerich, the young J. L. Borges (who met Tagore through Victoria Ocampo) enchanted by Tagore, *viśvakavi*, but many of them made contact and entered networks with each other thanks to their common interest in Tagore (Ivbulis, 1986, p. 134). He was hailed not only as a poet, but as a prophet and teacher. This prophetic image gained influence particularly in Germany (Kāmpchen, 1990, p. 112). However, soon afterwards, his popularity declined and oblivion followed—even W. B. Yeats and Pound who were the first to champion Tagore in Europe lost sympathy for him. The Indologist Igor Grbić recognizes the pattern he calls "Tagore effect:" the West is initially enchanted by an "authentic," "Oriental" piece (often a reflection of European literature, like English romanticism in Tagore), but then disgrace follows (Grbić predicts the same destiny to S. Rushdie and A. Roy; Grbić 2014; Grbić, 2018, pp. 55–58). Tagore's sudden success not only as a poet but also as a guru should be understood within the framework of European self-reflection following the catastrophe of a world war. The impression of a world breakdown cried out for causes, and they were often interpreted as a crisis of culture (which can be seen as a secularized version of the Biblical and medieval idea of sin and punishment). Benda's treason of intellectuals, Ortega y Gaset's rebellion of masses, Spengler's decline of the West were the most popular (and still remembered) concepts that emerged as the answers. But if this was the cause, then the

1 One could debate whether this is entirely true: Vivekananda and R. M. Roy were known before Tagore.

remedy could come from the spiritual renewal—like Berdjajev's new Middle Ages—or by the transfusion of fresh ideas from the East. Hermann von Keyserling and René Guénon were among the European intellectuals who expected such a renewal; the Upanishads and Buddhism articulated the European sense of longing for salvation in T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, with its final verse a repetition of the word *shanti*. Romain Rolland, respected (and vilified) for his pacifism during the war, contributed to the popularity of such an attitude with his books on Vivekananda, Ramakrishna and Gandhi—the latter also attracting world attention for his nonviolent philosophy. The cult of Tagore fitted into these expectations, building at the same time on a previous layer, starting with Romanticism, of an Indophile "oriental renaissance" (Schwab). Although Tagore wrote philosophical texts, as mentioned, his literary works, like dramas *Red oleanders* and *The Dam* (*Muktadhara*) expressed an anti-mechanicism that found a sympathetic ear among the European *Kulturkritiker*. Much later, Keyserling's son Arnold recorded how difficult it was to explain the influence Tagore and his father had exercised in that period; according to him, the two were the first to discover the spiritual unity of the world beyond national borders, unlike academic comparative research (Keyserling, 2018, pp. 156–158). It is debatable whether the younger Keyserling is entirely right in claiming such a primacy, but this attitude undoubtedly had resonance among those who sought a message of peace and universalism after the war. Still, Tagore himself did not have many illusions about European enthusiasm, comparing his idolaters to drunkards afraid of sober moments (as cited in Grbić 2018, p. 55); he once remarked to Rolland that people tend to scold former minions opining that they paid too much for them (Rolland, 1960, p. 144).

The European "discovery" of Tagore soon also reached Serbian culture: his poems started appearing as early as 1914 (in the journal *Narod*).[2] The writer Nikola Trajković testified to how exiled Serbian students in France during the war learnt Tagore by heart (Trajković, 1932). The journal *Krfski zabavnik* (an appendix of the official bulletin of the Serbian government in exile) published translations during WW1 comparing Tagore to "the victorious song of a young eagle" (XXXX). After 1918 Tagore's popularity only grew; the first books to appear were *The Gardener*; *Nationalism*; *The Stray Birds*; *The Home and The World*; *The Wreck*, although intellectuals also read him in other languages.[3] The peak of this popularity

2 Interestingly enough, there was even a negative reaction: *Radničke novine* [Workers' Paper] (June 19, 1914) criticized the suave and pessimist poetry of a member of the upper class.

3 In English, German or French. There were Croatian editions, too, and some works, like essays or the drama *Chitra* appeared in journals.

was the poet's visit to Belgrade in November (14–16) 1926, part of his European tour. Tagore was received as a celebrity, followed by the press, his lectures attended by *le Tout-Belgrade*. Meetings with the representatives of artist and intellectual cultural associations were organized (Pejčić, 1988). An artistic protest against him almost spoiled the solemnity of his reading: a group of young avant-garde poets, *Zenitists* interrupted by making noise and throwing leaflets. Yet, even they did so because of their Indophilia: they mistook Tagore for an opponent of Gandhi's, who they supported. For many who listened to Tagore it was an experience they remembered even decades later. For the poet, on the other hand, Belgrade was just another stop on a tour he was forced to undertake for financial reasons (Rolland, 1960, p. 225; Kripalani pp. 160 ff; 169; 188–190; between 1920 and 1936 he did not travel, lecturing only in 1931; Sykes, 1947, p. 111). The entire tour was commercial and the Italian part of it even politically manipulated (Petrović, 2011, pp. 156–159.)[4]

While Tagore's visit itself has been researched, the reception of his writing has remained surprisingly less so. The comparatist Svetozar Petrović dedicated two studies to this question (Petrović, 2011, pp. 135–168; for newer works: Data, 2019), concluding that in interwar Yugoslavia, Tagore perceived as a poet, not a prophet.[5] Judging from the translations (see Komadinić 1961; Grubić, 1984), this appears to be the case. But if we take the articles about Tagore published in that period, it is clear that he was seen as a messianic figure and a universal teacher. Petrović toned down this aspect, because the interwar reception had an ideological subtext both repellent to Petrović and officially condemned by the Communist philosophy at the time when Petrović wrote. A quote from the publicist Ljubica Sazdović-Dimović (1926) illustrates this view of Tagore, "a magnificent biblical figure: patriarch, prophet ... the look of his glittering eyes ... looked through our soul ... as if he looked into eternity" (pp. 2–3). The famous essayist Isidora Sekulić writes enthusiastically about Tagore as a mystic who continues the Upanishadic tradition, opening her paper with the line, "There is a moment when man closing his eyes with a hand sees the truth. That is the moment when he understands the Sacred Book from the East" (and so on for two pages before embarking onto his poetry; Sekulić, 1985, pp. 380–395). The writer Vladimir Velmar-Janković

4 It is telling that in a letter to L. Elmhirst Tagore mentioned he would visit "Yugoslavia, Serbia" (Tagore, 2005, pp. 339–340).

5 Still, his influence in poetry does not seem to be great (Petrović, ibid.) Exceptions are perhaps Desanka Maksimović (Vučković, 2012), the Croat poets Tin Ujević and Dragutin Tadijanović and Slovenians Alojz Gradnik and Oton Župančič (Gönc-Moačanin, 1996, p. 101).

hails Tagore's arrival as the revelation of spirit in the midst of a mechanical civilization (1926; 1927). The philosopher Dušan Stojanović sees in Tagore's personality (not work!) the personification of the eternal ideas of the East, like the fullness of life in harmony with the absolute, and joy given by the closeness to the eternal source of life (Stojanović, 1990, pp. vi-viii; Stojanović, 1927). Most influential, however, was Tagore's essay *Nationalism*, in which he judged nationalism as the manifestation of Western mechanistic civilization and, warning Asian nations not to accept it, he called for universal brotherhood. The book strongly influenced the Serbian intellectual movement generally referred to as panhumanism or Slavic-Indian humanism, which was a sort of Yugoslav messianism with universalist goals. These examples clearly show the extent of Tagore's stature. This entire complex of ideas can be called *Tagorism*, by analogy with similar interwar currents, like Bergsonism or Spenglerism. The image of Tagore as a sage is not merely a projection. Coming from a family that belonged to the reformist Brahmo Samaj movement, he was one of Neovedantin authors that marked Indian culture from Vivekananda to Radhakrishnan. In that sense, Serbian authors were not wrong seeing in him reliance on the Upanishadic tradition. That they tended to conflate Upanishads, Vedanta, and Neovedanta was quite another issue. Being fascinated with the *topos* of ancient India, they subsumed all these schools under the same umbrella, whereas Neovedanta is formed by modernism, social reformism, deviation from orthodoxy and politics (Kostyuchenko, 1983, pp. 155–222). Even though the image of Tagore as a thinker might not be wrong, it is, however, one-sided: after all, Tagore wrote comedies set in the contemporary Bengali milieu, and his novels such as *The Home and the World* or *The Shipwreck* have nothing prophetic in their plots. Some opine that such a European reception was caused by the poet himself who chose to present himself through the works he found to be most accessible to the Western readers who lacked a more profound knowledge of the Indian cultural setting (Ivbulis, 1986, pp. 122–123).

Tagore was identified with a very imaginary kernel of India, perceived as spiritual. He was read as the continuation of the ancient Sanskrit literature, although there is centuries-old tradition in his native Bengali (Petrović, 2011, p. 161). Europeans jumped from "mere Nalas and Shakuntalas" (in the words of Max Müller) to the living poet, but they understood him as the voice of antiquity and *topos* of "the spiritual India" promptly reappeared. A 1927 travelogue Jelena Dimitrijević, whose trip to India had visiting the poet as one of the main aims, testifies to the fact that Tagore was seen as a metonymy of the country: "Because all those details, climate, atmosphere, vegetation, landscapes, places and peoples are

a frame around Tagore's spiritual figure, just as all those gods and divinities in the shapes of humans and animals in Hindu temples are the frame around Brahma's sacred being" (Dimitrijević, 1928, p. 31).

The soil for Tagorism had been prepared: Serbian poetry of the period included a strong line that literary historians refer to as *cosmism*, inspired, among other sources, by the Upanishads (mediated, most probably, through Paul Deussen's interpretation). At the same time Serbian culture was strongly influenced by the reception of Bergson, W. James, *Lebensphilosophie*, and Russian religious philosophy creating a strong current of irrationalism: in philosophy it meant turning away from the academic philosophy of Branislav Petronijević, but it had a strong impact on literature too. However, Serbian Tagorism cannot be entirely seen as an offshoot of a European vogue—it had its own cultural traits, as the panhumanist reading of *Nationalism* shows: it is deeply marked by historical optimism prompted by the Yugoslav unification, unlike the reception of Tagore in Germany, a defeated country.

Ksenija Atanasijević was one of the authors who contributed to the formation of Tagorism. She wrote about Tagore as early as 1923, then in 1925, 1926, 1927, and finally, as mentioned, in 1970. Four articles are from the period of the poet's peak popularity, but the late text shows that the same topics recur over a great time span, revealing both her deep interest in Tagore and the stability of the image she had. Although some of these articles are of popular nature and published in dailies, and thus not entirely in-depth, they nevertheless contain Atanasijević's important views. Even those written for a broader audience are important for Tagorism, since they show the creation of his public image. In 1923, she published "A Visionary of the Present's Joy" where she analyzed Tagore's philosophical views, but also took a critical stance, as we shall see. In 1925 appeared a short article entitled "Woman in Rabindranat Tagore's Work." In 1926, a month after his visit, Atanasijević published "Rabindranat Tagore's Stay in Belgrade," a brief but exalted report, and the next year "Metaphysical Lyrics of India" with a general overview of his life and works. Finally, in 1970 she produced a longish analysis in "The Lyrical Philosophizing of Rabindranath Tagore," in which she partly reproduced passages from her first article. She made references to his poetic works (*Gitanjali*, *The Gardener*, *The Crescent Moon*), dramas (e.g., *Chitra*), novels (*The Home and the World*), philosophy (*Sadhana*), autobiography, and even to the German multi-volumed edition of his collected works.

Beside writing about him, Atanasijević met Tagore in person: she was among the intellectuals who received the poet in 1926. Her description of him is given in exalted words,

> The builder of the teaching that joy heals, ennobles, and pacifies, the preacher of the salvation that comes from knowing the immortal spark in the soul, an ethicist who brings harmony among people and obliterates the bitterness of mutual fracturing, he has come to us too. Of a prophetic figure, in a wide gown,[6] with the eyes like two dark burning stars, of clear forehead, noble nose and hair of pure silver, he revealed to us by himself the great truth of his country, that we are all made of the same metal, that we and all of nature have the same origin and same end because our ground is the unchangeable and eternal substratum of the world. (Atanasijević, 1927, p. 3)

Forty-three years later she remembered the poet in the same way: "Eyes like two burning stars, gaze withdrawn into himself, clear forehead, well-proportioned nose, slightly tanned face and hair and beard of silver color" (Atanasijević, 1970). During the meeting, she asked him what he thought of the women's movement:

> Full of transcendent patience, the philosopher answered all the questions perseveringly. He responded to me eagerly: he told me what he thought of women's movement for independence [...] Instead of feminism—poetry, exceptional and illuminated. The understanding of a woman as more personal and more esthetical than a man is interesting and artistically refined, but, sadly, inapplicable to us. Of course, I did not expect to hear anything similar to what is known to us about feminism. I knew that the poet came from a country where women of great eyes are silent and muted and where their awakening will not be achieved by European methods. (Atanasijević, 1926, p. 512)

In addition, it seems that she asked him also why he underestimated the problem of evil in his philosophy (Atanasijević, 1927). These are the fragments of the conversation she had with him and these personal impressions also contain the ideas Atanasijević developed in her articles. In the first place, she understands him as a philosopher-poet and a poet-philosopher; his poetry is metaphysics and his philosophy is poetry. Atanasijević makes no sharp distinction between the two categories. Perhaps already in this early formulation it is possible to see her understanding of philosophy as something broader than a strictly academic discipline—an attitude that, in the wider framework of her work, meant parting ways with

6 Tagore's clothing, that attracted the attention of Serbian public, was a mixture of Hindu and Muslim elements. His garments showed what he rejected in theory, too: Gandhi's hand made textile (*khadi*; Bharucha, 2006, p. 131).

Petronijević.[7] Moreover, she did not hesitate to call Tagore 'a prophet' and 'a sage' (1926). For her too, Tagore is a living voice of the ancient India. He 'devotedly guards' the tradition of 'forest sages and prophets', that is to say the Upanishads (Atanasijević 1923). Such continuity is for her the mark of Indian philosophy, unlike the European one. Atanasijević correctly identifies (Vedantic) monism as the core of Tagore's teaching, and thus the principle of unity and love he preaches (the ontological unity of beings leads many Neovedantins to pacifism, respect for life and empathy). But it would be too simple to say that Atanasijević succumbed to the commonplace view of Tagore as an ancient sage revived. Actually, she was aware of his modernist and reformist views. She notes that Tagore worked on bringing down the caste system, and is thus astonished at the reaction against him in Belgrade, obviously referring to the Zenitist demonstrations (1926); she also praises him for supporting pacifism, women's rights and social reforms. However, when it comes to some tendencies in his very philosophical views, she is more critical. As previously depicted, she challenged him on theodicy (a remark repeated in the papers, cf. 1970), seeing him as an optimist of cosmic joy. Indeed, theodicy is a problem of every monism. More importantly, she was very critical of Tagore's interpretation of Buddhism and that is the point where she quite forthrightly stands opposed to Tagore. Atanasijević concludes that Tagore presents Buddha's teaching as based on love: it is through love that self-liberation is achieved. However, that is for her a newfangled deformation of Buddha's original thought. Tagore, she reckons, perhaps did so to bring Buddhism closer to Christianity or German idealism. She does not refute that Buddha preached love for all creatures, but she emphasizes that such love should be understood as compassion. What the awakening Buddha spoke about is not love and joy but liberation from pain in nirvana. She reiterated the criticism in 1970 repeating the same formulation nearly half a century later: the truth resides in Buddha (even sharpening her view slightly, saying Buddha did not preach love, but only compassion). In the later article she was more specific concluding that Tagore's image of Buddhism was influenced by the Upanishads and their "cosmic joy" (perhaps referring to *ānanda*, as part of *sat-cit-ānanda* principle). It would be more proper to speak about Neovedanta as Tagore's context. Although (in her last article only) Atanasijević refers to Neovedantic authors (Vivekakanda, Radhakrishnan), she situates them in the tradition stretching from the Vedas through *Bhagavad Gītā*, without mentioning the modernist aspect of Neovedanta. Literature on Tagore confirms that he was influenced by

7 Petronijević himself taught a course on Indian philosophy 1912–1914 (Marić, 2013, p. 142).

Buddhism (unlike his contemporaries Tilak, Gandhi, Aurobindo, who all wrote about *Gītā*; Ray, 2018, p. 229), but he chose to present an idealized Buddha and the Upanishads as best "propaganda" for India and the East in the West (expecting that it could also affect positively the West; Ivbulis, 1986, pp. 122–123). Although taken by the prophetic image, Atanasijević did not lose herself in the platitudes of "spiritual East" but was prepared to offer criticism too (which further shows that, in spite of the lack of institutional Indology, there were some Serbian authors who were able to write critical articles on Indian topics).

