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ASJA BAKIĆ'S FEMINIST WEIRD FICTION

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Born in Bosnia in 1982, Asja Bakić now lives in Croatia, and publishes both in Croatia and Serbia. A member of a new generation of Balkan and post-Yugoslav writers, Bakić is not only poet and essayist, but also gained international success with her short story collection *Mars* (2015), which has been translated into English, German, and French. Bakić's playful poetry, feminist polemical essays, and her genre-bending short stories position her as a subversive author in Croatian literature where neorealist poetics is still dominant. In contrast, Bakić's short stories can best be described as "weird fiction" or "the New Weird", a self-reflexive and politically charged form of writing that blurs the boundaries between fantasy, science fiction, and horror. Her stories are generally set in the future and feature combative and persistent androgynous narrator-protagonists, mostly young women from the Balkans, who expose the ways in which sexism intersects with capitalism, colonialism, technology, and climate change. Bakić's stories bring together feminist ideas and "weird fiction" to illustrate how "female troublemakers", "feminist killjoys", and "willful subjects" (S. Ahmed) – theoretical and political figures which refuse to happily accept the position society has intended for them – can act as the "glitch" (L. Russell) that opens up new possibilities of living and being by exposing the failures of the current system.

Keywords: Asja Bakić, unreliable narrator, female troublemaker, willful subject, glitch

INTRODUCTION

"Balkan literature" is not a widely accepted term in Croatian literary criticism. Literary and cultural critic Katarina Luketić, whose work is dedicated to dismantling Balkan stereotypes, rightly states that Balkan literature does not officially exist in Croatia (Luketić 2013). Instead, as Luketić states in an interview with the Croatian daily newspaper *Jutarnji list*, "[t]here are only national literatures here:

Croatian, Serbian, Bosnian, Montenegrin... which are separate ghettos" (Devčić 2021). The term "post-Yugoslav" is somewhat better received, but tends to be used mostly in book reviews (Postnikov 2012). Scholars still predominantly classify literature according to national criteria, thus potentially excluding a large number of contemporary regional authors from "Croatian literature" (Devčić 2021). In contrast to this limited perspective, Katarina Luketić insists that it is precisely "[c]ultural heterogeneity – along with common historical experience and proximity of identity – that characterizes the Balkan and post-Yugoslav space" (Devčić 2021). Luketić lists several contemporary authors whose work could be read in a transnational context, such as Josip Mlakić, Miljenko Jergović, Lana Bastašić, and Semezdin Mehmedinović (Devčić 2021). There are, of course, many other authors who could be included in this list, one of whom is most certainly Asja Bakić.

Born in Tuzla, Bosnia and Herzegovina, in 1982, and now living in Zagreb, Croatia, Asja Bakić belongs to a new generation of Balkan and Post-Yugoslav writers. Bakić has gained international acclaim with her short story collection *Mars* (2015), which has been translated, among others, into English, German, and French. Her second book of short stories *Sladostrašće* (2020) was translated into English as *Sweetlust* in 2023. She also published a collection of poems *Može i kaktus, samo neka bode* (*It Can Be a Cactus, as Long as It Pricks*) in 2009 and a book of feminist essays *Dođi, sjest ću ti na lice* (*Come, I'll Sit on Your Face*) in 2020.

As Bakić herself commented in an interview for *Asymptote*, the fact that her books are published independently in Croatia and in Serbia speaks volumes about the "crude political divide" that keeps the literary markets of former Yugoslav republics separate (Semel 2019). She goes on to explain that this division is not only political but economic as well, since an author "must publish their book in the same language three times—for the Serbian, Bosnian, and Croatian markets" (Semel 2019). Boris Postnikov makes a similar claim when discussing the term "post-Yugoslav literature". While the term is seemingly anti-nationalist, "on its reverse side we will inevitably discover the work of capitalist market mechanisms" (Postnikov 2012: 12). In practice, this means that the Croatian and Serbian literary markets are strictly separated and that the biggest Croatian publishers "consistently ignore [books published in Serbia] in order to make a bigger profit by selling their own, much more expensive editions" (Postnikov 2012: 13).[1]

[1] Although it does not include Asja Bakić's short stories, Jagna Pogačnik's anthology *Područje signala. Mapiranje suvremene proze u Hrvatskoj 2000.–2020.* (*Signal Area. Mapping Contemporary Fiction in Croatia 2000-2020*) attempts to utilize the concept of "transnational literature" by emphasizing the difference between "Croatian literature" and "literature in Croatia" (Pogačnik

However, Bakić has unfortunately experienced firsthand how the economic and the political still go hand in hand whenever she participates in a public debate in Croatia. She is regularly targeted with nationalist hate speech on social media. An actor refused to read Emily Dickinson's poems which she had translated for Croatian Radio Channel 3, unless they were Croatized. During a polemical exchange with Ivana Bodrožić in *Jutarnji list*, Bakić was introduced as a "Bosnian poet" because, as she explains, "they clearly wanted to highlight the difference between a native, Croatian author and a foreign, 'Bosnian' poet who criticizes the native young hopeful" (Marušić 2019). On the other hand, when *Mars* became a success in the United States, the Croatian daily newspaper *Novi list* labeled her "our author" (Mandić 2019). It is therefore not surprising that Bakić was delighted with her reception in the United States: "People wanted to talk in detail about my short stories, not about me, not about where I'm from, but about the stories and writing" (Marušić 2019).

It is apparent that Asja Bakić is a very outspoken public figure who does not shy away from polemics in a literary scene that is otherwise small, insular, and divided into cliques. Her playful poetry, unapologetic feminist essays, and genre-bending short stories position her as an outsider in the Croatian literary scene still dominated by a neorealist poetics (Gajin 2020). Bakić specializes in short creative and non-creative writing – most notably poetry, short stories, essays – and her style is consistently minimalist, full of humor that defamiliarizes everyday reality and literary conventions, culminating an unexpected and often disorienting punchline. In the context of Croatian literature, it is hard to determine the genre of her stories, which are best described as a blend of science fiction with horror, fantasy, fairy tales, pornography, and romance. Thematically, they are concerned with timely issues such as feminism, capitalism, technology, climate change, sexuality, the relationship between the West and the Balkans, as well as art and literature. Many stories also have a prominent metatextual component due to their focus on the cultural status of literature and the potential power of art in current or imagined future societies.

