

**Angela Vode.** *Spol in upor.* [*Gender and Rebellion*]. *Zbrana dela Angele Vode. I. knjiga.* Ljubljana: Krtina, 1998. 351 pp., 3150 SIT (\$17) (paper).

**Angela Vode.** *Značaj in usoda.* [*Character and Destiny*]. *Zbrana dela Angele Vode. II. knjiga.* Ljubljana: Krtina, 1999. 274 pp., 3150 SIT (\$17) (paper).

**Angela Vode.** *Spomin in pozaba.* [*Memory and Oblivion*]. *Zbrana dela Angele Vode. III. knjiga.* Ljubljana: Krtina, 2000. 348 pp.

Slovenes born after 1945 heard nothing of Angela Vode (1892–1985) or her works until recently. In 1993, I saw her name for the first time when I was researching the Nagode trial (1947), in which fifteen Slovene intellectuals, among them Vode, were found guilty of treason. This was one of the most publicized political trials in Slovenia used by the Communist Party to eliminate potential political opposition after World War II. Who was Angela Vode? And why has the Ljubljana house Krtina prepared three volumes of her works for publication?

The answer to the first question can be found in Vode's own collected writings being reviewed here, and in two excellent studies, "Spol in upor" and "Značaj in usoda," by the Slovene sociologist Mirjam Milharčič-Hladnik, which appear, respectively, in the first and second volumes of Vode's collected works. In "Spol in upor," Milharčič-Hladnik constructed a personal and sensitive story of Vode where facts are intertwined with Vode's letters, vignettes, fragments from various documents, photographs of people and places, and remembrances by her contemporaries and close friends. Milharčič-Hladnik's story about Angela Vode reveals admiration for her personality and work, and entices the reader to become immersed in Vode's writings.

Before turning to Vode's own work, let me introduce some important milestones in her life. In 1911, when Slovenes were still a part of the Austro-Hungarian empire, Vode, like many able women in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, began a career as an elementary school teacher. Because of her involvement in the Preporod movement, an anti-Austrian youth movement organized just at the outset of World War I that promoted the Yugoslav idea, Vode was fired from her teaching job in 1917. Some time after that, she studied special education in Prague, Berlin, and Vienna, and became a special

education teacher at the school for retarded children in Ljubljana, where she taught until 1944.

In the interwar period, Angela Vode was one of the earliest and most important activists in the Slovenian and Yugoslav women's movement and also a feminist writer. She was keenly aware of social and national injustices, and became active in leftist political organizations. In the early 1920s she joined the Workers' Socialist Party for Slovenia (Communists), but was expelled from it in 1939 because she condemned Stalin's pact with Hitler. At the beginning of World War II, as a strong anti-fascist, she immediately joined the Liberation Front (OF) and became the member of its executive committee. But the Communist Party, which controlled the OF, could not tolerate an independent intellectual as one of its leaders, and she was soon dismissed from the OF ranks. During the war, she dedicated herself to humanitarian action, organizing and sending food and clothing to thousands of Slovene deportees in labor camps. In 1944, she herself was deported and spent several months in the Ravensbrück labor camp. After World War II, she was among the few people who tried to organize political opposition to the Communist Party, and she paid dearly for her courage. Angela Vode, an intellectual and an honest person, was banished from public life: she was sentenced to silence until her death in 1985. From 1947 to 1953, she was jailed as a political prisoner; thereafter she became a nonperson in the society that some people still like to call "Communism with a human face."<sup>1</sup>

In the 1980s, Vode saw the first signs of renewed interest in her work. On the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of her first book, *Žena v sedanji družbi* (*Woman in Contemporary Society*), *Nova revija* (1984) published an interview with her, and Professor Maca Jogan wrote Vode's biography (1983) for the *Slovene Biographical Lexicon*, published in 1986. In May, 1985, at the age of ninety-three, Vode died quietly at home in Ljubljana. Sadly, she did not live to see the day in 1991 when the court annulled the Nagode trial verdicts. She was thus posthumously rehabilitated. But her life and work deserved more, and as the editors' preface to volume 1 put it: "After sixty years of silence to which she was condemned, it is right and also proper to give her a

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<sup>1</sup> A characterization for Angela Vode as a "nonperson" is borrowed from Alenka Puhar's article "Vse je pribito k tlom, le duh je prost(?)" *Delo* 14 May 1998: 16.

chance to talk ....”<sup>2</sup> Krtina, the publisher, and two dedicated editors, Karmen Klavčar and Mirjam Milharčič-Hladnik, made that possible.