Did Atanasijević reproach Tagore as a historian of ideas, concerned about the correct historical understanding of Buddha? Or was her concern about the purity of Buddha's teaching more instigated by her own philosophy? Undoubtedly, Atanasijević had great respect for Buddhism. She considered Buddhism to be the most philosophical religion (1929, p. 56).[8] The crucial difference for her is that Tagore was an ontological optimist, of cosmic width, who even denied the reality of death seeing joy in an eschatological perspective. (Such optimism should be attributed perhaps not to the Upanishads but again to the Neovedantic turn that, unlike Shankara's classical Advaitic monism, did not consider the phenomenal world to be an illusion. This is especially visible in Tagore's esthetics and appreciation of nature (Kostyuchenko, 1983, pp. 232–233). While Tagore's emphasis on love is something he shared with other Neovedantists, the importance of "emotional and esthetical perception of the world" is his peculiarity, according to Kostyuchenko). Atanasijević sides with Buddha as an original pessimist whose "axiological evaluation of the empirical plane" bears the truth (1970). Her choice of pessimism as a philosophical worldview caused her to side with Buddha and to disagree with Tagore.

In this polemic she also emphasized that the original notion of nirvana was 'nothing without content' and the lack of suffering. This deserves a short comment. There was a strong interest in nirvana in Serbian culture since the early 20th century, both in philosophical and religious thinking (Marić, 2013), and even more in poetry (the poem "Nirvana" by Vladislav Petković Dis is the most famous example of *nirvanism*, as literary historians refer to this current, but far from being the sole one). The prevalent understanding of nirvana was a negativistic one, under the influence of the European reception and the authors like Schopenhauer, Burnouff, Taine, Gobineau, and Renan (De Lubac, 1987, p. 163). Nevertheless, another interpretation of nirvana by Buddhist scholars (Oldenberg, Rhys

8 In 1933 she gave a public lecture on Buddha (*Pravda*, January 14, 1933).

Davids) was made known to Serbian readership too;[9] still, Atanasijević adhered to the negativistic definition. In the 1970 article she somewhat modified this toward a kind of positive definition describing nirvana as "the transcendent realm of all-liberating and happy peace" (XXX).

Another peculiarity of her interest in Tagore are the links she tries to find between his work and feminism. The question she asked him during his visit (the same one asked by Ljubica Sazdović Dimović) might look surprising. But if we account for the fact that Tagore was seen as a teacher, then it is no wonder that they expected answers to contemporary questions from him. While that may seem to be an anecdote, the articles return to the link. Her articles elaborate the topic. In 1925 she gives a kind of overview of the female characters in Tagore's novels and dramas. Atanasijević pinpoints that a common denominator of Tagore's feminine characters is the idea that women announce humanity's rebirth and a new culture, founded on mutual help and love instead of nationalism. Although she sees a certain conservativism in Tagore, unavoidable in the cultural setting, she concludes that Tagore sees a woman as 'more personal' and 'more esthetical' than a man. Women have interest in others simply because they are alive; it boils down to the idea of the unity of humankind, and, although Atanasijević does not trace the idea to its ultimate source, such a view can also be deduced from ontological monism.

In 1970, she returned to the topic of the woman's role in the emergence of a new culture that would rely on cooperation among nations, with an eye on her contemporary Indira Gandhi: "Did he forebode that one of his compatriots would be one of the first female leader of a country in the world" (1970, pp. 19–20). At the time when Atanasijević wrote this article, India and Communist Yugoslavia were close collaborators in the Non-Aligned Movement, with their two leaders, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and Marshal Tito even on good personal terms.[10] (Ironically, five years later, Indira Gandhi introduced a state of emergency marked by arrests of political opponents, enforced mass sterilizations, corruption and nepotism).

Finally, Atanasijević praised Tagore not for his views only, but for the very influence his poetry exercised on people, strengthening harmony, judging him to be more human and more compassionate than the other builders of modern culture. Although undeveloped, such remarks reveal

9 As early as 1914 Pero Slijepčević published an article in which he discussed the definition of nirvana as neither nihilism nor quietism but beatitude.

10 While the link Atanasijević makes can seem far-fetched, it is interesting that the historian Ramachandra Guha opines that Nehru's universalism (which helped Nehru in forming the Non-Aligned Movement) was inspired by Tagore (Guha, 2012).

her awareness of the ethical and practical aspects of his literary work (different from pure estheticism).

Atanasijević's first article on Tagore was published a year after her thesis on Bruno and already showed her distancing herself from her *Doktorvater* Petronijević. She started with critical respect for Tagore, then moved toward an exalted view, obviously under the influence of her personal experience. In her last paper, she returns to a more analytical approach, full of respect but also with a critical stance regarding a Buddhism determined by her pessimism. Her interest in feminism can be seen as her specific contribution to the interwar Tagorism. Another element sets her apart from her contemporaries: she did not merge Tagorism with national messianism, as the panhumanists did, although she was close to the message of *Nationalism*.

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Atanasijević's interest in the Bengali poet can be seen as part of her broader interest in Indian topics, which is understandable if Tagore is taken as a metonymy of India. And India was part of her interest in the Orient that also included China and Japan[11] and a contemporary movement like Baha'ism (as we can tell from a highly favorable review of a book about it, she published in 1935).[12] As a kind of an appendix, we will tackle her views on Indian thought through the example of reincarnation. For Atanasijević reincarnation is adopted as a personal eschatology: "Yes, souls wander from one form into another and the more personal some of them was, the more unavoidable it is for it to continue from century to century (Atanasijević, 1930, p. 43). (She even mentioned Torquemada's reincarnations.) Although the sources of this concept could be Platonism, Orphism, or Pythagoreanism, since the 19th century reincarnationism had been closely linked to the reception of Indian texts. This transfer of ideas often took place through "alternative," occult movements, especially Theosophy, for which India enjoyed a privileged place. The Serbian case was no exception: while educated people read Schopenhauer or studies about Indian religions, for the followers of the "alternative," reincarnation was a matter of personal conviction. The majority of Serbian spiritists were reincarnationists and after 1918 Theosophy and Anthroposophy gained

11 In 1937 she lectured on the spiritual life of the East, i.e., about the philosophy and religion of China and Japan *(Pravda*, December 16, 1937). Her view implied that Asian spiritual unity is contrasted with political reality: at that time Japan was waging war on China.

12 Although again, she criticized the neglect of thinking about evil in the world.

popularity. The notion of karma and reincarnation were not restricted to elite circles: for example, the daily *Pravda* published an interview with Krishnamurti (August 28, 1932) discussing precisely these topics. Reincarnation also appears as a motif in the literature of the period. As early as 1922, the poet Svetislav Stefanović wrote, "the ideas of metempsychosis and transmigration today are flooding our poetry and art" (1922). Indeed, reincarnation is to be found in the stories by Stanislav Krakov (*The Story of a Mummy*, *The Alchemist*), the poem *Metempsychosis* by Božidar Kovačević, the avant-garde novel *The Phenomenon Monkey* by Marijan Mikac and in the poetry of Nenad Mitrov heavily influenced by Buddhism. In previous research we wrote about two poets who were close friends with Ksenija Atanasijević: Jela Spiridonović–Savić (1890–1974) uses the motif a couple of times in her poems and fiction, and making it the central one in her long poem *Pergaments* (Radulović 2018). The mostly forgotten minor poet Zora Topalović (1908–1996) frequently wrote about reincarnation in her poetry and in the novel *A Girl from the Shore* (part of *Trilogy* 1964–1966). Atanasijević wrote the foreword to Topalović's longish *Metaphysical Poem* (published 1982, but written much earlier), in which she praises the author for the highest spiritual insights provided by karmic laws (Radulović 2020). We can once more situate Atanasijević within the context and again, as in case of Tagorism, her views are not fully explicable by it. In 1928 Atanasijević published an entire article elaborating her views on reincarnation, calling it "the most rational answer to immortality." It is superior to the "ontologically impossible" and "ethically cruel" idea of post-mortal reward and punishment. At the same time, she criticized progressive reincarnations —a concept advocated by Spiritism and Theosophy (although she does not name them), since "different forms of ugliness in the world cannot be explained otherwise but by previous deeds." (The progressivist concept of reincarnation was criticized in *Filozofski fragmenti*, too; 1929, pp. 33; 36; for her views on reincarnation, see Radulović 2023, pp. 93–94). Indian views of reincarnation, both Hinduist and Buddhist, do not include progress. It is a modification included in the modern Western esotericism, under the influence of positivism, scientism and nineteenth-century optimism. Thus, Atanasijević distanced herself both from Christian and from alternative eschatology. Nonetheless, she also stepped away from Buddhism in that regard. The metempsychosis she talks about preserves continuity of personality, personal immortality, while Buddhism renounces personality (the concept of *anātman*), seeing the phenomenal 'I' as a conglomerate of ephemeral psychological elements (*skandha*).

Finally, this Orientalist complex of themes should be understood not as a result of purely theoretical study, but Atanasijević's living experi-

ence and praxis. As I have shown in previous research, Atanasijević was a member of the Theosophical society of Yugoslavia (she enrolled in 1934 together with her life-long friend Zora Stanković);[13] in a Theosophical framework, she discussed joining Co-Freemasonry (Le Droit Humain obedience); she was also a member of the Belgrade branch of the French occult society Polar Fraternity, which believed in making astral contact with the Tibetan sages. After 1945 she was acquainted with the circles practicing yoga in Belgrade (Radulović 2017; Radulović 2021; Radulović 2023). Biographies of important people and intellectual histories tended to dismiss such activities as marginal or eccentric, which again reflects the tendency to exclude esotericism from intellectual history. Nevertheless, they are both an important element of Western culture, and, in the Serbian case, "alternative" currents are obviously part of the history of Serbian intellectuals in modernity. This also constitutes an integral part of Atanasijević's intellectual biography.[14] Given the special role of India in modern Western esotericism, a better understanding of such activities could help us understand her interest in the Orient. Furthermore, it reveals how multifaceted her work is. Interpretations of her oeuvre have focused on different aspects of her writing and activities—on Bruno and on ethics, on Greek philosophy and feminism. Her views on Tagore, India, and the East (including "the alternative" aspect) are layers of her work that have been under-researched. Recognizing them reveals her contribution to Serbian culture between the wars and at the same shows her work to be a complex whole. Her Oriental themes are entangled with her ideas on other subjects, and understanding this Oriental part adds a new dimension to the comprehension of her better-known ideas.

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DOI 10.56461/ZR_2025.KA-ToT.129B

KSENIJA ATANASIJEVIĆ AS INTERPRETER OF NJEGOŠ

Abstract: This chapter discusses the interpretations of the ideas in the literature of Petar II Petrović Njegoš by Ksenija Atanasijević. First, we present Atanasijević's findings in a chronological manner within the historical context of academic studies of Njegoš, with special attention paid to relations between her, Branislav Petronijević and Anica Savić Rebac. Further, we discuss the most important ideas and original findings of Atanasijević's studies of Njegoš, where we highlight the position of human existence within the context of religion, philosophy and mysticism, alongside the metaphysical question of evil. Finally, we present the position that Njegoš has among other philosophers and poets in Atanasijević's studies and her work in general. This text aims to closer determine Ksenija Atanasijević's position among the various interpretations of Njegoš and his writing, seeking to make her a more visible source for future interpretations of this Serbian poet.

Keywords: Njegoš, ethics, Serbian philosophy, Serbian literature, theodicy, mysticism, dualism, history of the ideas

Exploring the philosophy of Njegoš within the framework of Serbian culture

Ksenija Atanasijević conceptualized her research (the end product being the study entitled *Penseurs Yougoslaves*) in a time when she, together with several other philosophers, turned towards national (South Slavic) sources of wisdom as the basis for new philosophical concepts (Marić, 2014, p. 69). For Atanasijević, the history of Serbian philosophy is divided into the western (rationalist) and the eastern (Slavic) current (Marić, 2014, p. 70). It seems that she is more interested in the eastern current because she considers it more communicative, due to the origins

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and originality of this way of thinking. Her study, *Penseurs Yougoslaves* was written in order to present the intellectual heritage of the South Slavic nations (primarily Serbs), mainly emphasizing their originality and differences to the western intellectual canon. In addition, she highlights the arguments that promote the intellectual values of these peoples. The fact that the book was originally published in French indicates who the target audience was. However, when we think about the significance of her study in the Yugoslav (Serbian) context, several things need to be pointed out. First, at the time of writing, her opinion of Western Europe was not positive. These were the decades after World War I, which showed all the flaws and dangers of a Eurocentric worldview, typical of Western civilization from the period of the Renaissance or perhaps even before (Atanasijević, 1936, pp. 8–9). In her view of the Slavic nations, their culture and philosophy was that these cultures ought not blindly follow and copy the Western European models, which are usually neither relatable nor close to them. Certainly the historical context in which national cultures were developed in the eastern and western parts of Europe, had the role of determining the primary philosophical issues and their solutions. The characteristic of South Slavic nations is that in the modern age they have long fought for their political, national, and religious independence, often against Western Europeans and their Asian allies, such as Turkey (Marić, 2014, p. 83) – thus their historical experience is very burdensome. All of this could affect the choice of primary problems in the philosophy of the South Slavic philosophers, which can be seen by the fact that they have always striven to find an explanation of human suffering. As an innovative poet, Njegoš drew upon folk traditions, and so it can be said that his poetic self-awareness unites the personal human experience with collective memory and knowledge. Thus, it is clear why Njegoš was a representative figure of the Yugoslav (Serbian) national thoughts for Atanasijević. The fact that she chose him, declaring him the most important poet, and placing him at the center of her studies shows that Atanasijević, as a philosopher, understood her national culture, which is a vital factor, in our opinion, that enables her to present her culture to the foreign academic public.