It is therefore difficult to situate Bakić's writing in the context of Croatian literature and much easier to compare her to contemporary international authors such as Carmen Maria Machado, Samanta Schweblin, Mariana Enríquez, and Bora Chung, or to place her stories in a broader context of "weird fiction". Only recently have attempts been made to identify "the New Weird" in Croatian

2024). In this way, Pogačnik's anthology includes regional authors, but primarily those whose books were published in Croatia, thus prioritizing economic criteria.

literature. Writing on his blog *Stray Satellite*, Jonathan Bousfield links Bakić to Luka Bekavac, Ivana Rogar, and Darko Šeparović in his description of "the New Croatian Weird" as a "distinct and disorienting strand" that is "beginning to take shape" in contemporary Croatian literature (Bousfield 2022). Although these four authors are distinctly different, what unites them is their distancing from the dominant neorealist poetics and their interest in various strands of speculative fiction as well as "the employment of serious literary discipline" in their writing (Bousfield 2022).[2]

OLD AND NEW WEIRD FICTION

So, what kind of fiction does the term "the New Weird" refer to? As Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock explains, New Weird fiction defines itself against the backdrop of the "Old Weird" or "twentieth-century weird fiction", which derives its name from the Old English noun *wyrd* meaning "fate, destiny" (Weinstock 2016: 177–178). The adjective "weird" originally signified "the supernatural power to manipulate the destiny of human beings" whereas today it implies "a sense of the strange, unusual and fantastic" (Weinstock 2016: 177). Attempting to avoid definitions that are too broad and vague, Weinstock traces the emergence of weird fiction back to early 20th-century pulp fiction, specifically to the magazine *Weird Tales* originally published from 1923 to 1954, and to H. P. Lovecraft's own delineation of the weird tale in his 1927 essay *Supernatural Horror in Literature* (Weinstock 2016: 178–179). According to Weinstock, Lovecraft describes the weird tale as "literature of cosmic fear" that "undercuts post-Enlightenment rationalism and posits instead the co-existence of other worlds and supernatural forces" (Weinstock 2016: 179). Consequently, Weinstock offers a "provisional definition" of Old Weird fiction as "late nineteenth-and early twentieth-century stories that undercut anthropocentrism by thematizing the insufficiency of science and human reason to comprehend the universe" (Weinstock 2016: 182–183). Associated with authors ranging from Edgar Allan Poe to the already mentioned H. P. Lovecraft, Old Weird fiction combines science fiction, horror, and fantasy,

[2] Dinko Kreho also labels Bakić's writing "weird fiction" in his review of *Sweetlust* (Kreho 2020). Although "weird fiction" is most commonly used by critics to describe the genre and style of these short stories, Lamija Milišić links them to "bizarro fiction", "a literary genre that uses elements of absurdism, satire and grotesque, along with pop-surrealism and canons of genre literature, in order to create strange, subversive and entertaining works" (Milišić 2020).

and is therefore less a "discrete genre" than a literary mode characterized by "a pessimistic orientation to human potential" (Weinstock 2016: 183).

The phrase "the New Weird" became prominent after M. John Harrison mentioned it on the electronic message board of the British science fiction zine *The 3rd Alternative,* on 29 April 2003 (Weinstock 2016: 183). Harrison's aim was to start a discussion on the forum about the existence of the New Weird, its meaning and definition, and the authors who might be linked to such a mode of writing (Weinstock 2016: 183–184). Indebted to Old Weird fiction but also differing from it, the New Weird was initially best described by Stephanie Swainston as even more "eclectic" than the Old Weird, as it "mix[es] modern street culture with ancient mythology" and "acknowledges, borrows from and mixes together other literary traditions and genres" (qtd. in Weinstock 2016: 184).

Soon after this discussion, one of the most prominent New Weird authors, China Miéville, published his own manifesto in *The 3rd Alternative*, highlighting the mode's "heterogeneity, while also asserting its politically progressive valence" (qtd. in Weinstock 2016: 184).[3] Emphasizing again the specific combination of science fiction, horror, and fantasy as well as other genres, theorists of the New Weird also point out the mode's self-reflexivity and self-awareness, attention to literary technique, political engagement, role of grotesque corporeality, and focus on real-world, urban settings with the specific aim to defamiliarize "the normal" (Weinstock 2016: 184–186). Because the distinction between Old and New Weird fiction is not always completely clear and the research attempting to define the New Weird is still ongoing, Weinstock concludes that both ask their readers to "reconsider and, finally, reconceive our interrelated senses of human importance and autonomy" in the wake of discovering that the human world is "only a flimsy façade obscuring a much weirder, and darker, universe" (Weinstock 2016: 196).

Following China Miéville's manifesto, Robin Anne Reid posits in her lexicon *Women in Science Fiction and Fantasy* that the New Weird "subvert[s] clichés of the fantastic in order to put them to discomfiting, rather than consoling ends" (Reid 2009: 234). She goes on to add that "these works confront the mechanics and manifestations of power in our own world", even uncovering how "normative morality and religion [are] implicated in maintaining oppressive power structures" (Reid 2009: 235). Therein lies the feminist potential of New Weird fiction.

[3] Other notable New Weird authors include Jeff VanderMeer, Caitlín R. Kiernan, Laird Barron, K. J. Bishop, Michael Cisco, and Stephanie Swainston, among others. It is also important to mention that Jeff VanderMeer wrote the blurb for the English translation of Asja Bakić's short story collection *Mars*, praising her as a "major talent".

Although, as Reid writes, the New Weird has shown more interest in class than gender issues, women authors have been "well represented" within the mode itself and in the discussions surrounding it (Reid 2009: 235). Conversely, even though Asja Bakić's stories are preoccupied with class, capital, precarious work, and poverty to a large degree, they are mostly concerned with unequal gender power relations in present and future worlds. Because of this, her short stories can be read as an example of overtly feminist weird fiction.

(UN)RELIABLE NARRATORS

The feminist component of Asja Bakić's stories can be identified not only in their themes and motifs but also at the formal level. In terms of literary technique, the formal device employed most frequently in the stories in *Mars* and *Sweetlust*, is first-person narration. Bakić's extradiegetic and homodiegetic narrators are also autodiegetic in the sense that they are protagonists of the story they are narrating (Genette 1980: 245). Ellen Elias-Bursać characterizes Bakić's narrators as "inquisitive, exploratory protagonists" (Elias Bursać 2019: 166–167). They are often presented as combative, cunning, persistent, immodest, and androgynous young women. Rejecting the more traditional modes of femininity such as passivity, instability, piety, irrationality, and compliancy (Ellmann 1968: 55), these active protagonist-narrators subvert patriarchal gender norms.

Only a few stories are told using second- ("MCSB" form *Sweetlust*) and third-person narration ("Buried Treasure", "Carnivore" and "Heading West" form *Mars*; "1998" and "Mama" form *Sweetlust*). Three of these stories are told from the point of view of a masculine character ("MCSB", "Carnivore" and "Mama") and the other three are more directly tied to a specific historical context of childhood and adolescence in socialist Yugoslavia, more precisely in the then Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the experience of being a refugee. Although "Buried Treasure", "Heading West", and "1998" also defamiliarize these histories and are by no means "realist" stories, their content can be linked to Bakić's biography. This reversal is especially intriguing: it seems that the stories which can be read in a more autobiographical way are told in the third person precisely to discourage that mode of interpretation and create distance from the material, whereas the more obviously fictional stories are told using a first-person narrator that is outspoken and opinionated, a narratorial voice that is very similar to the voice of Bakić's feminist and political essays or even her social network persona.