*Spol in upor*, volume I, includes two Vode texts: *Žena v sedanji družbi*, first published in 1934, and *Aktivnost slovenskih učiteljic* (*Activities of Slovene Women Teachers*), written in 1958–60 and never published before. Volume 2, *Značaj in usoda* contains Vode’s most important work, *Spol in usoda* (*Gender and Destiny*), first published in two parts: part 1 in 1938 and part 2 in 1939. And finally, *Spomin in pozaba* (*Memory and Oblivion*), volume 3, has two her memoirs: *Spomini* (*Memoirs*) and *Spomini na suženjske dni* (*Memories of Days in Slavery*), both written after World War II and published now for the first time. Present collected works do not include all of her works; there are numerous articles and also another book, *Woman and Facism*, published in Belgrade (1935).

*Žena v sedanji družbi* and *Spol in usoda* introduce Vode’s feminist commitments, which were influenced by the world economic and political situation in the 1930s, especially in Europe and in her homeland. The wider social phenomena of world economic crises and the rise of fascism and Nazism influenced her work. After World War I, one-third of Slovenes were left outside the Yugoslav borders—in Austria and Italy—where they were subjected to strong denationalizing pressures. At home, Slovenes suffered as well under the Yugoslav (Serbian) dictatorship and a politically counterproductive and aggressively adversarial division between the liberal and conservative political camps during the 1930s.

Vode wrote both books with the intention of informing and educating broad audiences and women in particular. First, she believed that women had to learn about the past to understand patriarchal practices that had created social structures, values, and customs throughout history, often devaluing women. Vode was convinced that women needed to know and understand society and its mechanisms in order get involved and change their own position. Second, she believed that equal treatment of women could only be achieved through changing the roles of both sexes in society: women needed to be treated not only as equal citizens but also as equal human beings, while natural differences between the sexes should be valued and cherished. More

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<sup>2</sup> Uredniška beseda, *Spol in upor* 7.

then sixty years since their first publication, both books are still informative and timely.

In the introduction to *Žena v sedanji družbi*, Vode wrote: "A woman is as integral a part of a human society, nation, state, and family as a man, and her life and position are equally dependent on all political, economic, and cultural developments ... and a demand for her participation in public life is absolutely natural and necessary."<sup>3</sup> Of course, a woman has to be educated, and that is what Angela Vode intended with this work. A short historical account of women's roles in the past is presented in the first part, followed by a description of women's changing role in the society after World War I, especially in Yugoslavia. The first Slovene women's organization was established in Trieste in 1887, followed by the Catholic Society of Female Workers in 1894. Especially active were female teachers, who organized the Society of Slovene Female Teachers (1898), and fought under the slogan: "For equal work, equal pay." Among other things, they demanded the right to keep their jobs after marriage, and the repeal of the regulation that married female teachers could keep a job only if they married teachers. In 1958–60, Vode wrote a separate and detailed account of Slovene women teachers and their role before World War II not only in their own organizations but in also as an important element of social life in general. Angela Vode knew the importance of separate female organizations and institution building as a means to achieve a more equal position for women in the society.