The metaphysical in Njegoš's poetry

If we want to roughly group interpreters of Njegoš in the history of Serbian literary criticism by to their conceptual orientations and disciplines, Ksenija Atanasijević could conceivably be sorted into the group that sought to unite the philological and philosophical methods of interpretation. There are two reasons why we are considering her work in this context: first, because she primarily reads his poetry from the philosophi-

cal point of view (she begins with her own philosophy, and follows it up by explaining which aspects of Njegoš's work she recognizes as philosophical); and second, because her argumentation aligns closely with religious and other philosophical interpretations. We will compare her methodology with four other interpreters, to present the differences and similarities between them. We think that this would be the optimal way to understand the relations between these researchers and the various perspectives that can be employed to assess the intellectual heritage of Ksenija Atanasijević.

Njegoš as a philosopher: Ksenija Atanasijević versus Branislav Petronijević

From the perspective of the history of Serbian philosophy, there is a very interesting and significant difference in how Njegoš is perceived between Atanasijević and her professor, the Serbian philosopher Branislav Petronijević. Petronijević is acknowledged as the first philosopher who sought philosophical answers in the work of Njegoš (Marić, 2018, p. 139). And although he launched important theoretical and scientific issues in Serbian culture (such as the relationship between philosophy and poetry), the problem with his conceptions is their narrow approach to Njegoš and their diminishing results (Marić, 2018, p. 144). This can be seen in the reduced literary scope of Petronijević's analyses (he exclusively focuses on *The Mountain Wreath*): he is primarily interested in a specific issue – Njegoš's attitude towards Darwinism (Marić, 2018, p. 144). The particular properties of his interpretation stand in stark contrast to those provided by Atanasijević after him. What does Petronijević do in his interpretations? He focuses on universal philosophical issues, not taking into account the cultural and historical context, and without any attention paid to the actual figures[1] that are the main subject of his research (Marić, 2018, p. 150). It would seem that it is this consideration of Njegoš that Atanasijević has in mind when she says that anyone who adhered only to the principle on logic was doomed to intellectual darkness. Furthermore, Petronijević's way of thinking can lead to similar misconceptions in others (Atanasijević, 2005, p. 26). There are two main points that separate their opinions – one is the issue of pessimism and the other is the issue of theodicy in Njegoš – B. Petronijević believes that Njegoš is a pessimist because he gave up on the notion of an immanent God, while Atanasijević believes that Njegoš solves the problem outside the field of logic, and thus is not a pessimist (Marić, 2014, p. 91).

1 That figure is, of course, Njegoš.

Njegoš as a religious thinker: Ksenija Atanasijević and Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović

Notable among interpreters of Njegoš's religious and philosophical thought is Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović, who in 1911 published a book titled *Njegoš's Religion* (*Religija Njegoševa*, Knežević, 2018, p. 60). According to notes by future interpreters, the book was a first attempt at trying to respond to the meaning of religion for Njegoš, in the context of his own spirituality and writing, and Velimirović's book attempts to resolve the many problems that arise in this regard (Knežević, 2018, p. 60). Let us compare the starting point of his interpretative methodology to that of Atanasijević. First, they are completely different when it comes to objectivity: Bishop Velimirović approaches Njegoš subjectively, intending to systematically reconstruct and present Njegoš's thought, so Velimirović fully immerses himself in the role of the hero which he is to interpret (Knežević, 2018, p. 61). By contrast, in her short study on Njegoš, Atanasijević uses her critical method to objectively approach the text, its author and the origins of the text. However, their views do not complete diverge, agreeing on the following point: Njegoš is, according to them, a poet who creates his works almost exclusively from the strength of his life experiences and feelings. In addition to the assumed limitations of such an approach, Velimirović is the first who discovered many religious layers in the works of Njegoš, which interpretation will be taken up by many other subsequent researchers. At this point, we should emphasize that there is a strong connection between this interpretation and the Platonist and original idea of preexistence, as well as a connection to Manichaeism and Stoicism (Knežević, 2018, p. 69). It turns out that, among pre-World War II interpreters, Atanasijević was one of the first to try to bring these complex conceptual systems closer to a well-known idea of Njegoš as a poet and philosopher. Bishop Velimirović, following his own views in relation to Orthodox dogma, asserts that Njegoš affirmatively solves the problem of theodicy, believing in God's presence in the world (Marić, 2018, pp. 91–92). In this respect, the Bishop is closer to Atanasijević than Petronijević. Despite her distance from the religious and dogmatic interpretation of evil, Atanasijević's reading of Njegoš is much closer to a theologian's point of view than a philosopher with whom she once had much in common. This divergence of opinion has its roots in the ideas the two philosophers studied, and can also be understood through their differing contexts.

Njegoš and European culture and literature: Atanasijević, Schmaus and Rebac

When comparing Atanasijević with other interpreters of Njegoš, it is important to note that her essay, "A View of Njegoš's Though" ("Jedan pogled na Njegoševo mislilaštvo," from 1937) came out after *Study of The Ray of Microcosm by Njegoš* (1927) by Alois Schmaus, but before Anica Savić Rebac's *Njegoš and Bogumilism* (1951) and *Njegoš, Kabbalah, and Philo* (1952). Unlike the texts by Schmaus and Rebac, which are relatively lengthy and independently published, Atanasijević's text is considerably shorter and part of a larger study published under the title *Penseurs Yugoslaves*. This fact underlines the difference in intention of these three authors: while Schmaus and Rebac provide detailed philological and philosophical interpretations of various literary problems in Njegoš's poetry, Ksenija Atanasijević places Njegoš in a much broader context that encompasses the entirety of Serbian[2] philosophy. Similar to Schmaus and Rebac, Atanasijević reads *The Ray of the Microcosm* (*Luča mikrokozma*) and *The Mountain Wreath* (*Gorski vijenac*), both considered Njegoš's important works. This methodological and conceptual perspective also conditioned the shortness of Atanasijević's essay. Despite the length, however, she agrees with the themes presented in Schmaus' and Rebac's studies: dualism, mystical philosophy, the problem of evil in the world, as well as biographical issues surrounding Njegoš. Nearly everything that Schmaus and Rebac discuss is also present in Atanasijević's essay. What then are the differences between their studies? Atanasijević devotes most of her argumentation to personal (and existential) experiences that can be read in the lines and stanzas of the aforementioned epics. While this aspect was not absent in the other two authors' texts, the primary focus of their studies is the problem of Njegoš's poetic and philosophical originality. Based on Atanasijević's text, it is possible to assume that she had read the studies of Bishop Velimirović and Petronijević, and probably Schmaus' study, which mainly deals with the relations between Njegoš and the European classics of Milton, Dante and Goethe. On the other hand, in her research, Rebac, who scrupulously explored Platonist, ancient and esoteric layers in those books, truly delves into the domain of the history of ideas (Lompar, 2018, p. 182). In our opinion, there is a very important, deep and conceptual similarity between her results and those of Atanasijević, which we will discuss presently. For now, it is important to say that, compared to the other

2 In those times the name Yugoslav was used, but nearly all of the philosophers and poets from her studies declared themselves as Serbs.

two authors, the issue of potential sources in Njegoš's two main epics is secondary for Atanasijević. She writes about the cultural substrates and consciousness, mentioning famous mystics, but without dwelling on finding specific links between them and Njegoš (which aligns with the general topic of the study itself). Even more important is that her approach is in agreement with her opinion that all mystical experiences, though similar in nature, are always the results of an individual's plunge into the self; which implies that the source of Njegoš's philosophy is his own existence.

The history of ideas: Ksenija Atanasijević and Anica Savić Rebac

We previously mentioned that we consider Atanasijević to be ideologically close to Rebac because both sets of research of Njegoš stem from the domain of the history of ideas. This opinion is corroborated by a study in which Milo Lompar analyzes the intellectual contributions of Rebac's interpretation of Njegoš's poetry. Lompar's study shows that some of the features attributed to the historians of ideas could also be attributed to Atanasijević. The first and most general refers to anyone who deals with changes in ideas and their interpretations during moments of cultural development (Eriksen, 2013, p. 7). Atanasijević dealt with many questions in the context of national philosophy, deliberating which ethical questions are the most common, and she handled these questions by following the ways they were resolved in folk literature, the works of Dositej Obradović, Božidar Knežević, Njegoš, as well as the works of modern Serbian poets. Unlike Rebac, who did not particularly pay close attention to the history of national mentality as a branch of the history of ideas (Lompar, 2018, p. 182), the studies of Atanasijević enter the domain of representing the Serbian, Slavic and Balkan mentality. By interpreting the various layers of literature written by Njegoš and other Serbian poets, Atanasijević demonstrates an exceptional interpretation of ideas and opinions, as well as the ability to understand their cultural and historical context. And she infuses her research and interpretations with her own philosophy which is an important feature of cultural historians (Eriksen, 2013, p. 11). She additionally chronicles the history of two motifs (good and evil), which is another aspect of the cultural historian's vocation (Eriksen, 2013, p. 19). Rebac does not mix ideological discourses and problems into her scientific research (Lompar, 2018, p. 182), while the case of Anatasijević is such that our judgement of it can influence how we perceive her shift towards eastern philosophy. In our opinion, although some of her ideas can be used in politics, generally politics is just outside its purview. The vital difference

in their approaches to studying Njegoš is that Rebac values the literature that she interprets implicitly (Lompar, 2018, p. 183), while Atanasijević does so explicitly.

Njegoš from the perspective of Ksenija Atanasijević

A human existence in history

Ksenija Atanasijević sees Njegoš as a man with a trying existential situation who attempted to exhaust the potential of his mind to its very limits, so that he could shed light on the problem of living in a world with evil (Atanasijević, 2005, p. 17). His problem was that he was the sovereign of a very small state, which had been part of Serbian territory in the Middle Ages, before the arrival of Ottoman Turks to the Balkans. He had a double responsibility: toward a state that he ruled, but also toward a much broader national community with whose suffering he sympathized. This situation can be characterized as a borderline case because, at that moment, Njegoš and his country faced an existential problem. Of course, the mention of borders in the context of philosophy is associated with the notion of Karl Jasper's boundaries, and we can think of these borders as a possible perspective for the interpretation of Njegoš's works (*The Mountain Wreath*, *The Ray of Microcosm*, *The Fake Tsar Stephen the Little*). And although Atanasijević's essay cannot be said to make references to Jasper's philosophy, it focuses on human existence, and by using logic and independent thought, it generates the use of some distinctive existentialist terms. Thus, from the composition of this essay, we can conclude that for Njegoš the existence in such a borderline situation is the first prerequisite for fulfilling unconditional requests and for meeting God (or in Jasper's terminology – transcendence), ideas that will remain central to Jasper's subsequent studies (Jaspers, 1973, pp. 162, 154, 168).

Theodicy: Mystics as an answer to human questions about God and evil

Although Njegoš's religiousness was not disturbed by the question of God's presence in the world, his approach to this problem, according to Atanasijević, is not orthodox, but mystical, because his cosmology in some aspects is different from the Christian dogma (Atanasijević, 2005, p. 18). She values this approach more than the rational one, because the mystical journey involves the deepest plunge in the essence of phenomena, and as such, it allows salvation. The path which Njegoš takes in order to come to,

what Atanasijević called, "an esoteric notice" begins from the original pessimistic awareness of human existence. In that pessimistic perspective, a human is powerless, full of deep flaws and is thrown into a pitiless nature governed by an all-out war (hence Petronijević and predecessors linking Njegoš and Darwin). But for Njegoš, man is a being torn between the lowness of matter and the immortality of the soul. If a poet rested at this conclusion, it would mean that existence was meaningless and that there was no belief in good itself. However, since Njegoš is, in Atanasijević's view, *the one who seeks God*, she observes that he chooses to continue his faith that the spirit is more valuable than the material part. (It can thus be said that theodicy is the most important point and problem of Njegoš's philosophy). It follows that the entire universe is managed by a higher mind: some phenomena that previously functioned as indicators of permanent chaos, are now seen as manifestations of harmony. When man encounters such a law, the human spirit itself, while still connected to the material life on Earth, can find something worth striving for. This is the essence of Njegoš's representation of heroism, which is refined by metaphysics and can become the universal essence of human life and existence in general.

What is the result of the philosophy expressed in *The Ray of Microcosm* and *The Mountain Wreath*? As Atanasijević writes, the result lies in achieving "transcendent places where the only acceptable thing to do is to examine human existence on Earth" (Atanasijević, 2005, p. 19). Specifically, in her reading of *The Ray of Microcosm*, Atanasijević emphasizes the idea of the preexistence of the soul – noticing that Njegoš equalizes the forces and arguments of God and Satan who fight for power in the Universe. Njegoš's dualism (in which spirit is good, and matter is bad) was the direct result of his reflections on the problem of the presence of evil in God's world, in which it was impossible for spirit to have anything to do with evil, and thus evil had to be wholly transferred to matter (Atanasijević, 2005, p. 25). This is how, in Atanasijević's opinion, Njegoš solved the problem of theodicy in his philosophical poetry.

The source of ethics in a world with evil

For Njegoš, God's cosmos, as an expression of poetic harmony, is infinite. This means that in Njegoš's texts, the cosmos is not unlike the "harmony of spheres" (influenced by Pythagorean philosophy). We see that Atanasijević, as well as Bishop Velimirović, pointed out the role of poetry and poets in the world, which for Njegoš was similar to God's. What is clear and established is that the central principle of metaphysics and ethics within Njegoš's philosophy is God himself is an "eternal and inexhaust-

ible life source for the survival of the Universe" (Atanasijević, 2005, p. 25). The way Njegoš shapes and understands the principles of ethics is very important for the philosophical research of Atanasijević: her philosophical preoccupation was ethics with a metaphysical-mystical basis, which she understood as a path from initial human weaknesses, through practical moral training, to the final ethical equilibrium within the field of transcendence (Petrović, 2006, p. 9). For the purposes of this chapter, it means that Njegoš the philosopher is conceptually close to Atanasijević's philosophy. Namely, when she turned away from the intellectual philosophy of Petronijević, she oriented herself toward the practical application of philosophical problems (Marić, 2014, p. 91). Although she knew ancient philosophy very well, she reasoned that its detachment from religion made it in some way incomplete (Marić, 2014, p. 119). This also applies to ethical issues, because although she wrote about Socrates, the Sophists, Epicureans and Stoicism (Marić, 2014, p. 119), she also draws attention to eastern wisdom, which united philosophy, religion and literature (Marić, 2014, p. 119). This approach shaped her opinion that human behavior cannot be evaluated and explained without insight into transcendence. Following eastern thought, which is represented by Dostoevsky (Marić, 2014, p. 119), Atanasijević believes that Njegoš managed to resolve the question of human destiny, in which man has submitted himself to a force higher than any human (the exact opposite of the Sophist principle of man being the measure of all things). This also means that Njegoš did not set boundaries to rational knowledge, and did not deny the existence of God, as Petronijević claimed. What is extraordinary about Njegoš is the mystical element of knowledge and experience that he attempted to present through the language of poetry.