Due to the outspokenness of these narrators and the bizarreness of the stories they tell, the issue of narratorial reliability inevitably arises. But are Bakić's narrators truly unreliable or are they just gutsy young women whose stories are less likely to be taken seriously because of the patriarchal assumption that "the male body lends credence to assertions, while the female takes it away" (Ellmann 1968: 148)?

Narratorial reliability is a narratological concept that is almost exclusively related to homodiegetic narration. As Dan Shen succinctly puts it in *The Living Handbook of Narratology*: "If a narrator misreports, -interprets or -evaluates, or if she/he underreports, -interprets or -evaluates, this narrator is unreliable or untrustworthy" (Shen 2013). The concept of narrative unreliability was first introduced by Wayne Booth in *The Rhetoric of Fiction* where he claimed that the narrator is unreliable when their words or actions are in conflict with "the norms of the work (which is to say the implied author's norms)" (Booth 1961: 15).[4]

Summarizing the issue in *Narrative Fiction*, Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan distinguishes three basic sources of narratorial unreliability and suggests that "reliability can be negatively defined by their absence" (Rimmon-Kenan 2002: 101). The first source of unreliability is the narrator's "limited knowledge", the second "personal involvement", and the third "a problematic value-scheme" (Rimmon-Kenan 2002: 101).

In the first case, the reporting of the events itself is problematic because the narrator does not have access to all the facts, while in the second case the narrator is unable to interpret the events objectively. This is true of most homodiegetic narrators who only have access to their own point of view which is subjective by default. The third case of unreliability differs from the first two in that it necessarily brings up the issue of an assumed "unproblematic" or proper value-scheme. Rimmon-Kenan states that the "narrator's moral values are questionable if they do not tally with those of the implied author of the given work", but immediately admits that it is "notoriously difficult to arrive at" the norms of the implied author (Rimmon-Kenan 2002: 102). Of course, sometimes the facts or the outcome of the plot contradict the narrator's version of events, when the perspectives of other characters do not align with the narrator's, or when the narrator's language is contradictory and ironic (Rimmon-Kenan 2002: 102). These occurrences can serve as signals of narratorial unreliability or, more precisely, "indicate a gap between the norms of the implied author and those of the narrator" (Rimmon-Kenan

[4] Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan claims that the implied author might be best understood as a "voiceless and silent" textual construct "inferred and assembled by the reader from all the components of the text" (Rimmon-Kenan 2002: 88).

2002: 102). However, when it comes to moral values, it is much less clear what the "norm" is, as different people and different social groups uphold different value systems that are also historically and culturally variable.

Since most of Bakić's protagonist-narrators can only narrate the events from their own perspective, their narration is necessarily defined by "limited knowledge" and "personal involvement". However, their knowledge is not limited because of their youth or cognitive and mental disability, and they do not disclose information they do not have access to (Rimmon-Kenan 2002: 102). Rather, their knowledge is limited because they find themselves in new, unfamiliar, and stressful situations. In order to gain some control over the events unfolding in unknown and often dangerous surroundings, the narrators must gather as much information as possible, and the reader follows them on this quest.

Although all stories except two ("MCSB" and "The Sorrows of Young Lotte") are told in the past tense using ulterior narration indicating that the narrated events have already happened (Rimmon-Kenan 2002: 90), they are nevertheless presented as if they are happening in the present due to internal focalization (Genette 1980: 189). Since the reader has access only to the perspective of the "experiencing self" without any subsequent explanation or interpretation provided by a more informed "narrating self" (Genette 1980: 252), this creates a strong impression that the narration occurs simultaneously with the events. This impression is reinforced by the way in which the protagonist-narrators gradually accumulate information about the situation they are in, until they finally understand what will happen to them or, in many stories, how to use this information to escape, gain power over others or reverse the course of events. For instance, in the first story from *Mars*, "Day Trip to Durmitor", the protagonist--narrator finds herself in an afterlife she "was trying desperately to understand" (Bakić 2019: 5). She slowly figures out that when people die, they go wherever they imagined they would, and that her afterlife is a kind of limbo where two secretaries named Tristesa and Zubrowka force her to write as many stories as she can so that she can move on to the "second phase" (Bakić 2019: 6). Similarly, the narrator of "Abby", who seems to suffer from memory loss, slowly learns that she is an android purchased by her "husband" John.

In this way, all autodiegetic narrators in Bakić's stories struggle to comprehend their circumstances, but this does not necessarily mean that they are unreliable. Indeed, her stories told in the third person by an objective heterodiegetic narrator disclose information in the same gradual manner. However, when comparing "Day Trip to Durmitor" and "Abby" with "1998", one of the few stories with the heterodiegetic narrator, what becomes apparent is not the difference in the way

the events are reported but in the way they are perceived and evaluated, and especially in the way the autodiegetic narrators perceive and evaluate themselves. For instance, the protagonist-narrator of "Day Trip to Durmitor" presents herself as different to other writers who only write autobiographies: "But when I got down to writing, it became clear that I didn't know how to write sappy stories. I wrote how I thought, and my thoughts were explosive" (Bakić 2019: 8). But then she modifies this statement: "To be honest, I wasn't actually special. I had an eccentric personality, sure, but plenty of others did too. I wasn't unique" (Bakić 2019: 11). Does this new assertion mean that she was not honest before? Should the reader trust her now just because she is explicitly claiming to be honest? "Abby" presents a slightly different case because at one point in the story the narrator realizes that she is "an excellent liar" (Bakić 2019: 46), but as far as the reader can see, she only lies to her husband in order to escape. Is being honest to the narratee about lying to other characters a sign of unreliability?