One of this book's valuable contributions is Vode's analysis of the consequences of the world depression and how it related to the fascist and Nazi ideologies. Fascist ideology and its conservative treatment of women is dealt with in detail, as are the actions the National Socialists, who used the women's vote to come to power but opposed women's participation in public life and promoted eugenics to purify the German nation. She speaks forcefully against eugenics and sterilization as its method, because it could be (and was) used for political purposes. The eugenics movement in the United States is dealt with more sympathetically, although in the light of today's knowledge of it, Vode's judgment was too lenient.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> "Žena v današnji družbi," *Spol in upor* 1998, 97–98.

<sup>4</sup> See Steven Selden. *Inheriting Shame: The Story of Eugenics and Racism in America* (New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1999).

She concludes *Žena* with a very short but rather "programmatically" third part, concluding that political rights for women (suffrage was achieved in Yugoslavia only after World War II) were far from sufficient to maintain their economic independence. She envisioned a more egalitarian future, in which "women's" and "men's" jobs would be shared and where there would be less division between public and private spheres in life. Although expressed at the turn of the century (for example, by Charlotte Perkins Gilman in *Women in Economics*, 1898). The feminist movement in the last few decades again seems to have forefronted these ideas. They remain the essence of the struggle for gender equality in today's society.

In the more important and controversial book, *Spol in usoda*, Vode wrote about intimate, personal aspects of women's lives. She developed a modern text on women's and men's gender roles, shaped partly by nature, but mainly by external factors, such as family, education, and social conditions. The first part deals mainly with the development of gender roles and social responses to crucial phenomena affecting women, for example, childbearing out-of-wedlock and prostitution. While the first part was well received and did not cause controversy, the second, published a year later, and dealing exclusively with marriage, caused a storm in Slovene conservative circles. The controversy about it is the main topic of Milharčič-Hladnik's second enlightening study *Značaj in spol*.

Vode is a proponent of a monogamous family, in which relations between husband and wife are based on equal treatment and rights of both partners as human beings, independent of their sexual roles. Partnership in marriage should be built on love, friendship and collegiality, mutual understanding, respect, and also economic independence. Looking historically at marriage, Vode gave credit to Christianity for making marriage a sacrament, demanding sexual faithfulness of both partners. Yet, she observed the existence of double morality and standards for women and men in her time. What was tolerated and allowed to men (pre- and extra-marital sex) was prohibited for women. She also warned about double standards in parenting:

They always stress that a wife is, by nature, destined for motherhood, proclaiming its sanctity. I do not say that it is not so, but fatherhood also has sanctity, and I do not know why a wife by nature would be more destined for motherhood than a

husband for fatherhood; they both have the same role in the family. (*Značaj in usoda* 234)

*Spol in Usoda* is not only a theoretical discussion of social issues and problems; for example, employment of women, legal questions of marriage, family law, family and child protection, health care, and social services, but also an analysis of concrete conditions found in Slovene society. At times she compares them with solutions in other, mostly European, countries. Although written sixty years ago, the book is useful in contemplating social developments in a newly democratic, free-market Slovenia.

In the third volume, *Spomin in pozaba*, two of Vode's until now unpublished works give us insight into history as viewed by an educated, idealistic, and honest woman. In "Spomini," she describes her life and work before World War I, and in *Spomini na suženjske dni* she writes about her experiences in the German concentration camp Ravensbrück in 1944. Both works are revealing and informative reading for historians and anyone interested in Slovenian history.

The publication of Angela Vode's major works is a worthy project. Vode's works survived her time; they are relevant reading today. Vode's life story and personality touched me deeply and will stay with me. The publication is, however, only a small debt paid, not just to her, but also to those Slovenes of free spirit who were locked in darkness for more than half a century.

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**France Bernik.** *Obzorja slovenske književnosti. Slovenistične in primerjalne študije. Razprave in eseji*, 43. Ljubljana: Slovenska matica, 1999. 327 pp.

This volume is one of the recent publications of the Slovene literary historian France Bernik, since 1992 president of the Slovene Academy of Sciences and Arts in Ljubljana. It represents a selected collection of his essays on Slovene literary themes and topics of the eighteenth through twentieth centuries, dedicated "Njej, ki je odšla," to his wife who not long ago passed away.