Njegoš among the Serbian philosophers

We come to the question of Njegoš's position in the pantheon of Serbian philosophers and poets, as chosen by Atanasijević. When it comes to philosophers, Njegoš and Božidar Knežević are the ones who went furthest in resolving the question of human existence on Earth, precisely because they took God as the supreme principle in their way of thinking. There are further similarities between Atanasijević and the other two philosophers. First, there is the fact that both of her essays about these philosophers can be seen as a polemic with Petronijević, which we can see from their conflicting opinions on the philosophy of Knežević (Marić, 2014, p. 93). Nevertheless, Petronijević still considers Knežević a great Serbian philosopher; and although Petronijević seems to appreciate Njegoš

more, he denied the poet the status of great philosopher. By contrast, Atanasijević is consistent in her evaluations of the intellectual contributions of the philosophers, both Njegoš and Knežević, who, in her opinion, represent the eastern way of thinking. Unlike Petronijević, she believed that an existential approach to larger philosophical issues is better than an intellectual one, as the former is not separated from life experiences and practice (Marić, 2014, p. 95). Petronijević's inclination to consider philosophical questions purely intellectually, according to Atanasijević, leads to the aphoristic (unsystematic) thinking that resonates strongly with the ordinary man. As an example of differences in philosophical approaches, she contrasts Hegel with Pascal, Schopenhauer, Dostoevsky and Tolstoy (Marić, 2014, pp. 96–97). For Atanasijević, what connects Njegoš and Knežević is their striving to establish ethics in humanity, thus resolving the issue of immortality of the soul (Marić, 2014, p. 97). They come to the solution by two different paths: Knežević deductively and Njegoš inductively (Atanasijević, 2005, p. 17). They nevertheless come to the same idea of the universal reconciliation between man and cosmos, which is a reality that exists beyond the domain of the rational and logical, but is also by far superior (Atanasijević, 1937, p. 11).

Ksenija Atanasijević in the history of Serbian literature

Njegoš among the Serbian poets

When it comes to Njegoš among Serbian poets, Atanasijević classifies him in the same category as Jovan Sterija Popović, Đura Jakšić, Milan Rakić and Sima Pandurović, and her criteria are the same as the ones she uses for the group of Serbian philosophers. Her insights and argumentation concerning the relations between these authors are very important from the point of view of Serbian literary history. The main reason her approach is so crucial is that by "connecting them to a single poetic line" (Svirčev, 2020, p. 301), she notes the poetic and conceptual continuity of Serbian literature, which turns out to be a key problem of its history. Of course, she does so from a philosopher's perspective and on a quantitatively small sample, but it does not make her insights any less valuable. On the contrary, we can say that it shows her exceptional research intuition. Moreover, this accomplishment connects her on a deeper level to the European existentialist tradition of literary interpretation. This connection manifests above all in her choice of authors, those most successful at expressing views on an individual's life on Earth, but with a tendency towards a negative or pessimistic outcome. Further, arguably Njegoš is

the least pessimistic among these poets, because the metaphysical point of view is much stronger for him than for those coming after him – maybe because they were grounded in non-religious, Stoic ideas (Sterija and Rakić), or are simply and radically individualistic (Jakšić), or else are modernists (Pandurović). However, if each of them simply retained their pessimistic attitude toward life, Atanasijević would certainly not value them as she did, because ultimately each of them overcame their initial pessimism in their poetry by entering the field of transcendence (Svirčev, 2020, p. 301). This shift in the poets' attitudes fulfilled the necessary condition for Atanasijević to perceive them as outstanding philosophical poets in Serbian literature and culture, able to come to an ethical resolution of human existence in the world.

Researching Njegoš: past, present and future

When it comes to "Njegošology," we will emphasize a few things. First, the passage of time has not disproved the arguments that Ksenija Atanasijević made and it has not influenced the cohesion of her conclusions on Njegoš's philosophy, making her studies comprehensive and current. This is not negligible, because some great literary critics have failed in interpreting these aspects of Njegoš's poetry. We must mention the fact that Pavle Popović has completely neglected the metaphysical aspect of *The Mountain Wreath* (Nikolić, 2018, p. 171), which certainly diminished the commentary's aesthetic and conceptual value (and oriented its future interpretations!). It is also important to note that Popović was a member of the committee that wrote the report on Atanasijević's work and consequently got her expelled from the University of Belgrade (Marić, 2014, p. 47). An important limitation of her analysis of Njegoš is the fact that the corpus she used to discuss Njegoš's pessimism, did not include *The Fake Tsar Stephen the Little*. It is in this poem where one can observe that Njegoš's pessimism borders on nihilism, calling into question the belief in God's immanence (which is the ideological summit of Njegoš's two previous pieces of writing). This neglect is not a problem stemming from Atanasijević as a philosopher and interpreter of literature, but from overall Serbian culture, and in a broader sense "Njegošology," which was silent about *The Fake Tsar* until 1998 (when Milo Lompar published the first study about it). Yet, although her interpretation of Njegoš was suppressed (much like the rest of her writing), it is still, by its content and concepts, one of the most important and impactful Serbian interpretations of Njegoš. This is what makes Atanasijević a model interpreter of the thought and legacy of Njegoš in Serbian culture and literature.

Conclusion

As a final assessment of the contributions that Ksenija Atanasijević made to interpreting Njegoš, we can say that she, above all, expressed the hermeneutical quality inherent to the best interpreters of poetry and philosophy: the ability of the interpreter to adapt their personality to that of the poet, while providing an interpretation that will be relevant to the understanding of that specific poet and simultaneously to the understanding poetry and philosophy in general. Atanasijević based her interpretations on her own views of nature and the essence of philosophy, thus recognizing Njegoš as a Serbian cultural figure eligible to represent Serbian intellectual heritage as a genuine Eastern European, and yet capable of providing universal and practical understanding of the human condition. By conducting her research, in this personally inspired hermeneutical dialogue, Atanasijević has left an authentic and representative view of Njegoš in Serbian culture and in "Njegošology."

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DOI 10.56461/ZR_2025.KA-ToT.141Z

VISUALIZATION OF KSENIJA ATANASIJEVIĆ IN ALEKSANDRA LALIĆ'S FASHION DESIGN

Abstract: The proposed paper provides a pioneering interpretation of the Serbian philosopher Ksenija Atanasijević's life, work and image through the framework of fashion studies. As such, it observes the ways through which her struggle with societal prejudices and gender bias of 20th-century Serbia, her authentic fashionable iconography and philosophical and ethical thoughts are visually and semiotically transposed – and transgressed – into the medium of fashion. The subject of the analysis will be three fashion collections that visualize the philosopher, by the Serbian fashion designer and art historian Aleksandra Lalić for her designer label LalicA: Comradesses, Wandering Womb and Bruno's Conception on the Threefold Minimum and Measure. The last, in an act of feminist emancipation, directly quotes Atanasijević's 1922 doctoral thesis defended at the University of Belgrade. By analyzing these collections, the paper will identify modalities through which the designer, both critically and polemically, reconfigures life, philosophy, looks, the feminism and antifascism of Ksenija Atanasijević into her aesthetic habitus. At the same time, Atanasijević's philosophical deliberations are seen as a possible tool in elevating fashion as a critical cultural practice in Serbia and affirming philosophy of fashion as a potential academic discipline within the corpus of national philosophy.

Keywords: clothes, fashion, fashion collection, fashion design, fashion history, feminism, philosophy, visual culture

"Women derive a pleasure, incomprehensible to the other sex, from the delicate toil of the needle." –

Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, 1850

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Introduction: Who is Ksenija Atanasijević? What is she?

Painted in 1912, the portrait of philosopher Ksenija Atanasijević (1894–1981) by the modernist painter Nadežda Petrović (1873–1915)[1] has long remained the principal representation of the trailblazing thinker, not only in the corpus of national history of art, but the entire visual culture domain in Serbia respectively.[2] The painting, executed in an Expressionist manner, portrays Atanasijević as a seemingly pensive, rather fashionable figure positioned against what we can assume is a snow-covered abstract cityscape. Instead of submitting her subject to the common iconographic conventions of the late 19th and the early 20th century representation of women by *displaying* her in the act of (un)dressing in front of the mirror, Petrović is permitting Atanasijević to think and contemplate outside. As the feminist art historian Griselda Pollock observed in her 1998 essay *Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity*, this *outside* is an unconstrained, open and more importantly, public space of freedom, which opposes and defies the norm of interior spaces as spaces designated for femininity (Pollock, 1998). Tied to this spatial symbolism, yet more intriguing, is the semiotics of the painting's language of fashion, as Atanasijević is depicted in a fashion repertoire common for the late Victorian era and the last decade of the 19th century when she was born, rather than the contemporary fashion of the moment of painting. Despite being painted from the waist above, we can see that she is wearing a two-piece day dress comprising a skirt and a bodice with a high boned collar and gigot sleeves pronounced above the shoulders, completed with a hat featuring a large bow.[3] Based on a 1909 photograph of Petrović, it is noticeable that similar fashion was to an extent still present in the 1900s Serbia, yet such fashioning of the philosopher could be, in light of this (un)intentional historical fashion error, interpreted along two lines. On the one side, it could be seen as both Petrović and Atanasijević's constriction as modern women – an artist and a philosopher – by 19th century bourgeois moralistic ideology which, to paraphrase Pollock (1998), reconstructs social spaces through the doctrine of separate spheres of public and private, resulting in a gendered division

1 The painting is part of the permanent collection of the Pavle Beljanski Memorial Collection in Novi Sad, Serbia.

2 Less well known is Atanasijević's portrait by the realist painter Uroš Predić (1857–1953) from 1917, belonging to the Fine Art Collection of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts.

3 The hat Atanasijević posed with for Petrović was brought from Paris by the artist for her sister, Mica.

(p. 67). On the other hand, such a presentation of Atanasijević by Petrović conveys an empowering and emancipatory – even subversive – undertone. Namely, it could be argued that Atanasijević is dressed in her 'uniform': a 'working outfit' worn by many suffragettes at the turn of the 20th century, when women's rights activism was emerging as a notable humanist orientation, as well as a certain form of primary occupation.

It is no surprise then that Petrović's painting has accordingly served as the visual identity of the conference held in 2019 at the Institute of Social Sciences in Belgrade, symbolically titled *Ksenija Atanasijević: My Deeds Will Talk About Me* (*O meni će govoriti moja dela*). Still, it would take another three years for Serbian academia to, for the first time, address this visually elusive philosopher – both her life and work and her image proportionately – through the lens of visual culture studies. The 2022 conference, *The Philosophy of Ksenija Atanasijević*, organized by Atanasijević's alma mater, the Faculty of Philosophy's Department of Philosophy, and held at the Rectorate Building of the University of Belgrade, it saw the first contributions to the scholarship on Ksenija Atanasijević from the fields of art history and fashion studies. Art historian Lidija Merenik focused on the portrait and the relationship between Atanasijević and Petrović, whereas as a fashion historian, I analyzed how Ksenija Atanasijević's life, work and image not only aesthetically inspired but were semiotically transformed in Aleksandra Lalić's fashion design.

In visual reconstruction of the image and the fashion persona of Ksenija Atanasijević, available sources are, understandably so given her persecution, rather scarce. Nonetheless, Petrović's portrait and several preserved photographs collected mostly from the press and documents in volumes by Ljiljana Vuletić, *Life and Thought of Ksenija Atanasijević* (*Život i misao Ksenije Atanasijević*, 2005) *and Ksenija Atanasijević: Ethics of Courage* (*Ksenija Atanasijević: Etika hrabrosti*, 2011) testify to a fashionable persona of modern sensibility. Hence, Merenik poses the same question as Pollock regarding the Impressionist painter Mary Cassatt, which is: *Who is Ksenija Atanasijević? What is she?* The premise of this question is that history and philosophy of fashion are seen as emancipatory tools which innovatively reaffirm Ksenija Atanasijević's monumental contributions to the culture and civilization of Serbia, including fashion. By focusing on Aleksandra Lalić's fashion design, predominantly collections that, some less and some more, touch upon Atanasijević, this chapter aims to illustrate the philosopher's hitherto unresearched influence on fashion as a critical cultural practice in Serbia. Following minor attempts to establish the philosophy of fashion within the Serbian academic framework, reduced to Eugen Fink's essay on fashion published in Danilo Pejović *New*

Philosophy of Art (*Nova filozofija umjetnosti*, 1972) and Lars Svendsen *Fashion: A Philosophy* (2004) translated into Serbian in 2005, the chapter also aims to diversify the national philosophical discourse by applying fashion studies to it.

Fashioning Ksenija Atanasijević's feminism and antifascism

Prior to initiating our analysis, it is important to note that Atanasijević, despite producing essays and criticism on other forms of art (most notably criticism of modern Serbian literature) and theorizing the imagination in *Philosophical Fragments I (Filozofski fragmenti I*, 1929) as a socially engaging concept able to transform human nature, she did not aesthetically or critically consider the phenomenon of fashion. However, as Agnes Rocamora and Anneke Smelik point out in their introduction to *Thinking Through Fashion*, theorizing fashion is dependent on one's ability to critically engage with a vast array of theories and concepts, often from thinkers who, unlike in some other fields of cultural criticism, have not themselves written about fashion (2016, p. 2). In other words, the lack of Atanasijević's own theoretical approach to fashion does not mean that her ideas cannot serve as the basis for thinking through fashion. Whether we think through fashion academically as scholars or creatively as designers, both orientations (should) intellectually and critically scrutinize fashion as a complex cultural process and, as the French philosopher Gilles Lipovetsky (1994) saw it, a social mechanism. Such intellectualization of fashion, especially with regard to either the historical or current body and gender politics, is not unknown to the Serbian fashion designer and art historian Aleksandra Lalić (Žarić, 2022a, p. 62). Philosophical methods of conceptual analysis, critical discussion and questioning are thus adjacent to Lalić's fashion habitus, consisting of designs that are case studies in deconstructing both traditional and contemporary perceptions of women and their positions within social structures. Visualization of Ksenija Atanasijević in her design should therefore not be taken as a process of mere iconographic transformation, but as one of aesthetic and semiotic argumentation that transposes – and creates – meaning through new visual units. While various questions concerning women's rights and sociopolitical and visual representation of women (primarily in Yugoslavia) permeate the designer's oeuvre since the beginning of her career,[4] the

4 Lalić's first collection from 2011, *Hair Dress*, was created from felted human hair as a way of challenging beauty standards and body requirements women are subjected to.

collections *Wandering Womb* (fall/winter 2017), *Comradesses* (spring/fall 2018) and *Bruno's Conception on the Threefold Minimum and Measure* (fall 2018),[5] presented at Belgrade Fashion Week, form a reconstructive triptych Atanasijević's life, work, image and above all, her struggle.

Underscoring antifascism and women's solidarity as its main themes, the collection *Comradesses* (*Drugarice*) draws inspiration from Yugoslavia's Antifascist Women's Front (Antifašistički front žena, AFŽ) and women partisan fighters in World War II, whose photographs were projected as background behind the runway. As antifascism lies at the core of Atanasijević's feminism and pacifism, this collection acts as a bonding material between the collections *Wandering Womb* and *Bruno's Conception on the Threefold Minimum and Measure*, connecting them on visual and semiotic levels. *Comradesses* could be understood in light of Atanasijević assertion that the starting point of feminism is abolition of socioeconomically and biologically imposed differences and inequities between human beings (as cited in Vuletić, 2011, p. 46). Translated into Lalić's fashion language, that assertion operates by visually erasing such differences. Women are taking over the men's job of freedom fighters; moreover, their uniforms are then deconstructed through fashion in *Comradesses*. In *Dressing the Resistance*, Camille Benda examined such dynamics, finding that uniforms separate resistance fighters from regular citizens in public space and encode visual cues that differentiate between friend and foe by identifying "the other" (2022, p. 123). By dressing up in uniforms, women are 'de-othering' themselves; by dressing models in uniforms-resembling designs, Lalić is cancelling the gaze which, according to Pollock, works to secure a particular social ordering of the sexual difference (1998, p. 66). Further, we are presented with fashion hybrids: entities that are men, women, fighters, models, beauty objects and agents of political change all at once. Visually and socially fluid and mobile, we are unable to transfix our gaze onto a singular meaning. This subversion, as Benda concludes, plays a key role when taking a conventional piece of clothing from those in power and undermining its traditional meaning becomes a new weapon for dissent (2022, p. 123). We can see this in Lalić's reconfiguration of partisan uniforms and the collar as a singular accessory omnipresent in the designer's fashion semantics that visually designates Atanasijević. A visual signifier denoting the image of the Serbian philosopher, taken from her

5 The collections *Comradesses* and *Bruno's Conception on the Threefold Minimum and Measure* were only ever given Serbian titles *Drugarice* and *Brunovo učenje o najmanjem*; we have translated them here for ease of reading. *Wondering Womb* was originally in English.

most referenced photograph,[6] the collar was introduced in the collection preceding *Comradesses*: *Wandering Womb*.