Several narrators seem more clearly unreliable. Firstly, the protagonist-narrator in the short story "Passions" is a writer who is trying to find out if Vanja, her friend from college, has written the anonymously published novel metatextually named *Passions*. The narrator spends a significant portion of the story suspecting everyone else of lying:

> I was still wondering what had happened to Vanja and whether she'd really given up on literature. I just couldn't believe her. People lied so much and so carelessly that I was certain Vanja had been lying to my face the whole time we were together. (Bakić 2019: 100)

However, it soon turns out that Vanja has not been lying to the narrator; rather, the narrator has been lying to herself. When she finally admits that she has been deceiving herself, her whole story falls apart:

> "Listen, we haven't seen each other in years. I don't know why, out of all our classmates, you decided to contact me. It is because I have money?" she asked.
> "For god's sake, Vanja, weren't we best friends?"
> "No, we weren't," she said. "We barely spoke outside of class. You were always terribly shy. If you need money," she continued, "just say so. I know it's hard to live as a writer." (Bakić 2019: 101–102)

The narrator in "Passions" is unaware of her own unreliability and she believes that she is telling the truth until Vanja's words reveal the reality of their relationship. Consequently, this case of unreliability could be placed in Rimmon-Kenan's category of "personal involvement" where the subjective perspective of the

narrator affects the narration. On the other hand, the narrator in "1740" from *Sweetlust* openly admits to her narratee that she is lying:

> A little drop of sweat trickles down my cheek. I say it's a drop of sweat, but of course I'm lying. Lying helps me survive – it's because of lying that I'm not an extinct species myself. I've been lying my entire life. (Bakić 2023: 76)

When her friend Vilko visits her, she lies to him as well:

> "You're crying again?" he asks.
> He never beats around the bush. Maybe that's why I still consider him a friend.
> "It's sweat," I lie. "It's hot." (Bakić 2023: 77)

This short conversation confirms that the narrator was crying instead of sweating before Vilko came. The narrator immediately tells the narratee that she is lying, but she continues to lie to her friend Vilko. This kind of "liar paradox" is typical of many unreliable narrators that explicitly admit their unreliability: should the reader believe her when she says she is lying? However, the narrator in "1740" differs from the narrator in "Abby" because she does not lie to save herself but to sabotage her friends' plans, and this factor brings to mind Rimmon-Kenan's third source of narratorial unreliability, "a problematic value-scheme".

While the vast majority of Bakić's protagonist-narrators hold feminist and socialist values, "1740" is an especially intriguing story owing to the narrator's unreliability, as well as her individualistic neoliberal politics (Vićentić 2022). The story is set in the near future, when the Balkans are flooded as a direct result of global warming. A group of scientist friends are building a time machine in order to travel back in time to 1964 and persuade Yugoslav politicians like Edvard Kardelj and artists such as the writer Miroslav Krleža and the sculptor Vojin Bakić – whose modernist sculptures they use to construct the machine – to stop the "'great economic reform' that will open up Yugoslav society to a market economy and capitalism" (Bakić 2023: 101). Conversely, the narrator describes her own values as "traditional values" that had "always mattered in the Balkans" and which she inherited from her parents: "[f]amily, money, and rakija" (Bakić 2023: 82). In the end, she brings her own console and programs the time machine to take them to 1740 instead of 1964. They land in "the most delightful, most debauched age of Louis XV", where the narrator will not have to face any consequences for her own contribution to global warming (Bakić 2023: 103).

The narrator in "1740" is the villain of the tale, but since Bakić's stories are never explicit political manifestos, the other characters, Vilko and Višnja, are

unsympathetically portrayed as well. Višnja has a "terrible" sense of humor (Bakić 2023: 80) and even though the narrator describes her as a "noble" person (Bakić 2023: 84) who "only respects progress with no commercial value" (Bakić 2023: 99). In the end she also wants to decide what is best for other people (Bakić 2023: 96), much like the narrator. Višnja supposedly makes these decisions "for the greater good", but the narrator thinks her motivations are "selfish" (Bakić 2023: 87). When Vilko tells the narrator that they stole parts of Vojin Bakić's sculptures "for the greater good" to build a time machine. He justifies their behavior by mentioning the previous destruction of the artist's sculptures, many of which were devastated by Croatian nationalists after the breakup of Yugoslavia. Although their motives are opposite, the destruction is similar, which casts doubt on Vilko's "nobility". The narrator may also have a point by questioning their whole enterprise: could the progressive wing of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia comprehend and act upon this warning from the future? And could any environmental policy that Yugoslavia might implement in 1964 really have a global impact? The almost comical outrageousness of this idea also makes it difficult to accept it without irony. Certainly, the narrator and her friends are constructed as polar opposites, the former glorifying family over community and the latter privileging the political over the personal. In the end, while the narrator is the villain, Višnja and Vilko are hardly heroes.

Finally, there is Lotte from "The Sorrows of Young Lotte", the final story in *Sweetlust* which is a feminist retelling of Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther* written in the form of Lotte's brutally frank diary. In this version of the story, Lotte is a murderer which should make her value system immediately problematic, but again, it is not that simple. Not only do Lotte's diary entries seem completely honest, but her retelling of the events reveals Werther as a misogynist and classist, a cruel and evil man who condones rape as an "outburst of passion" that is "healthy and genuine" (Bakić 2023: 193). Lotte's narration exposes Werther's idealized image of her beauty and goodness as an illusion produced by patriarchal ideas of true femininity. He is in love with the idea of her while simultaneously showing no interest in the real, flesh-and-blood Lotte. In response to this neglect, Lotte writes:

> I want you to at least get a glimpse of my rich inner life. [...]
> I could never take [your mother's] place, nurturing your weakness like it's the greatest gift to humanity. [...]
> Is a woman even alive if there's no man nearby lamenting his pain in her presence?
> Of course, but who cares? (Bakić 2023: 187, 191, 192)

Ultimately, the problem with including the issue of moral values as a source of narratorial (un)reliability is that, formally speaking, the narrator's values have no direct impact on her reliability. Reliability should depend only on the accuracy and consistency of the narrator's information. The narrator may not be likeable, which might depend on the readers' taste but she should be considered reliable if she appears to be honest about her transgressions or crimes.

WILLFUL SUBJECTS

In her memoir *In the Dream House*, author Carmen Maria Machado wants to know "how people decide who is or is not an unreliable narrator" (Machado 2020: 166). She explains that as a child her parents and siblings referred to her as a "drama queen" because "the profound unfairness of the world triggered a furious, poetic response from [her]" (Machado 2020: 166). They believed that "ferocity did not become [her]" because she was a girl (Machado 2020: 166). Machado asks: "Why do we teach girls that their perspectives are inherently untrustworthy? [...] And after that decision has been made, what do we do with people who attempt to construct their own vision of justice?" (Machado 2020: 166).

Asja Bakić's protagonist-narrators certainly construct their own vision of justice. As "The Sorrows of Young Lotte" makes clear, men like Werther do not truly care about the inner lives of the women they supposedly admire and love. When women are seen only in relation to men and not as individuals, it follows that their stories are not considered universal and important, a tendency that becomes even more pronounced when gender intersects with age, class, race, sexuality and ability. Bakić's narrators, often constructed as young women from the Balkans, subvert this familiar dynamic by boldly using their voices and exercising authority that has been historically and culturally denied to them. Writing about Bakić from a decolonial-feminist perspective, Jelena Vićentić reads her stories as subversive "responses to the violence of hegemonic structures" told by the narrators from a "marginalized position" (Vićentić 2022). Vinćetić links this position to Gloria E. Anzaldúa's concept of "border thinking", "an epistemological position that is critical of abstract 'universal' categories of knowledge and a real step forward towards repressed – indigenous, folk, traditional, spiritual – non-hierarchical knowledge" (Vićentić 2022).