Proposed in ancient Greek medical texts and popularized during the Victorian Era, the wandering womb was the belief that a displaced uterus, which often needed to be fixed with forced pregnancy, was the cause of various medical conditions in women (Žarić, 2022b, p. 28). The title of the collection thus criticizes the notion that women's bodies are the bodies of the other and upon which psychophysical (especially sexual) violence is socially permitted. In Atanasijević's case, the symbolism of wandering womb as an attempt of the patriarchy to immobilize women – physically, sexually, emotionally, professionally, socio-politically – is reflected in fabricated affairs and accusations of plagiarism, both lesbian and mistress to a married man, which ultimately ended up costing the philosopher her university position. Lalić accentuates this by placing a red letter 'A' on her creations, referring not only to Atanasijević's surname and struggle, but to Nathaniel Hawthorne's 1850 novel *The Scarlet Letter*, in which the protagonist, Hester Prynne is accused of adultery and forced to wear the letter sewn onto her dress in an act of public shaming. The fact that Hester has to embroider the letter on her own makes this motif socially and aesthetically subversive. The society admires her 'feminine craft' even though it considers it a sin, thus exposing its own hypocrisy. The representation of the embroidering woman, as Laura Powell stresses in analyzing sewing and needlework in *The Scarlet Letter*, not only reveals the 'falseness' of the ideological impositions constructed around her gender, but also suggests that the practice of embroidery in fiction serves to criticize that ideology, opening a space of possibility in which women can negotiate (the extent of) their participation in the ideological constraints of gender (2011, p. 4). *Wandering Womb* is a *par excellence* critique of such ideological constraints, with the embroidered letter and the collar enabling the designer to masterfully carry out such criticism on the runway. In *Comradesses*, the collar of military uniforms is transformed into a stylized neckerchief (often red or blue), with a brooch resembling military orders attached to it. In *Wandering Womb*, on the other hand, the collar is white with embroidered or laced style lines, referencing the same collar in which Atanasijević was photographed. As such, the high boned collar Petrović painted Atanasijević with is abandoned in the favor of a more open and less constricting accessory. Researching fashion in Belgrade in the 19th and at the beginning of the 20th century, ethnologist Mirjana Prošić-Dvornić

6 The photograph is kept at the Museum of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Belgrade, alongside Atanasijević's diaries, correspondence and personal library she bequeathed to the Museum.

interprets high boned collars as the relics of false morality, exposing the neck through a round, square or V-cut collar, deemed immoral and even hazardous for women's health (2006, p. 333). Taken within fashion history, and beyond the timeframe of Prošić-Dvornić's study and Atanasijević's life, the collar manifests its full subversion as follows:

> Popularized by Coco Chanel, the white collar originates from elaborate ruffled collars of Queen Elizabeth I as the symbol of female power and perseverance. Milena Pavlović Barilli, who was, like Ksenija Atanasijević, accused of being an adulteress and lesbian, also wore it. A symbol of authority and education, the white collar further symbolized obedience in Puritan colonies in New England, while in the US south it connoted not only gender but racial inferiority, as it was part of the uniforms worn by female African American servants. In that regard, the white collar can be interpreted as a symbol of disobedience or rebellion. Around Atanasijević's neck, it becomes a quiet (sub)conscious protest; on Lalić's models it becomes a tool of empowerment and solidary, of questioning both past and present. (Žarić, 2022a, p. 63)

Through symbolism of the collar, *Comradesses* and *Wandering Womb* visually negotiate Ksenija Atanasijević by reconstructing her (almost erased) image, reviving her struggles as an antifascist and feminist, as imagined on the contemporary runway and in contemporary society. Visually less referential when it comes to the philosopher's image than the previous two, collection *Bruno's Conception on the Threefold Minimum and Measure* expands Atanasijević's struggle and ideas, as we will see, through her primary signifier: her philosophy.

On the Threefold Minimum and Measure (1591–1922–2018)

The collection *Bruno's Conception on the Threefold Minimum and Measure* (*Brunovo učenje o najmanjem*) marks the first (and thus far only) fashion collection in the national fashion system based on a Serbian philosophical thought (Žarić, 2022a, p. 62). By naming the collection after the title of Atanasijević's doctoral dissertation on Giordano Bruno's philosophical poem *De triplici minimo et mensura* (1591), defended in 1922 at the University of Belgrade under the supervision of Branislav Petronijević, the designer is not evoking the philosopher through her appearance or gender anymore (although she does not negate them), but is equating her with her life's work and most important aspect of her identity: her philoso-

phy, education and knowledge. Ksenija Atanasijević should be thought in the context of the social rehabilitation of *Bruno's Conception on the Threefold Minimum and Measure* (Žarić, 2022a, p. 63). Writing on the parallel fates and philosophies of Ksenija Atanasijević and Giordano Bruno, Nada Sekulić (2020) is of the belief that Atanasijević's choice to study this philosopher was driven by his uncompromising ethics, persistence and immense importance in spreading the enlightened Renaissance spirit and overcoming centuries of dogmatic thought (p. 195) – precisely the reasons for Lalić's choice of Atanasijević as her 'muse'. Both Atanasijević and Bruno defied imposed societal limitations and challenged academic norms. For this, they were discredited, persecuted and in the case of the Italian philosopher, burned at the stake for heresy. Due to such profound symbolism, it was the runway presentation in its own right rather than the iconography of the collection's materiality (as in the collar in *Comradesses* and *Wandering Womb*) through which Lalić channels Atanasijević this time.

The collection consists of aestheticized voluminous baggy forms that erase the conventional fashion silhouette, cover models in a protective layer of cloth and, like in *Comradesses*, hybridize the gender binary: pants/men/mobility – skirt/women/immobility (Žarić, 2022a, p. 63). This approach to design perfectly aligns with Bruno's belief that organic forms, including the human body, constantly change in their transition from one condition to another, as Atanasijević remarked in her dissertation (Atanasijević, 1922, p. 7). Following that remark, visualization of Atanasijević by Lalić is in this case entirely semiotic. In *Comradesses* and *Wandering Womb*, we read the meaning from the image; in *Bruno's Conception on the Threefold Minimum and Measure*, we visualize the meaning without the tangible manifestation of the philosopher's image. As such, the collection is also hybridizing Roland Barthes' three structures of fashion: technological (real clothing), iconic (image-clothing) and verbal (written clothing; Barthes 2010), with the designer resorting to visualizing, even conjuring Atanasijević by inviting us to engage senses other than sight through a multimedia spectacle becoming feminist performance. The dramatic text on Atanasijević's public persecution entitled *Ksenija A: Biodrama* by activist and author Marija Ratković was read aloud by the actress Vesna Paštrović, while the unconventional soundscape of the event was composed and performed by violinist and sound artist Manja Ristić. When fashion is presented as spectacle, radicalism lies in the behavioral implications of what is being shown (Clark, 2001, p. 17): we are hence seeing, hearing and *feeling* what it is like *to be* Ksenija Atanasijević.

Ksenija Atanasijević is therefore Bruno's minimum of Lalić's collection: the basis of everything, as the subject and object of nature and art;

furthermore, every fusion and fission start from the minimum and return to it (Atanasijević, 1922, p. 7). Bruno claimed, as the Serbian philosopher observed in her thesis, that all the opposites are cancelled in the minimum: odd and even, many and few, definite and infinite are all the same (1922, p. 8). The capacity of the minimum to erase all the differences provided Lalić with the opportunity to reveal Atanasijević as the subversive and fluid figure that she was, and to give her agency and mobility on the 21st century runway by addressing her immobility in the social reality of the 20th century. As ethics in both Bruno's and Atanasijević's philosophical systems pertains to a coherent metaphysical conception of the universe (Sekulić 2020), it is paramount, as Aleksandra Lalić (2018) stated in an interview discussing the runway show, to observe the collection in the context of local social currents. Seen this way, the runway performance presents a reckoning with public (lack of) taste, both aesthetic and ethical. Consequently, the collection becomes an aesthetic and socio-political tool for critique of past and present repression and hypocrisy, revealing them to be spaces in which Ksenija Atanasijević's philosophical contributions and her fight for human rights have been scandalized and almost entirely marginalized (Žarić, 2022a, p. 62).

Conclusion

In her book *Worn: A People's History of Clothing*, Sophie Thanhauser writes that in any historical period or region, to study a culture's conflicts and debates about clothes is to watch them approach the basic questions of civic life, including equality and power (2022, p. 292). The dynamics of clothes become narratives of our selfhoods, both private and public, as they enfold and contain our bodies and selfhoods in the most intimate of ways, and also manifest them to society which, in return, perpetually attempts to mold us to its liking. Applied to Atanasijević's life trajectory, Thanhauser's statement allows us to observe the visual and semiotic power of fashion, narrating both the oppression and perseverance of one woman's lived experience in 20th-century Serbia. Translated into the contemporary fashion design of Aleksandra Lalić, the philosopher's struggle remains relevant even in the 21st century, as she still has not received satisfactory rehabilitation in Serbian universities (Sekulić, 2020, p. 192). However, the transformative potential of Lalić's artistry is nonetheless positive as it creates a discourse of artistic (and academic) novelty and societal change by rendering Ksenija Atanasijević current through an unlikely practice of fashion design and its often sidelined intellectual capacities. As such, Lalić's collections inspired by Atanasijević do not simply summarize

or conclude the philosopher's life and reality. They restore her struggle to the present moment, as they draw both from fashion history and ongoing social inequalities, becoming a case study in affirming philosophy of fashion. Positioning Atanasijević within and against the primary visual sources of two paintings, several photographs, three contemporary fashion collections and the backdrop of fashion history allows a diachronic reading of her life and work through fashion. It is, however, important not to fall into the cliché of romanticization of Atanasijević when it comes the meaningfulness of her clothes, as fashion history (just like any other history) often does. Without actual preserved garments – an uncanny symbolism for a person whose mortal remains were destroyed along with her tomb – our contextual reading must be rather careful. To read clothes mindfully and accurately, Thanhauser continues, is to read the world itself: its systems and its system-level failures (2022, p. 293). Approaching Atanasijević through fashion studies exposes the failures of the system she lived in yet rebelled against, leaving us with the hope that, even if history has failed her, fashion history will not.

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DOI 10.56461/ZR_2025.KA-ToT.153C

A PORTRAIT OF ORTEGA Y GASSET**

Abstract: Reading only the title of this article, the first thing that comes to mind might be that it focuses on a particular work of art, more precisely, the image of José Ortega y Gasset, as represented in one form of visual arts. But such a conclusion would be wrong. The fact that this piece of writing is part of a collection of articles dedicated to Ksenija Atanasijević's thought suggests – evidently – that she is the author of that portrait. This genre is not exclusively the realm of artists, but also of philosophers and generally all those who primarily express themselves with words. A detailed reading of Atanasijević's article on Ortega y Gasset, more than half a century after it was first published, is complemented by her positions, presented in her other writings. A particular question at issue here is the affinity or similarity of these two thinkers' theoretical standpoints.

Keywords: Ksenija Atanasijević, José Ortega y Gasset, silence, painting, life

A portrait is primarily or usually seen as a non-verbal image that represents a particular person. However, it can also be made of letters and its subject need not necessarily be a physical person. Regarding its form, this genre does not denote only two-dimensional artistic representations and sculptures, nor, in terms of its subject matter, only individual human or living beings. There are also portraits made of words. They transcend acts of depicting the physical appearance of a person, although they can indeed be merely a representation of physical traits of the individual portrayed, and his or her mood or character.

Discourse can have a representational function. It can also be painting by language. Using words, it is possible to create the impression that a person is present even when they are actually absent, to achieve vividness

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** This chapter is an excerpt from the article "Portret u rečima: Ksenija Atanasijević o Hoseu Ortegi i Gasetu," published in the journal *Theoria*, LXVII/3, Beograd, 2024, pp. 87–104.

of representation. In such instances, language rivals the visual arts. On the other hand, it is legitimate to represent a person through their work. Such is the case with philosophical or intellectual portraits. To make such a portrait means to reflect on something by portraying someone. In addition to the fact that such a text can include a biography of the thinker to whom it is dedicated, it also renders a portrait of that thinker by examining their writings and problems they were preoccupied with. A gallery that contained all such words would have to be extremely spacious.

Ksenija Atanasijević wrote texts that could be described as portraits, herself using the word "sketch" when providing them with titles. One such article, "Humanist Thought of the Spanish Philosopher José Ortega y Gasset" was published in the journal *Savremenik* (Atanasijević, 1967). As can be seen from the title, the article focuses primarily on Ortega's theoretical positions, not his visual representation rendered with words. For this reason, it is a philosophical portrait. If someone unfamiliar with Atanasijević were to learn that she created "a portrait of Ortega y Gasset," they would probably think that she was a painter or a sculptor who produced a portrait of a person. That conclusion would be wrong not only because she was not a visual artist, but also because the idea of the portrait resists such simplification.

During his lifetime, José Ortega y Gasset was painted by at least two artists. Painter Ignacio Zuloaga made two portraits of him. The first one is from 1917, and is now kept at the Cervantes Institute in Paris. Done in charcoal on canvas, this painting shows Ortega in full figure, sitting on a chair, with the El Escorial palace behind him, looking straight at the viewer, that is, exchanging glances. In the other painting done by Zuloaga, the philosopher is also sitting in a chair, his head shown in three-quarter view. On this oil painting, he has his hands crossed in his lap. However, in this representative portrait from 1935, which is now part of the collection at the Complutense University in Madrid, there is a pile of books in the background, instead of the royal palace. It is quite possible to see them as buildings or monuments. Moreover, eyeglasses are sticking out of his jacket pocket, while his hands rest on a book in his lap. The atmosphere in the paintings gives the impression that the philosopher is thinking about what he has read.

Attention should also be drawn to another portrait of Ortega, made by Joaquín Sorolla y Bastida (the names of the artist and subject are in the upper right corner). This portrait is held at the Hispanic Society of America Museum in New York, and it was painted approximately one year after Zuloaga's first portrait. This painting also shows Ortega as a young man, in his mid-thirties. Just like Zuloaga's latter portrait, this one is char-

acterized by the motif of books, an iconographic detail indicating that the portrayed person is *un homme de lettres*. More precisely, a number of books are painted in the lower left corner of this composition. They are piled up on the desk at which Ortega is sitting. There is an open book in front of him, while he supports his head with his right hand in a posture of pensive mood. The whole painting looks very vibrant, which indicates the vigor of his reflections and the dynamics of the captured moment. Although these descriptions I have provided are brief and inevitably lacking, the reader can imagine these portraits, just as they can look at them at any time, that is, look at their reproductions, if not the originals.