Further subverting patriarchal gender norms, many narrators and characters in Bakić's stories are depicted as androgynous as well as queer. For example, in "Asja 5.0", the narrator rediscovers sexual pleasure with one of her own clones;

in "Carnivore", a man finds out that his wife is in a relationship with another woman; in "Passions", the narrator is attracted to Vanja who is described as an androgynous woman; in "Gretel", the narrator is a trans woman; in "Blindness", the narrator takes part in an erotic ritual performed by a group of witches; and in "The Abduction", the robots do not conform to the gender binary.

Even the title of Bakić's first short story collection, *Mars*, can be read as undermining gender norms because it evokes many culturally masculine associations but then ties them to the feminine narrators and characters: Mars is the Roman god of war, which is also alluded to in the title of Miroslav Krleža's 1922 short story collection *Hrvatski bog Mars* (*The Croatian God Mars*), one of the most important books of Croatian and Yugoslav modernism. In popular imagination, Mars is a masculine planet while Venus is considered feminine, and in astrology, people with Mars ascendant, like the narrator in "The Underworld" who goes on to destroy Earth, are characterized as lively and energetic.

Consequently, it could be argued that the combative protagonist-narrators in Bakić's stories embody the figures of the "female troublemaker" and "feminist killjoy" that Sara Ahmed discusses in her influential book *The Promise of Happiness* (2010). Ahmed shows how "happiness as a form of world making" is "used to justify oppression" and meticulously uncovers "the unhappy effects of happiness" when it is understood as a social norm (Ahmed 2010: 2). According to Ahmed, certain forms of personhood and certain social forms – especially the heterosexual family – are seen as promoting happiness more than others. As she maintains, "[t]he demand for happiness is increasingly articulated as a demand to return to social ideals, as if what explains the crisis of happiness is not the failure of these ideals but our failure to follow them" (Ahmed 2010: 7). Thus, the way in which Western society presents happiness not as a social norm but as an individual responsibility hides the alignment of happiness with political, social, and economic privilege and erases the history of its unequal distribution. Ahmed offers "an alternative history of happiness [...] by considering those who are banished from it, or who enter this history only as troublemakers, dissenters, killers of joy" (Ahmed 2010: 17).

Ahmed's "troublemakers", "killjoys", and "angry black women" are feminist figures because the history of feminism is defined as "a history of making trouble, a history of women [...] refusing to make others happy" (Ahmed 2010: 60). In fact, "[t]he female troublemaker might be trouble because she gets in the way of the happiness of others" (Ahmed 2010: 60). Ahmed often uses examples from literature to illustrate her points and in several of her books she returns to the story of Maggie Tulliver, the protagonist of George Eliot's 1860 novel *The Mill on the Floss*. In contrast to her brother Tom, Maggie is regarded by her parents as a "troublemaker".

Moreover, she is "attributed as the cause of trouble", but "what does not get noticed is the violence that makes her act in the way that she does" (Ahmed 2010: 61). As an outspoken girl, Maggie is dismissed as "bold and thankless" as well as having "too much curiosity" (Ahmed 2010: 61–62). She soon learns that to be "a good girl is to give up having a will of one's own" (Ahmed 2010: 62).

Maggie is therefore also seen as "willful" (Ahmed 2010: 64), a concept that Ahmed further develops in her later books *Willful Subjects* (2014) and *Living a Feminist Life* (2017). For Ahmed, the figure of the "female troublemaker" is aligned with the figure of the "feminist killjoy" because both are regularly described as "willful": "A subject is described as willful at the point that her will does not coincide with that of others, those whose will is reified as the general and social will" (Ahmed 2010: 64). Similar to the "troublemaker" who is judged as the cause of trouble while the injustice that leads to her reaction is ignored, feminists are "read as being unhappy, such that situations of conflict, violence, and power are read as *about* the unhappiness of feminists, rather than being what feminists are unhappy *about*" (Ahmed 2010: 67).

In Ahmed's theory, happiness works by masking unhappiness, "by covering over its causes" (Ahmed 2010: 87). If the causes of unhappiness are sexism, racism, homophobia, transphobia, and similar forms of discrimination, then feminists have a duty to uncover "the violence and power that are concealed under the languages of civility and love", beneath the idea that everybody should get along (Ahmed 2010: 86). But when feminists begin to unearth "what is concealed by signs of happiness", they soon realize "that the world you are in is not the world you thought you were in" (Ahmed 2010: 86). In this case, Ahmed continues, "[f]eminism becomes a kind of estrangement from the world and thus involves moments of self-estrangement" (Ahmed 2010: 86).

In Bakić's stories feminist estrangement unfolds in narrative situations that are themselves constructed as strange because they involve communication with worlds and realms other than our own. As discussed earlier, weird fiction – with its distinctive combination of science fiction, fantasy, horror, and fairy tales – strives to defamiliarize the normal in order to expose the workings of power in our world. Bakić's characters must expose the power structures underlying the worlds they inhabit so that they can save themselves, and sometimes the only viable solution is to destroy the unjust and violent world itself. In this way, combining weird fiction and feminist ideas, Bakić's stories employ both the aesthetic and political meanings of estrangement.[5]

[5] Ahmed's use of the term "estrangement" could be linked to the Russian Formalists' concept of estrangement/defamiliarization (*ostranenie*) (See Shklovsky 1965).

Even though the fictional worlds of the stories range from the familiar to the strange and downright bizarre, they all seem to be organized along patriarchal and capitalist lines. For instance, in "Day Trip to Durmitor", the narrator finds out that even the afterlife, where poets return to Earth as zombies, is hierarchically structured when the poet Njegoš "get[s] the honor of the first bite" in the "hunt for the human brain" (Bakić 2019: 18). When the narrator in "Abby" discovers that she is an android and that her "husband" has taken out a bank loan to pay for her, she destroys her own USB stick and leaves him. "Asja 5.0" is set in a world without sexual pleasure where "gender roles persisted even without sex" (Bakić 2019: 70) and people only touched one another "during the exchange of money and other essential goods" (Bakić 2019: 66). The narrator in "Guest", who possesses the power to create and destroy worlds, decides to destroy the world she is visiting because it "can imagine only the material" and not abstract notions like infinity or peace on Earth (Bakić 2019: 125–126). Similarly, the narrator of "The Underworld", a writer who was exiled to Mars after writing was banned on Earth, realizes that she has the power to destroy our planet. "Gretel" imagines a world without men, where "all that remained of them was Sweetlust", an erotic amusement park that the narrator and her friends plan to sabotage with a computer virus because they believe it keeps women "stuck in the past" (Bakić 2023: 21–22). In "Fellow's Gully" – a rewriting of the myth of Persephone – the narrator must share her husband with his mother who lives in the underworld, but their exchange is presented in the form of buying and selling property. "The Abduction" features another writer character whose writing has been reduced solely to manual labor in the service of capitalist advertising.

Many of these stories end in a moment of crisis, with the protagonist on the brink of decision that will change not only her life but also the future of humanity. In several stories this decision has already been made, but its consequences are not yet apparent. Mikhail Bakhtin calls this particular combination of time and space, "highly charged with emotion and value", "the chronotope of the *threshold* [...] the chronotope of *crisis* and a *break* in a life" (Bakhtin 1981: 248). According to Bakhtin, such moments of crisis occur in liminal spaces such as staircases, halls, and corridors, as well as public squares and streets, but in Bakić's speculative fiction these spaces expand to include the threshold between two worlds, between captivity and freedom, life and death, destruction and renewal. They can also be described as "places where crisis events occur, the falls, resurrections, renewals, epiphanies, decisions that determine the whole life of a man" (Bakhtin 1981: 248) – or woman.

Although Bakić's stories do not offer a clear vision of the world to come after the present one has been dismantled, many of them end on a hopeful note and

thus enact Sara Ahmed's definition of feminism as "the struggle for more bearable worlds" (Ahmed 2017: 1). Bakić's protagonists feel like strangers in the worlds they inhabit because these worlds do not "accommodate" them (Ahmed 2017: 10). They "encounter the world as resistant, as blocking rather than enabling an action", and therefore "feel alienated from the world as they experience the world as alien" (Ahmed 2017: 11). "To fall from Mars", a Croatian saying also alluded to in the title of Bakić's book and explicitly mentioned in "The Guest",[6] connotes someone who is confused, baffled, and cannot find their way. However, in "The Guest", others look at the narrator as if she "fell from Mars", indicating that she appears strange to them, that they do not understand her, and that she does not fit in. Some characters exhibit physical symptoms of not fitting in. For instance, in "The Underworld" the narrator suffers from headaches and nausea because she is exiled to Mars, a planet not meant for her: "When you live on a hostile planet, everything is a reminder of your weakness, the vulnerability of your organism" (Bakić 2019: 145).

These mental and physical symptoms point to "a body that is not at home in the world" (Ahmed 2017: 13). In *Living a Feminist Life*, Ahmed demonstrates how feminist knowledge is generated from such experiences, "the kinds of experiences you have when you are not expected to be here" (Ahmed 2017: 10). "Think of this", she continues, "how we learn about worlds when they do not accommodate us" (Ahmed 2017: 10). Feminist ideas arise not through distance or abstraction, "but from our involvement in a world that often leaves us, frankly, bewildered" (Ahmed 2017: 12). They come about from "hunches, those senses that something is amiss, not quite right, which are part of ordinary living and a starting point for so much critical work" (Ahmed 2017: 12). In this way, concepts are inseparable from everyday bodily experiences, "like an apple that hits you on the head" (Ahmed 2017: 13), or a feeling as if you have fallen from Mars.

Ahmed uses the term "sweaty concepts", following Audre Lorde, for this kind of worldly, bodily thinking which is "generated by the practical experience of coming up against a world, or the practical experience of trying to transform a world" (Ahmed 2017: 13–14). For female troublemakers and feminist killjoys, "[t]he task is to stay with the difficulty, to keep exploring and exposing this difficulty" (Ahmed 2017: 13), to persist in uncovering the injustice and violence underlying societal structures. As aforesaid, these feminist figures are often judged as "willful", as "going one's own way" or "going the wrong way" (Ahmed 2017: 65). In tracing the cultural heritage of troublemaking and willful girls, Ahmed

[6] "The guests looked at me curiously, like I'd just landed from Mars" (Bakić 2019: 117).

goes back to the Brothers Grimm story "The Willful Child" in which a child is so disobedient that God lets her become ill and die, but her arm keeps rising up from the grave until the mother strikes it down with a rod (Ahmed 2017: 66–67).

It befits, then, that the narrator of Bakić's first story in *Mars* describes herself as willful, thus setting the tone for the rest of the book: "I was a disobedient child and I stayed that way: mischievous through and through" (Bakić 2019: 9). Abby also ends her story with a willful promise: "I tossed the USB on the ground and stomped on it. I resolved no one would stick anything into me anymore" (Bakić 2019: 59). Asja in the story "Asja 5.0" bites on her knife while sending text messages to her clones and orders the tyrant Kreanga to remove his hand from her pants: "'The forest is yours,' I'd say, 'but what you've grabbed – that is not'" (Bakić 2019: 63–64). In "The Guest", the narrator refuses to wear the dress the guru Carlyle has chosen for her, wearing it as a shawl instead (Bakić 2019: 115).

Continuing the legacy of the willful child from Grimms' tale, the willfulness of these disobedient characters is also often symbolically linked to their hands which they use to protest, write, create, and destroy. In "Day Trip to Durmitor", the narrator is fixated on her hands, her writing tools: "I was always waving my hands, gesticulating wildly: I wrote poetry with a carpenter's pencil" (Bakić 2019: 10). Finally, when she feels a higher power "tugging the rope" that controls her, she "trie[s] to make a fist, but [her] hand [doesn't] cooperate" (Bakić 2019: 18). The narrator in "Passions" states that she wanted to "beat people up", but never did, though she would "sometimes wake up with clenched, burning fists" (Bakić 2019: 94). This motif is especially pronounced in "The Guest", where the narrator's palms grow warmer throughout the story until she realizes that her hands are powerful tools of creation:

> I looked at him, my fists clenched. They were beyond hot now – smoke poured from them, finally bursting into flame, illuminating the farthest corner of the cave. I stood in the middle of the room, thinking only of incinerating myself and everything around me. (Bakić 2019: 126)

In the end, she decides to use the power emanating from her fists to destroy humanity, but preserve everything else (Bakić 2019: 127).

In addition to the clenched fist, another motif recurs in the stories – the protagonist laughing in the face of male figures representing power and danger. Humor is also a trait of the feminist killjoy: "To laugh at something can be to make something more real, to magnify it, and to reduce something's power or hold over you, simultaneously" (Ahmed 2017: 246). Bakić's protagonists succeed in using laughter to ward off danger, and sometimes to defuse it altogether. For example,

the heroine of "1998" laughs when the mysterious young man who preys on girls tries to seduce her by telling her that she is "different, better than the other girls" (Bakić 2023: 18); or when Daphne laughs at Apollo's personal ads in old issues of *Erotica* magazine because she has not forgiven him yet (Bakić 2023: 135).