It is possible to imagine other instances of visual creations without seeing them first-hand. Preceding the aforementioned portraits, in 1912, Nadežda Petrović made a painting of Atanasijević, who was very young at the time. This oil on cardboard, now part of the Pavle Beljanski Memorial Collection in Novi Sad, is dominated by shades of blue, the color of contemplation, and the portrait shows Ksenija outdoors, in the snow, with an extravagant hat on her head. About five years following Petrović's painting, Uroš Predić did another portrait of Atanasijević. In terms of its iconography and composition, this painting is similar to Sorolla's portrait of Ortega, done at about the same time as Predić's. Namely, the painted model is shown leaning upon the table, supporting her head with her right hand. She does not look out, but rather somewhere upwards, beyond the painting frame. Part of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts Collection, done in the style of academic realism, it draws on the humanist tradition in painting, the art of silence, although the painting was made after the one by Petrović (which follows the principles of a more modern style and contemporary poetics).

In her article on Ortega, Atanasijević refers to painters that the Spanish philosopher wrote about, such as Ignacio Zuloaga, also El Greco, Velázquez and Goya. All of them painted portraits that have a significant place in the history of art. Some of these portraits have even achieved canonical status, because the history of European painting would not be the same without them. In return, Ortega portrayed some of those painters in the form of essays and studies. In particular, he wrote at length and in detail about Velázquez, as well as about Goya. For a person who thought through language and devoted his life to letters, it is perhaps most well-suited to be portrayed in words, so as to bring to life his personality and understand what he created.

Atanasijević's text about Ortega saw the light of day the year after it was written. The article opens with a chapter that sets out Ortega's intellectual biography. This section gives an account of the philosopher's

education, his academic career, political and other activities, followed by his books and his writings in general, characterized by a great variety of topics. Atanasijević places particular emphasis on his philosophy of culture and his essays, and finally provides a conclusive appraisal of his work. Although a commendatory opinion prevails throughout, the article does not hold back from being critical. The penultimate paragraph of the first chapter is actually a late portrait of the philosopher, a description of the look on his face. This sentence, in its entirety, that is, this picture painted with words, gives off a rather dark atmosphere:

> The last photographs of Ortega y Gasset show the elongated face of the philosopher, utterly worn-out by illness and all the trials and tribulations he endured in his life, with large, sunken, sad eyes (Atanasijević, 1967, p. 236).

It is indeed interesting to wonder what motivated Atanasijević to delve into Ortega's philosophy and to write such a detailed and comprehensive article about him, to spend a significant portion of her time studying his ideas. Why him, and not some other philosopher? First of all, both Ortega and Atanasijević were deeply interested in the topic of life itself, and human life in particular. In that respect, their theoretical positions are anthropological in nature. Both of them saw the opposition between the rational and the irrational in understanding of the world and the human being as an essential problem. The title of her article already makes it clear that humanism is something recognized as a fundamental value in the work of the thinker to whom the text is dedicated.

Their theoretical positions were shaped to a great extent as a sort of dialogue with vitalism, that is, with what this term encompasses. The question of the pre-rational in the process of apprehending the real should not be disregarded, but neither should the question of the structure and dynamics of human life. It is an open question whether reason is the basic principle according to which human beings actually behave and act. However, both thinkers believe that one must act in accordance with reason, that is, its postulates, in morality and politics alike. The author of the article "Neither Vitalism nor Rationalism" claims that he has nothing against reason as such, but rather rationalism as a doctrine, its "blindness," and argues that the rational and vital complement each other (Ortega y Gasset, 2005, p. 722). In *The Meaning and Value of Existence: Axiological Considerations*, we read that reason is the "regulatory principle of all life," even if it is only a "secondary human power" (Atanasijević, 1968, p. 37). Life and instincts, that is, everything that is encompassed by the irrational, are

forces that the reason must reckon with. An individual can think over this and other phenomena from a personal perspective.

I would here like to elaborate three points that seems to me interesting and significant.

1) A large portion of the text on Ortega's writings is dedicated to the text "Silence, the Great Brahman." There are certainly reasons why this essay, written in 1928, was given priority over many others. Some of his writings are not mentioned at all – it would surely be impossible to write about all of Ortega's essays in a single paper, given that at least one entire book would be needed for such a task – while others are referred to only through mention of certain places and observations, without extensively examining them in detail. Such is the case with his essay "Meditations on the Frame."[1] We can assume that there were two basic reasons for Atanasijević's decision to comment on the essay "Silence, the Great Brahman" more extensively, although we can never be absolutely certain about what goes on in someone's mind and what their motives are. The first reason is that Atanasijević understood the merit of the essay itself, the quality of the ideas contained in it and the profoundness of its insights. We can see this by the praise explicitly given to this piece of writing. The second reason lies in the fact that Atanasijević also wrote about the phenomenon of silence herself. She did this in the second book of *Philosophical Fragments*, which deals with questions belonging to the realm of ethics. Therefore, it is obvious that both authors shared an opinion about the importance of this phenomenon, in the sense that it deserved to be the subject of careful examination.

Among other things, this Ortega's essay deals with interpersonal relationships and the need to refrain from saying certain things about other people. Over time, through contact with someone, what we observe and get to know about that person becomes settled in us, and these observations mostly remain unspoken. The extent of knowledge acquired and accumulated over time is proportional to the intensity and profoundness of the silence. "The more we know, the more we keep our silence and the more we isolate ourselves" (Ortega y Gasset, 2004a, p. 726). On the other hand, and more or less simultaneously, Atanasijević writes about the sig-

1 At the beginning of this text, before focusing on a painting in a golden frame, vivid descriptions are given of two classical portraits, or rather photographs of those paintings, hanging on the wall in the room where the author writes his meditations. On these oils, that is, their reproductions, male and female figures are portrayed. Placed on opposite walls, these two portraits are apparently facing each other. At certain moments, it seems as if they are having a "silent dialogue" (Ortega y Gasset, 2004b, p. 432).

nificance of refraining from speaking. "One must keep quiet about things that are inconvenient to say, things that will be hurtful if spoken of, things that will be stupid to say" (Atanasijević, 1930, p. 114). It is the "politics of silence" she is speaking of in this place. In that regard, the position of the human being corresponds to that of a stone, that is, an inanimate thing incapable of speech. Needless to say, refraining from speech is not the same as silence, as the latter is not necessarily a consequence of the absence of someone's words.

That not everything can or should be said to another person, despite or rather precisely because what we know about them keeps multiplying and growing, is a matter of good taste. Refraining from saying what should be left unsaid – in Ortega's opinion – is a social convention that ought to be followed. Atanasijević sees the attitude of keeping silent as a sign of nobility, that is, a way of keeping a healthy and tactful distance from the people surrounding us, in addition to the fact that this attitude brings inner peace and fullness of existence. What is the reason for keeping silent? Atanasijević criticizes Ortega for not adding that "the crucial motive that drives us not to tell anyone anything of what we have learned about our fellow human beings: our fear of unfathomable and extremely unpleasant consequences we could face for such threatening honesty" (Atanasijević, 1967, p. 248) The civilizational framework in which we find ourselves "teaches and encourages us not to hurt each other" (Ortega y Gasset, 2004a, p. 723). However, there is no explicit mention of fear itself.

Atanasijević also focuses on the observation according to which what we know about another person also includes the way such person sees us. In that case, who is the author of the portrait we are looking at? Are we its creators or is it the person in whose behavior and acts directed at us we recognize the image of ourselves? Furthermore, Atanasijević translates and incorporates Ortega's words on this matter in her article. She quotes his claim that "our personality is deformed in others" (Ortega y Gasset, 2004a, p. 725). Atanasijević translates here the Spanish *figura* with the Serbian word *ličnost*. It is well-known that this word, which comes from Latin, also means an artistic representation of a human being. Moreover, the word *idea*, as used in the sentence "if I reveal to you the idea you have about me, you would be surprised..." was replaced by the word "image." The figure, thus, becomes a personality, while the idea turns into an image. In any case, the question remains to what extent it is possible to enter inside the mind of another person. Intersubjective relations are a very complex matter.

Not everything deserves to be left unsaid. "We should abandon the method of keeping silence only when it is beneficial for us to make some-

thing known. And there are such instances" (Atanasijević, 1930, p. 114). Ortega believes that there are certain individuals who should use the knowledge they gain about people they live with to make it known on principle. In his own words, "I believe that every man capable of meditation should complement the books written within their profession with another kind, which would impart their knowledge about life" (Ortega y Gasset, 2004a, p. 725). Atanasijević's *Philosophical Fragments* seem to be precisely such a book or something very akin to it. Composed of two volumes, this book – although not only this one – is a sublimation of one person's life experiences and insights, a written testimony about human nature, as seen from a personal perspective.

2) Silence and speech also permeate the world of art. When considering and describing their character, pieces of art and literature can generally be divided into silent ones and those that speak. Furthermore, ineffability is the feeling evoked by certain works of art due to their aesthetic or other qualities. The essay, "The Dehumanization of Art," which is also examined by Atanasijević in detail, deals precisely with what certain works of art and literature from the early 20th century were saying to Ortega, including ones that are silent and whose qualities cannot be completely communicated in words.

In his essay from 1925, Ortega observes that certain contemporary trends in art require special knowledge in order to be properly understood, which is the reason why not everyone finds them communicable. An average person, or rather a person with insufficient education, remains "blind and deaf" to the notion of "pure beauty" embodied in such works of art (Ortega y Gasset, 1968, p. 6). Of course, most people have healthy eyes and ears. The point of that metaphorical statement is that such people are unable to understand what they see, read or hear when they encounter such works.

When it comes to the way artistic creations are usually perceived and experienced, it is necessary to become detached. According to Ortega's pedagogy of seeing, the attitude needed to properly perceive more radical artistic creations of his time can be explained precisely in the case of portraits. When looking at a painting of a certain person, we should not imagine that we are seeing someone standing there in front of us "in person and see instead a portrait – that is, an image, a fiction" (Ortega y Gasset, 1968, p. 10). In other words, it is the work of art itself that matters, as an inanimate and artificial object, despite its subject represented as if alive. From that point of view, the portrayed individual gives way to the portrait itself, the signified to the signifier.

Indeed, it is quite possible to imagine someone's portrait painted entirely in abstract forms, in which the features of the portrayed person's face are unrecognizable, just as other parts of their body or "living forms" in general. In such a case, the title of that composition could serve as an indication of what is represented on such painting and which genre it belongs to. The radical stance on the genre in question in the field of the visual is referred to in the following passage:

> A traditional painter painting a portrait claims to have got hold of the real person when, in truth and at best, he has set down on the canvas a schematic selection, arbitrarily decided on by his mind, from the innumerable traits that make a living person. What if the painter changed his mind and decided to paint not the real person but his own idea, his pattern, of the person? Indeed, in that case the portrait would be the truth and nothing but the truth, and failure would no longer be inevitable. In foregoing to emulate reality the painting becomes what it authentically is: an image, an unreality (Ortega y Gasset, 1968, p. 38).

Such a painting is a paradigm of what this essay is about. This extreme example is an illustration of what is referred to as 'artistic art'. Ortega also calls it "new" or "young" art, an attribute that makes sense given that the philosopher was dealing with phenomena from the world of art occurring at the time of writing. One should pause before naming something that still has not reached its final stage or exhausted itself, and even then, because the name is by itself a limitation of a given phenomenon, just as it serves to articulate and reveal it. When Atanasijević refers to those artistic tendencies, she calls them "modern art" in general, although Ortega does not mention this term in "The Dehumanization of Art." Is it a good determination of what is elaborated in the essay? Given that irony, abstraction and play are some of the main traits of stated works of art, perhaps it would be better to use the term 'avant-garde' instead as by comparison, modern art is a much broader notion.

Based on everything mentioned so far, it follows that, generally speaking, seen from a certain historical distance, Atanasijević believed that modern art, which came before the avant-garde had not produced many works that had great aesthetic quality. She held the opinion that "there are so few things of true value in modern painting" (Atanasijević, 1967, p. 50). Her own portrait done by Nadežda Petrović also belonged to that painting 'language'. We cannot know for sure whether she really appreciated that work, and what she intimately thought of it, but bearing in mind what she said of 'modern painting' in her text, we can assume that she was not referring to

Petrović's artistic style. We cannot say beyond any doubt that Atanasijević was not inclined to radical experiments in art, but she did make some comments that were critical of such experiments.[2] Be that as it may, works of art and literature have the ability to do away with pessimism and disappointment in human achievements, or at least reduce such feelings.

Atanasijević does not only sing praises to Ortega's insights and judgments, given that she does not shy away from critique of one of his theses. Namely, she is critical of the differentiation between two social groups when it comes to the question of "artistic art," that is, between the intellectual elite and the others who fall short of it. The example uses to illustrate this does not come from the world of visual arts, but it is applicable to it and other art forms as well. "This distinction made by Ortega is superficial and unrealistic, as evidenced by, among other things, the indisputable fact that both culturally and musically inclined people who have refined nerves are incapable of listening to those ultra-modern musical compositions" (Atanasijević, 1967, p. 50). However, it seems that her criticism is unfounded in this respect, although she was on the right track in her interpretation of his thinking. A more attentive reading of the paragraphs dealing with this problem suggests that her critical remark was unjustified. For the claim made by Ortega was not about whether or not someone enjoys such works of art, but whether or not they understand them. "It is not that the majority does not *like* the art of the young and the minority likes it, but that the majority, the masses, do not *understand* it" (Ortega y Gasset, 1968, pp. 5–6). Taste is largely a subjective category, something that has to do with the individual. The fact that someone is unfit to listen to a certain kind of musical composition because it is tiring, banal, boring, or absurd does not mean that they are unable to explain it theoretically.

3) One more thing needs to be pointed out. In his essay "The Dehumanization of Art" Ortega mentions a book written by Jean-Marie Guyau, whose name we encounter in the very opening sentence. Ortega highlights the significance of *Art from a Sociological Point of View*. In Guyau's view, art is a representation of life. Works of art give form to life, fulfilling human existence, and they enhance the development of a sense of sociality.

2 In that vein, she commented specifically on the dramatic arts. Writing about the way that philosophy and science can give pleasure to our lives by imbuing us with knowledge, she noted: "We could include in the same category the enjoyment of reading good books, as well as the performance of plays that are truly valuable (the latter surely cannot include those works where half-crazy characters and utter lunatics are given prominent place on stage, bombarding the unfortunate audience with a barrage of ineptitudes!)." As regarding a certain positive effect of music, she has some reserves: "This, of course, does not apply at all to atonal and electronic music, from which only God can protect every sensitive soul" (Atanasijević, 1968, pp. 27, 32)!

Thus, enjoying them has a purpose, which goes beyond the realm of purely artistic. In this vitalist philosophy, life does not refer to the 'biological', but rather the one through which mind and morality become manifest. Intuition and emotions provide the pathway to reach this realm.

Works of art are an expression of life in its individuality. The more articulated this idea is in its realization, the more powerful the art will be in its immediacy. Guyau elaborates on the motif *individuum est ineffabile*. Given that each and every individual is unique, it is impossible to subsume anyone under some general category, because there is always something remaining or missing, which makes them ineffable from such perspective. Therefore, the artist faces a difficult task, but still the artist has an advantage over the vocabulary of abstract discourse. Each work of art is actually a portrait of someone, although its creator has no precise knowledge about that someone in advance. The recipient connects the artistic object with their own experiences and thus becomes reflected in what is in front of them: "A work of art is always a kind of portrait, and looking at that portrait carefully, we recognize part of ourselves in it (Guyau, 1889, p. 17).