These women laugh and raise their fists at powerful men, thereby reclaiming some of their power. While many of them do act alone, some stories feature a female collective. As Ahmed emphasizes, the story of willfulness is "not a story of a lonely person fighting against the tide of social traffic" (Ahmed 2017: 82). When "willfulness is confused, and reduced to, individualism", this "reduction is how willful subjects are dismissed" as being "*stubborn, obstinate, defiant, rude, reckless*" (Ahmed 2017: 83). However, "[t]o reclaim willfulness is how a *we* can be brought forth by the willingness to go the wrong way" (Ahmed 2017: 82). Even if they are put in extraordinary situations, many Bakić's heroines are strongly aware that they themselves are not exceptional. To reiterate, the narrator in "Day Trip in Durmitor" puts it best: "To be honest, I wasn't actually special. I had an eccentric personality, sure, but plenty of others did too. I wasn't unique" (Bakić 2019: 11). This insight – that she is not an exception – will help the protagonist of "1998" defeat the villain. He wants to win her over by using the misogynist compliment that she is "better than other girls", but she is not fooled: "She laughed. She knew she wasn't better. That realization would save her" (Bakić 2023: 18).

These stories may focus on the quest of a single heroine, but they are never set in a social vacuum. The protagonists are well aware that they share their marginalized position with other women who are not very different from them. Ahmed believes that achieving feminist consciousness largely involves becoming aware that "what happens to me, happens to others" (Ahmed 2017: 27):

> In finding feminism, you are finding out about the many ways that feminists have tried to make sense, already, of the experiences you had, before you had them; experiences that left you feeling all alone are the experiences that lead you to others. (Ahmed 2017: 31)

The narrator in "Day Trip to Durmitor" had been watching Rambo when she died "and unwittingly took his motto, 'Alone against everyone'" (Bakić 2019: 4). However, several stories center on a group of women, a "feminist army of arms" (Ahmed 2017: 84). The motif of women working together or helping other women appears in "Abby", where a woman's voice on the telephone guides the narrator to freedom; in "Asja 5.0", where Asja's clones conspire against the male dictator figure; and in "Blindness", where the narrator's sister helps her find a way to regain her sight. However, the most memorable examples of female

cooperation and friendship are found in "Gretel" and "Cassandra".[7] In the first story, the narrator and her friends program a computer virus nicknamed Gretel which is meant to destroy Sweetlust, the infamous erotic amusement park offering heterosexual activities for women in a world where men no longer exist. The narrator even comments: "I'd never cried because of a man, but my friends were my weak spot" (Bakić 2023: 32). "Cassandra" portrays a group of women from the Balkans who escape from a medical facility where they were being monitored for "hormonal changes caused by global warming and poverty" (Bakić 2021).

Even in the stories where the protagonists seem to be fighting alone, their hands are presented as laborers' arms, which Sara Ahmed describes as willful (Ahmed 2017: 85). Bakić's characters are almost always writers; however, in stories such as "Day Trip to Durmitor", "The Underworld", and "The Abduction", writing literature is depicted as manual labor, akin to other forms of labor under capitalism. These stories make clear that there are many other writers, other laborers doing the work of writing along with the protagonists. In this way, another meaning of the willful subject's clenched fist emerges. The clenched fist is "a revolutionary sign for labor movements" as well as "a key image for the women's liberation movement" (Ahmed 2017: 85). "Willfulness", Ahmed writes, is "how some rise up by exercising the very limbs that have been shaped by their subordination" (Ahmed 2017: 88).

However, some of Bakić's protagonists seem more alone than others and two of them – the narrator of "1740" and "The Sorrows of Young Lotte" – stand out in this respect. As discussed earlier, in this "counter-story" (Ahmed 2017: 210) to *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, Lotte is given an imagination, an inner life, and a will of her own that Werther's account of their relationship lacks. Lotte writes about Werther with palpable contempt, but her public conduct is conventionally pleasant. Her example proves that it is also "possible to act willfully by not standing out at all" (Ahmed 2017: 83). Ahmed names this behavior "willful passing" and considers it a type of willfulness whereby one "might pass as willing in order to be willful" (Ahmed 2017: 83). As Ahmed maintains, "[s]he might be plotting" (Ahmed 2017: 83), and that is indeed what Lotte is doing, for in this counter-story she confesses to murdering Werther.

Unlike most of the narrator-protagonists in Bakić's stories, Lotte and the narrator in "1740" are not straightforward feminist heroines; in fact, it would be difficult to consider them anything other than villains. Lotte would fit more easily into Ahmed's analysis of the phenomenon of the "feminist snap" or "breaking

[7] "Cassandra" is a story not published in either of the collections but in Bakić 2021.

point" (Ahmed 2017: 187). For Ahmed, a "snap" is recorded as the moment when a woman breaks, but what is not shown is the long process leading up to that event:

> When you don't take it, when you can't take any more of it, what happens? The moment of not taking it is so often understood as losing it. When a snap is registered as the origin of violence, the one who snaps is deemed violent. [...] And then: violence is assumed to originate with her. A feminist politics might insist on renaming actions as reactions; we need to show how her snap is not the starting point. (Ahmed 2017: 189)

Similar to Lotte's counter-story, Ahmed interprets three films that also address women murdering men in response to patriarchal oppression through the lens of feminist snap.[8] Lotte is indeed a murderess, but Werther's murder is not the beginning of the story. The beginning can be found in the patriarchal violence she has endured for years. On the other hand, the actions of the narrator in "1740", as analyzed earlier, are perhaps the most difficult to justify since she has internalized traditional Balkan values such as family and money, yet rebels against them in a willful but politically reactionary way. The fact that that the protagonists of Bakić's stories are complex, contradictory, and not always straightforwardly feminist or "positive" demonstrates her interest in exploring a wide range of women characters. Stories like "1740" and "The Sorrows of Young Lotte" serve as a welcome addition to the debate about "negative" heroines in feminist literary criticism, proving Rita Felski's point in her book *Literature after Feminism* that "[w]e cannot have female agency without the possibility of female error and cruelty" (Felski 2003: 125).

CONCLUSION: FUTURE WORLDS

As aforementioned, many stories in *Mars* and *Sweetlust* end in a moment of crisis, just before a transformative event is about to happen or just after it occurs. In these cases, something is "snapped", broken, destroyed – a marriage, a system, a world, a planet. The destruction of an old, unjust system brings victory and freedom, and with them a new feeling of uncertainty. "Gretel" contains a fitting description of such a moment, following the destruction of the erotic amusement park that prevents women from moving on:

[8] These films are *A Question of Silence* (1982, dir. Marleen Gorris), *Nine to Five* (1980, dir. Colin Higgins) and *Born in Flames* (1983, dir. Lizzie Borden).

> Now there were no more men, and no more Sweetlust. We could start anew, just like my friends said. No longer covered by a fake roof of candy. All around us were bare walls and exhausted women leaning against them. Some visitors lay on the floor and we had to step over them on our way to the exit. Our teeth chattered from the cold. (Bakić 2023: 39)

While her friends tell her that the weeping women will be fine, the narrator is not as sure. She says: "Sadness can't be turned off like a computer" (Bakić 2023: 40). Although the stories end before new systems are created, they aptly capture the uneasy transition from old to new, and offer a glimpse into what these future worlds might look like. According to Luka Bekavac, Bakić's stories already include various metamorphoses of humans into plants, machines, animals, viruses, or a combination of these entities (Bekavac 2023). These stories of "new and unpredictable affinities [...] regard inorganic nature, animals, humans, technology and pure information as a continuum, a locus of possible solidarity, transforming the received notions of corporeality, virtuality, family, sexuality, economy and progress" (Bekavac 2023: 7). Also writing about "Gretel", Bekavac points out that even though biology and technology blur in the story, "it is crucial that the narrator had to step in personally to play a certain role in order to gain a specific effect [...] only a particular action taking place in a context of material entanglement effects a real change" (Bekavac 2023: 9).

Indeed, in Bakić's stories change is usually brought about by the protagonist – by something she has or something she is. In "Gretel", the narrator's friends tell her that she is their "Trojan horse" (Bakić 2023: 31), referring to the term for a computer malware that already alludes to the ancient Greek myth. As a trans woman, she is a "glitch" in the system that will eradicate the gender binary. That is precisely why the motto of the story is taken from Olga Goriunova and Alexei Shulgin's essay "Glitch" about the new aesthetics of glitch: "A glitch is the loss of control" (Goriunova and Shulgin 2008: 115). According to Goriunova and Shulgin, a glitch occurs "[w]hen the computer does the unexpected, goes beyond the borders of the commonplace, changes the context, acts as if not logical but irrational, behaves not as technology should" (Goriunova and Shulgin 2008: 115). A glitch is "produced by error and usually not intended by humans", and therefore it is not "one-hundred percent compatible with customary human logic, visual, sound, or behavioral conventions of organizing and acting in space" (Goriunova and Shulgin 2008: 115).

Along similar lines, Legacy Russell coins the term "glitch feminism", which takes up the notion of "glitch-as-error" in order to celebrate it as a "vehicle of

refusal" to participate in the gender binary and other rigid and unjust political, social, and economic systems (Russell 2020: 8). For Russell, the "ongoing presence of the glitch generates a welcome and protected space in which to innovate and experiment" (Russell 2020: 12). This exploration of "new frameworks and new visions of fantastic futures" will first happen online, in the digital realm, and then spread out into the world "away from the keyboard" (Russell 2020: 14). She recognizes power in error and failure, in being "the glitch in the system", failing "in a system that has failed us" (Davis 2020). "How do we break what is broken?", she asks in an interview for *Artnet* and emphasizes the importance of interrogating "what models of 'success' are in a culture that continues to center supremacy and enact social and physical death unto those who don't 'fit'" (Davis 2020). Just like Bakić's heroines, she calls for the destruction of the system: "I say tear it all down – breaking what's broken is the glitch. It is an abolitionist demand, a demand to get free" (Davis 2020).

Asja Bakić's heroines, as young women in a marginalized position, are the glitch in the system. They embody the glitch in a formal sense, narrating their own stories in bold and brutally honest ways which can make them unlikeable as characters and therefore unreliable as narrators, as well as by exercising their willfulness. They do not fit in, they are discarded and overlooked, seen as easy prey, but their surprising power lies precisely in their marginality. Bakić's stories bring together feminism and weird fiction to demonstrate how female troublemakers, feminist killjoys, and willful subjects who refuse to happily accept the position society has intended for them can act as the glitch that opens up new possibilities of living and being by exposing the failures of the existing system.

If a glitch is the loss of control, feminist snap is also often unplanned, but happens anyway because something was "too much, before we even know it is too much", and because "where we have been is no longer where we can be" (Ahmed 2017: 200). Nevertheless, Sara Ahmed believes that "snap involves another kind of optimism; we might call this an optimism without a future, an optimism that makes a break of something the start of something without knowing what this something is, or what it might be" (Ahmed 2017: 200).

It is precisely at this point that Bakić's stories end. There is no future yet, but there will be one. As Ahmed often asserts, "[k]illing joy is a world-making project": "We make a world out of the shattered pieces even when we shatter the pieces or even when we are the shattered pieces" (200). Asja Bakić's stories leave the reader imagining future worlds that can be created after this one is destroyed.

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Sažetak

FEMINISTIČKA "ČUDNA PROZA" ASJE BAKIĆ

Asja Bakić (rođena 1982. u Bosni i Hercegovini, živi u Hrvatskoj, objavljuje u Hrvatskoj i Srbiji) pripada novoj generaciji balkanskih i postjugoslavenskih spisateljica. Iako je i pjesnikinja i esejistica, Bakić je postigla međunarodni uspjeh zbirkom kratkih priča *Mars* (2015), koja je prevedena na engleski, njemački i francuski jezik. Njezina domišljata poezija, feministički polemički eseji i žanrovski hibridne kratke priče pozicioniraju je kao subverzivnu autoricu u hrvatskom književnom polju u kojem još uvijek dominira neorealistička poetika. Nasuprot tome, kratke priče Asje Bakić najbolje se mogu opisati kao "weird" (čudna) ili "New Weird" pripovjedna proza, autorefleksivan i politički obilježen oblik pisanja koji briše granice između fantastike, spekulativne fikcije i horora. Bakićine su priče redovito smještene u budućnost, gdje njezine borbene i uporne androgine pripovjedačice-protagonistice, uglavnom mlade žene s Balkana, razotkrivaju načine na koje se seksizam presijeca s kapitalizmom, kolonijalizmom, tehnologijom i klimatskim promjenama. Spajanjem feminističkih ideja i "čudne" proze njezine priče pokazuju da "buntovnica", "feminist killjoy" i "svojevoljni subjekt" (S. Ahmed), teorijske i političke figure koje odbijaju mirno prihvatiti položaj koji im je društvo namijenilo, mogu funkcionirati kao "glitch" odnosno tehnička "pogreška" (L. Russell), koja otvara nove mogućnosti življenja i postojanja istovremeno razotkrivajući neuspjehe postojećeg sustava.

Ključne riječi: Asja Bakić, nepouzdani pripovjedač, buntovnica, svojevoljni subjekt, pogreška