This philosopher is also present in Atanasijević's writings. We have already talked about her *Philosophical Fragments*. Guyau's name is also mentioned in this book. When considering the realm of art and not morality – although, in Guyau's opinion, as already stated, aesthetics and ethics are not radically separated, quite the opposite – Atanasijević mentions him in her unpublished lectures on aesthetics, that is, a manuscript that is now kept at the Serbian Orthodox Church Museum in Belgrade. Some of the pages of those lectures, which she gave at the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade, were written on the reverse side of invitation cards for the formal reception held at the Bristol Hotel on the occasion of the Second International Congress of Byzantine Studies in 1927, a fact which indicates that those notes were created approximately at the same time.

Among the topics discussed in those lectures was the question of principal division among different types of art. Atanasijević reminds us that the arts can be divided into spatial and temporal ones. She also mentions that there are "inorganic" arts, which is a determination also found in *Art from a Sociological Point of View* (Guyau, 1889, p. 16; Atanasijević, n.d., [p. 84]). Such arts are based only on sensations and do not express or create life in a strong sense. It is logical then that there are also 'organic' arts. Hierarchically speaking, the latter would be higher than the former, and they would include all art disciplines that are traditionally viewed as *les beaux-arts*. We should also mention that Guyau's claim that art is an expression of "anthropomorphism" can also be found in

Atanasijević's manuscript of lectures on aesthetics (Guyau, 1889, p. 23; Atanasijević, n.d., [p. 91]). Although works of art are inanimate things – as Atanasijević herself emphasized in another place – people in fact animate and personify them.

The idea that works of art are persons is supported in portraiture by the very fact that persons are represented through this art form. Of course, the subject of such artistic creation is not a necessary condition for its personification, but these examples are rather illustrative for understanding this more or less spontaneous act. There is probably no portrait that fully captures the individual it portrays. The question remains whether the comparison of several different paintings of the same person actually contributes to a more complete and faithful perception of them, in analogy with the procedure in which the essence of an object is reached through a series of variations.

The text "Humanist Thought of the Spanish Philosopher José Ortega y Gasset" certainly speaks about its author too. Bearing in mind the volume and thematic diversity of Ortega's oeuvre, the selection made from such multitude of topics and problems that could be discussed inevitably reflects the personality and theoretical interests of Ksenija Atanasijević. The decision to include certain topics, that is, texts, and leave others out, is an indicative act.

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DOI 10.56461/ZR_2025.KA-ToT.165M

WOMEN AS THE FOCUS OF KSENIJA ATANASIJEVIĆ

Abstract: The subject of this chapter is Ksenija Atanasijević's depiction of female characters in the works of ancient literature. Through them, she affirms her standpoint that a woman, in her natural complexity, is a valuable active participant in ancient myths and tragedies. The aim of the text is to show that Atanasijević considered women to be equally glorious expressions of a set of thoughts and feelings as the most successful male dramatic characters, and that their fates are no less tragic. The conclusion is that she affirms female subjectivity and dignity even in the most difficult and tragic circumstances, thus encouraging readers to take up such an attitude. A warning that "the possibility of being carefree has been radically removed from all of us" is also present in her works, a warning equally pertinent in her time as today. The chapter is structured as an imaginary dialogue between the author and Ksenija Atanasijević, touching upon her most significant attitudes, thoughts and ideas.

Keywords: female characters of ancient Greece, position of women in Atanasijević's time, multiplicity of female identities, reception of philosophical opus

Introduction

The reception of the works of prominent philosophers enables the discovery of the virtues of philosophical thinking and their association with today's interests. Receiving, accepting, incorporating and adopting are acts of reception that can also be specifically applied to the works of Ksenija Atanasijević (Mršević, 2022, p. 197). Bearing in mind that her work, as and example of philosophical female experience, was systematically neglected and marginalized until the first decades of the 21st century,

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such reception is all the more necessary. In this way, her philosophy as a universal ambition of the mind – in particular the portions related to the multiplicity of female identities – becomes accepted.

In this chapter, I apply the basic postulate of reception theory, that is, considering a dialogue between Atanasijević's oeuvre and the readership. This dialogue emerges in our time through an interest precisely in those neglected fragments of ancient Greek female figures, as well as Atanasijević's contemporaries. These fragments of hers strive towards a whole, proving that there is a transformative power in fragments – from parts to wholeness – from the female characters of ancient drama, through the writings of Atanasijević's contemporaries, all the way to her creation of a consistent hologram of the female soul. The rights to this fragmentary approach have been given to us by the unexpected but convenient coincidence of the literary affirmation of fragmentation at the time of writing this chapter.[1]

The methodological innovation of this text is of the dramaturgical type and is implemented in the form of an imaginary dialogue between the author of the chapter and Ksenija Atanasijević. It is a dialogue that enriches our knowledge and reading experience through six sections. Against Ksenija Atanasijvić's dominant opus (Atanasijević, 2011), we now stand with our horizon of expectations, giving our philosopher access to the current social context through dialogue. Thus, all her earlier writing ceases to be sealed within scientific immutability, and is rejuvenated by a dialogic reception in the present (Atanasijević, 2008). We are convinced that Atanasijević would not hold this against us, bearing in mind that she herself stood for *poiesis,* i.e., participation in the creation of new knowledge in dialogue with otherness, expanding variety, potentiality of meaning, as well as shaping the sensitivity for virtual and unpredictable imaginativeness.

The basic philosophical and ethical credo of Ksenija Atanasijević

Q: Summarized, what would be the starting point of your philosophy?

My life and work are significantly marked by French spiritual values and role models, especially beginning with my studies in Paris and the publication of my doctoral dissertation in French. That is why my entire philosophy, its starting point and origin, could be summed up by Pascal's

1 Danica Vukićević received the 2023 NIN Literary Award for her book *Inner Sea* (Unutrašnje more), a novelistic collection of fragments and records, mini-essays, lyrical-narrative fragments, (auto-)poetic, personal and valuable fragmentary insights.

thought: All human dignity is contained in his one thought. So, let's try to think well: here is the moral principle. And I really believe that people who think well always act ethically (Đurić, 2020, p. 254).

Q: From which ethical values are your courage and feminism derived?

A: In short, whatever I write about, I always strive for the truth in a sincere desire to help an individual or a community. Although basically pessimistic, my philosophy is fundamentally altruistic (Atanasijević, 1924).

Q: Was your academic preference for the French language also noticed by your high school teachers?

A: Yes, among the high school teachers I fondly remember are Draga Đurić, the French teacher, and Mileva Petrović, the Latin teacher... they encouraged me to write a diary of my thoughts in French. I am grateful to them for that, because this is how it began to enter my consciousness that many artistic objects, events and various phenomena of inestimable value existed in Paris. (Đurić, 2020, p. 251)

Q: Did all of this manifest in Geneva as an environment of strictly moral understandings?

Oh yes! All of that came true in Geneva, even more than I could have imagined. That's how I found all the cultural activities I loved: "concerts, operas, the latest films, theatrical performances, all kinds of exhibitions, books, magazines, encounters with an interesting world" (Đurić, 2020, p. 252).

Q: From a feminist position, you pointed out the inadmissibility of misogyny and gender discrimination?

A: Yes, because feminism is not only an economic and legal, but primarily an ethical system. Feminism represents an eminently idealistic direction, the starting point of which is the belief in inviolability of the person, in its absolute right to freedom and the provision of all the needs for its development. From this issues, as a necessary logical consequence, the refutation, both theoretical and practical, of the gross absurdity of the rooted belief that one gender has, by nature, superiority over another (Atanasijević, 1930, p. 304–306).

Q: From a higher philosophical point of view, what will have to fall away, considering that "social, interpersonal monstrosities that can no longer be tolerated" (Atanasijević, 1929, p. 24)?

A: First of all, these are all gross violations of personality, because the principles of democracy, freedom and fairness have been officially adopted.

Q: How would you summarize the genesis of feminist ideas?

A: It is necessary to understand the historical movement as progress in the consciousness of freedom as follows: "The irrevocable and unstoppable flow of culture has brought with it the awareness that a woman, in terms of her abilities, endowments, virtues and sins, is no different from a man; therefore, her duties, her rights and her entire destiny cannot and should not be diminished or obstructed" (Atanasijević, 1931, p. 2).

Q: You stand for feminism, which is not only a striving for women's rights, but for the advancement of the rights and dignity of all people (Atanasijević, 1932). What does this achieve?

A: This builds a new ethical doctrine that strives to achieve certainly a more universal, better and nobler relationship between people of both sexes that will exclude any physical and moral abuse of the other. This is my starting point: the abolition of forcibly imposed differences and inequalities between human beings. This is a position – albeit a utopian one – that should be accepted as imperative at all times (Duhaček, 2020).

Q: You not only perceive, analyze and describe, but also enter into dialogue with written texts and other forms of cultural processes. Where do you look for answers?

A: I look for answers to questions that affect me and the writers I write about in our worldly experience as human beings. I am not only interested in *mimesis*, the tautological creation of a model for understanding the given, but also *poiesis*, participating in the creation of new knowledge in dialogue with otherness, inscribed in the read texts, in the expansion of variants, and the potentiality of meaning (Svirčev, 2020, p. 312).

Q: What is 'activist pessimism', and who influenced you in this sense?

A. 'Activist pessimism' does not mean a resigned surrender to life's difficulties, but rather a fighting attitude, the igniting of unquenchable restlessness after every life break, a pessimism that "acquires a suggestive, strong and unforgettable expression in the luxuriously sonorous and often triumphantly overflowing verses of this poet, whose feelings, almost always, were saturated with intensity" (Svirčev, 2020, p. 303). My role model is Đura Jakšić who, despite the "bitter residue of experience," has room for happiness and delight in his poetic world.

Q: How did you come to opt for the short form as your writing style, as precise and concise expressions in fragments and aphorisms that leave a deep impression?

A: First of all, I have never been a slave to dry philosophical concepts, but I instead live my philosophy deeply, that is, I live it personally by

building up my own philosophy of life that bears my intimate, spontaneous and convincing hallmark. What I have in common with, for example, the French moralists, is the chosen form of the fragment (Đurić, 2020, p. 254), i.e., a short statement that transmits to readers the maximum message through minimal means.

Q: Why do you use first-person narration?

A: With first-person narration, characteristic of the essay, I try to escape the figure of a woman deformed by stereotypes as a culturally immature person who is spoken of in the third person, as being looked at from above, protectively, as if she were not part of culture, despite being conspicuously present (Svirčev, 2020).

Q: What is the social environment in which your views on women have been formed?

A: They have been formed in an atmosphere hostile to women; one that is openly misogynistic (Atanasijević, 1928). The need for women to express their political will is viewed with disapproval and ridicule, based on the belief that they are not intellectually capable of such a role. "This environment is far from the golden age of Serbian democracy" (Popović-Obradović, 2008, p. 22), and by other criteria, especially considering the ubiquity of cultural misogyny (G. Bašić, 2020).

Q: Do you feel that support for women is very much denied in your age?

A: Yes, I absolutely do. I myself write and publish in an intellectual climate where support for women is denied on many fronts. Women in our country play an increasingly crucial and beneficial role in raising the cultural and ethical level of society, something that is to be attributed far more to a woman's abilities and her conscientiousness and perseverance in her work, than to any kind of support (Atanasijević, 1931).

Q: As an engaged intellectual, you concretized your philosophical point of view through constant dialogue with the challenges of your time (Atanasijević, 2011), which you dealt with comprehensively through your texts. What is your message to us, your future audience?

A: You need the "conviction that, in due time, what until recently looked like a utopia, will become a reality" (Mršević, 2020, p. 330). I did not see a realization of that utopian vision of mine, and you probably won't either, but that makes it even more pressing that it be accepted as a task for everyone to work on in their own time. "*Feci quod potui, faciant meliora potentes*" – I have done what I could; let those who can do better (Đurić, 2020, p. 263).

Q: Do you believe that the reception of Ibsen's *Nora* was marked by a particularly patriarchal, i.e., anti-feminist and 'universalist' approach, during the 20th century?

A: Yes, I believe that with the play *A Doll's House*, Ibsen showed that he understood the essence of women's liberation down to its last psychological subtleties (Svirčev, 2020). This drama, heavy in content, presents the evolution of a woman as first her father's, and then her husband's doll, and then a conscious being who independently wants to solve serious life problems from which she was previously sheltered (Atanasijević, 1927a). Cunningly deceived in her feverish expectation of a miracle that would unite her and her husband in sovereign understanding, she has the decisive courage to cut the untruth of her marriage at the root, and to leave the man who has become a stranger to her and the three children she had with him (Žikić, 2013, p. 796).

Q: Do you think Ibsen shows respect for women's struggle in fighting for their rights?

A: Yes: the creation of Nora, who evolved to devote herself to the sacred and most important duty to herself, upon arriving at the knowledge that she must not accept responsibility for anyone until she first forms herself, irrefutably proves Ibsen's respect towards women's struggle to achieve their rights (I. Bašić, 2020).

Female characters in Ancient Greek tragedies

Q: What are you trying to show through your analyses of female characters in Ancient Greek tragedies?

A: I claim that a woman, in her natural complexity, is a precious participant in myths and tragedies, as well as in literature about them. I clearly express my desire to write about women as complicated but also interesting, because that's exactly what they are (Atanasijević 1927b). I point out that ancient authors singled out several women who are equally glorious expressions of a complex of thoughts and feelings as the most renowned male dramatic characters. According to Aeschylus, catastrophes ripen in the soul of a woman, and she is always exalted in his plays with her overwhelming energy (Žikić, 2013, p. 796).

Q: What do you want to achieve by affirming the female subjectivity and dignity present even in the most difficult and tragic circumstances?

A: I want to encourage myself and others to understand that we can live in dignity, both in my time and other times, as we women know

that the possibility of being carefree has been radically removed from us (Mršević, 2020).

Q: You point out that the fates of female characters in tragedies are no less tragic than those of male characters; Polyxenes, Andromache, Alcestis, Electra, Iphigenia, Antigone, Jocasta, Makaria, and more?

A: Absolutely. You mentioned only the most famous female characters of Greek antiquity. Iphigenia is a heroic girl who willingly goes to her death for the salvation and glory of Greece. Antigone is a timeless heroine, an advocate of divine right as higher justice; only a woman knows how to defy the tyrant and bury her brother in spite of his ban. Jocasta does not believe in prophecies but in her own decision-making, Makaria willingly wants to be a victim, giving her life when not forced to do so, begging only that she be permitted to die among women, far from the eyes of men, which is why King Demophon calls her the bravest of all women (Atanasijević, 1924, pp. 1–12).

Q: What attention did you pay Iphigenia?

A: Agamemnon killed Artemis' stag in ignorance. Artemis becomes angry and prevents the fleet from sailing out, which she will only allow when Agamemnon's daughter Iphigenia is sacrificed to her. Iphigenia's awareness that she will be the savior of Greece prevails over her desire to live. She says that all of mighty Greece is looking toward her at this moment: the fleet's departure, the destruction of Troy, it is all dependent on her. She knows that it is necessary for her to sacrifice herself, to give her blood to reject the prophecy. At the moment when she is to be killed, Artemis substitutes a stag in her place at the altar, takes her in a cloud to the land of the Tauri. Iphigenia is then made a priestess of the cult of Artemis (Atanasijević, 1924).

Q: Did you also represent the stereotype of the faithful wife, as was Alcestis, for example?

A: Yes, that's important: you see, her husband Admetus was promised he could escape death if someone agreed to die for him. Even his old parents, much less his friends, would not do this, but his wife Alcestis agreed voluntarily to sacrifice herself and go to her death in place of her husband. What better way to show a devoted wife than by her agreeing to die for her husband! Her conjugal devotion is nevertheless rewarded; Hercules steals away Alcestis from death, because her devotion and self-sacrifice contrasts sharply with Admetus' male self-absorption. (Atanasijević, 1924).

Q: You depict Hermione as a multi-layered character though: Are there elements of misogyny in her?

A: Yes. In an act of remorse, Hermione complains that evil women have caused her to envy and hate Andromache, and concludes that no man should allow his wife to have communication with other women, because such visits always result in trouble.

Q: And how do you present Andromache, the widow of Hector, who becomes a slave of Achilles' son Neoptolemus, also brimming with misogynistic attitudes?

A: Andromache is an example of conjugal and maternal love, but with too little – in fact, without a shred of – female solidarity, I must say. She believes that, regardless of a man's mistakes, his wife should please him, and not always look for a reason for a fight. She pronounces judgement on women: "How strange it is, that though some god hath devised cures for mortals against the venom of reptiles, no man ever yet hath discovered aught to cure a woman's venom, which is far worse than viper's sting or scorching flame; so terrible a curse are we to mankind!" (Atanasijević, 1924, p. 1–12).

Q: How do you introduce Polyxena?

A: I introduce her as another heroine. When it is decided that Polyxena, the daughter of the captive Hecuba, Priam's wife, should be offered as a sacrifice at Achilles' grave, the young girl willingly agrees to die and is only worried about how her mother will withstand the impact. Proud Polyxena demands that her mother not beg Ulysses for mercy. Hecuba's despair subsides when she is told that Polyxena died fearlessly, "beautiful as a statue" (Atanasijević, 1924).

Q: What attracted you to the character Makaria in the tragedy of Heraclides, and why does the Attic king Demophon describe her as the bravest of all women?

A: I presented another heroic female self-sacrifice through the character of Makaria, the daughter of Heracles and Deianira, recognized for her bravery. She hears that the gods demand the sacrifice of a girl to ensure salvation of Heracles' children and of Greece in the fight against the enemy. She therefore willingly wants to be a victim, like Antigone, Polyxene and Iphigenia. She claims that her life belongs to the king; that she gives it willingly, and is not forced to do so. She declares that she has found the best way to leave life: with honor; begging only the king for permission to die away from the sight of men, among women (Atanasijević, 1924).

Q: Who would you highlight as one of Euripides' strong-but-evil female characters, and why?

A: That would be Phaedra. Aphrodite makes Phaedra fall in love with her stepson Hippolytus out of revenge. But Hippolytus rejects Phaedra's love. She sees only one way to get rid of the pain, and that is to die as soon as possible, because only this way would she avoid embarrassing her husband and children. But, before she dies, Phaedra wants revenge upon Hippolytus for his arrogance and insensitivity. She hangs herself and leaves a letter containing a false cause of her death, blaming Hippolytus. Hippolytus falls victim to her mindless passion and desire to punish him (Atanasijević, 1924).

Q: What other female character is driven by a terrifying desire for revenge?

A: In my opinion, Medea, a desperate and abandoned woman whose husband, Jason, is unfaithful, even going so far as to wish her and her children's banishment from their home of Corinth. Driven by hatred, she sends her rival a dress of the finest material and a golden crown, gifts she received from her grandfather Helios. As soon as her rival Creusa puts them on, she dies of the poison Medea laced the garments with. But it was not enough for her to kill her hated rival; she would go on to kill her own children, wanting to crush their father's heart. She refuses the offer to spare the children and go into exile together and be each other's life's joy with the words: "By those avengers in lower Hell, I'll never deliver up my children, hand them over to their enemies, to be humiliated. They must die — that's unavoidable, no matter what. Since that must happen, then their mother, the one who gave them life, will kill them" (Atanasijević, 1924, p. 10). Poisonous and destructive, Medea resembles Hecuba, albeit with a much harsher nature to her inhuman and demonically designed revenge (Atanasijević, 1924).

Q: When and why did the beautiful Helen of Troy, the cause of the Trojan War, curse her beauty?

A: Helen is in Egypt during the Trojan War. There she comes to learn that her mother Leda hanged herself due to the shame her daughter brought upon the family, that Troy was destroyed, that her husband Menelaus had died, and that great shame is attached to her name. She then curses her beauty as the cause of so many conflicts and destructions, including her own misfortune: "If only! If only I could scratch this beauty out, like painters do to their pictures and paint another picture of me, this time an ugly one! If only! [...] Ah! Such is the depth of misery into

which my beauty has brought me. While beauty makes other women happy, mine is the very implement of my destruction!" (Atanasijević, 1924, p. 7). It transpires, however, that Menelaus is actually alive; he comes and assures her that she is completely innocent, and that all of the misfortune that befell the world was caused by a vain goddess, and he escapes to Greece with Helen (Atanasijević, 1924).

On Teresa of Ávila

Q: You also chose to present Teresa of Ávila. How did you encounter this saint, who, in your time, was almost unknown in the Serbian linguistic and cultural context?

A: The Spanish mystic and Catholic saint, Teresa of Ávila is a noteworthy figure in the Christian religious tradition. Moreover, she was "the most gifted of all female mystical writers" (Atanasijević, 2010, p. 137) During her lifetime, she did much to strengthen the Catholic faith at a time when it was internally shaken up in various ways (Vuletić, 2010). She built up the Church's strength through her way of living, her experience and her diplomatic gift, and in this sense, she is the forerunner of many feminist ideas that exist within the Church today. In her theology, Teresa starts from a personal experience with God. She is a famous mystic who found her own way to God and as such teaches more through her deeds than the written word. She dedicates the books to her sisters so that they can learn from her experience of how to avoid sin and come closer to God.

Q: How did the 'greatest mystic' – Saint Teresa of Ávila – influence you as a philosopher?

A: Saint Teresa had a significant (perhaps decisive) influence on my independent philosophical orientation; I saw it as a meeting of two feminists on the same objective. The saint's thinking helped me to 'talk' with others in my own environment through a publicly published text, but also with those who are close to me; sisters in the feminist movement. This is the approach that the saint primarily adopted in her texts addressed to her sisters, writing so that everyone finds a message relevant to themselves, in order to transmit it to others within the Church who need to hear it (Savić, 2020).

Q: By informing the general public about the opinions of women from other religious denominations, you became one of the pioneers of feminist theology in your country. Why did you decide to do this?

A: A feminist's interests is to reflect on the truth of living together, and attempt to answer the essential questions of philosophy and religion

as well. I understood its importance, not only for the needs of my sisters (and students) in the community, but also for our feminist movement between the two world wars (Savić 2020).

Q: What examples does she offer for today?

A: At the same time, Teresa is an example of a wise woman who, in unstable medieval times, managed to maintain and expand monastic life, to communicate with her religious superiors with great diplomatic skill, and at the same time maintain her understanding of the life of the community and the Church. Her capacity for personal experience with God, with which contemporary feminist theologians empathize, and her gift of diplomacy in dealings with Church institutions, which we can also identify today in many contemporary theologians within Christianity, are two things we can learn from Teresa of Ávila. Teresa's message about the necessity of diligent devotion is also relevant: "We work to make at least some small progress for ourselves every day, and to grow in zeal; after all, the truth is that we are always in the midst of battles, and that neither the desire for rest nor carelessness should overwhelm us, until we achieve final victory" (Žikić, 2013, p. 797).

Q: How was Teresa educated, and what influence did it have on her works?

A: Her path of self-education is interesting: "she was a great and passionate reader, but she did not have a particularly literary education. That is why her prose (although she also wrote a little poetry) is characterized by simplicity, sincerity of expression and spontaneity. This was also her conscious intention, since she cared about reaching the largest number of people, women (nuns in the first place), but also the uninitiated world in general. But we the moderns, we do not need a withered logician, but a philosopher-visionary and preacher of religion." (Đurić, 2020, p. 253).

On women writers

Q: Do you write essays about women writers?

A: Yes, I especially strive for the affirmation of female creative practice. Essays on female authors are particularly important to me, because my engagement in this field has coincided with the formation and affirmation of feminist literary-critical discourse in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes/Yugoslavia, and I want to contribute to that process (Svirčev, 2020).

Q: What did you strive for in your essays about women writers?

A: I tried to shed light on their characters and life experiences as comprehensively as possible, and to present the key poetic characteristics, imbuing them with my own reflections on various literary and non-literary problems. I wrote particularly enthusiastically about the process of the reader's sympathy with the narrative world of Milica Janković and about the prose works of Desanka Maksimović. Essays on women writers, that is, their portraits on the level of interpretative procedures and linguistic and stylistic expression, correspond to my essay writing on literature (Svirčev, 2020).

Q: Do you see women's imagination as a means by which to attempt to avoid fate?

A: Yes, that's right, I find the imagination invigorating in women writers, which is important, because "...when our imagination is full of joyful images, then we have cheated fate, and when our dreams are ugly, then fate has overcome us" (Atanasijević, 1929, p. 148). I should additionally mention that I publish in magazines of various profiles and have a stratified readership that includes both the intellectual elite and the general public (Milanković, 2020). With regard to essays on female writers, I think it is particularly important to point out the politics of the place of publication. Namely, I have not published essays about women authors exclusively in feminist-oriented periodicals, but also in a wide variety of other magazines and periodicals, with a broad range of scopes and themes. I believe that this has been extremely important in the process of affirming women's creativity and breaking down barriers to their reception (Milanković, 2020).

Q: Do you consistently affirm women's solidarity and the importance of mutual support?

A: I insist that any ethics of feminism should be based on the selfless provision of solidarity and mutual support by and between women (Atanasijević, 2011).

Q: In addition to writing and publishing essays, do you regularly give public lectures?

A: Yes, I have also given many public lectures on pacifism, anti-Nazism, and feminism (Marinković, 2020). There are few authors who through their essays and literary criticism have had a presence in different public spheres in the way in which I have. I am certainly the only author of this kind in the interwar era.

Concluding questions

Ksenija Atanasijević is one of those prominent women who are of great importance for the achievement of gender equality because by her example and activities she contributed to the creation of a society in which women and men are equal in terms of rights and opportunities, and where the contributions of all members of society are recognized and appreciated, regardless of gender. She was engaged in the promotion of gender equality and the fight against discrimination against women. Her presence in the public space allowed her to raise awareness of the problems faced by women in society. Her openly expressed feminism represents an eminently idealistic direction, to achieve certainly a more universal, better and nobler relationship between people of both sexes that would exclude any physical and moral abuse, and the abolition of forcibly imposed differences and inequalities between human beings. She also devoted herself not only to feminism, to pacifism and anti-Nazism, but also to the principles of democracy, freedom and fairness which she wanted to be officially adopted. Or to put simply, her message might be that people who think well always act ethically.

Ksenija Atanasijević had an important role in promoting and achieving gender equality, acting as inspiration and role model for other women and girls. Her achievements, if and when known, can motivate others, regardless of gender, to fight for their goals and dream big. This helps to break down stereotypes and prejudices related to women's abilities. She advocated for fairer rights for women, by providing examples of heroic women of Greek antiquity, the bravest of all women as she called them, but also of wise women, such was Theresa of Ávilla. Her message is that women can build strength through their way of living, experience and diplomatic gift, as did Theresa of Ávilla.

The virtues that Atanasijević recommended through her work to women are: mutual support by and between women including necessity of diligent devotion to solidarity, self-education and simplicity, sincerity of expression and spontaneity, invigorating imagination, learning from our sisters' experience in the feminist movement, always having a sincere desire to help an individual or a community. She affirms the presence of female subjectivity and female dignity, philosophical female experience and multiplicity of female identities. But also, she warned every single woman that she must not accept responsibility for anyone until she first forms herself.

Women should never stop working towards at least some daily, small progress for themselves. After all, the truth is, that women are always in

the midst of battles. By affirming women's creativity and breaking down barriers to their reception, Atanasijević affirmed female creative practices, characters and life experiences, as well as women's imagination as a means by which women can try to avoid tragic fates.

Ksenija lived and wrote in a time when the need for women to express their political will was viewed with disapproval and ridicule, based on the belief that they are not intellectually capable of such activity. In response, she warned that women in their surroundings played an increasingly crucial and beneficial role in raising the cultural and ethical level of Serbian society. Simply put, women can live in dignity. She thus warned that women's duties, their rights and entire destiny cannot and should not be diminished or obstructed.

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Proofreading
Edward Djordjevic

Cover design
Katarina Njegovan

Layout and print
Dosije studio, Belgrade

Print run
50 copies

ISBN 978-86-6427-347-3

CIP – Каталогизација у публикацији
Народна библиотека Србије, Београд

14 Атанасијевић К.(082)
141.72:172(082)
82.09 Атанасијевић К.(082)

KSENIJA Atanasijević : a tapestry of thought – philosophy, art, literature and feminism / edited by Jelena Pavličić Cerović ... [et al.]. – Belgrade : University, Faculty of Philosophy : University, Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory, 2025 (Beograd : Dosije studio). – 179 str. ; 24 cm

Tiraž 50. – Str. 7–10: Ksenija Atanasijević : a tapestry of thought – philosophy, art, literature and feminism / Jelena Pavličić Cerović ... [et al.]. – Napomene i bibliografske reference uz tekst. – Bibliografija uz svaki rad.

ISBN 978-86-6427-347-3 (FF)

1. Pavličić Cerović, Jelena, 1987– [уредник] [аутор додатног текста]
а) Атанасијевић, Ксенија (1894–1981) – Зборници

COBISS.SR-ID 170665225

The texts in this collection are a valuable contribution to understanding the range of themes the philosopher Ksenija Atanasijević worked on throughout her fruitful career. Both the breadth of topics and the number of academic disciplines brought together here clearly reflect the editors' ambitious aim: to provide a thorough engagement with the intellectual legacy of Ksenija Atanasijević.

– Svetlana Ćirković

It is quite rare for our philosophical community to comprehensively deal with its own heritage, and rarer still for it to direct its attention at a single thinker. Yet, this collected volume does just that. It thus represents a one of a kind testament to Ksenija Atanasijević – whose intellectual outline the careful reader will clearly glean between the lines of text. Moreover, the Festschrift character of the book does not impinge in the least on the considered and critical insights it provides. The portrait that emerges from these pages is no idealized statue, but a dynamic thought, in all its virtues and imperfections.

– Una Popović

This volume has an additional, rather important aspect that surpasses purely philosophical or literary boundaries: it arouses interest in the life and struggles Ksenija Atanasijević faced, which are the foundation of women's emancipatory efforts, the fight for liberty, and general open-mindedness. Her philosophy, her scientific contribution, just as much as her struggle for emancipation, were explicitly and unjustifiably neglected through rigid and biased patriarchal treatment, leaving her marginalized both as author and person. This volume is a significant step in rectifying these injustices.

– Ivan Nišavić

ФИЛОЗОФСКИ ФАКУЛТЕТ
1838

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ISBN 978-86-6427-347-3