

POZNAŃSKIE STUDIA SLAWISTYCZNE
PSS NR 11/2016 ISSN 2084-3011
DOI: 10.14746/pss.2016.11.9

Data przesłania tekstu do redakcji: 15.01.2015
Data przyjęcia tekstu do druku: 20.07.2015

Anna Kurowicka
Polish Academy of Sciences
anna.kurowicka@ispan.waw.pl

Ewa Serafin
Polish Academy of Sciences
ewa-serafin5@wp.pl

Ewa Wróblewska-Trochimiuk
Polish Academy of Science
ewa.wroblewska@ispan.waw.pl

The (Lost) Voice of a Woman: the Gorgonowa Case in Irena Krzywicka's Narrative

ABSTRACT: Kurowicka Anna, Serafin Ewa, Wróblewska-Trochimiuk Ewa, *The (Lost) Voice of a Woman: the Gorgonowa Case in Irena Krzywicka's Narrative*. "Poznańskie Studia Slawistyczne" 11. Poznań 2016. Publishing House of the Poznań Society for the Advancement of the Arts and Sciences, pp. 127–142. ISSN 2084-3011.

The article analyses Irena Krzywicka's coverage of the so-called Gorgonowa case, in which a Yugoslavian citizen, Rita Gorgon, was accused of killing her teenage stepdaughter. The authors notice two seemingly dissonant practices in the analysed text: Krzywicka's involvement in the fight for women's rights is accompanied by taking away the accused's voice. The feminist writer treats the case as a pretext for a critique of the bourgeoisie and its institutions, which she achieves by revealing and exaggerating the theatricality coupled with sadism present in the court proceedings. The strategy of exoticisation of Rita Gorgon, which affected her perception as a stranger, is also explored. In the emotionally charged description of the trial, there is surprisingly little space for the voice of the accused herself, who is not represented by Krzywicka, but merely presented. The pursuit of rehabilitation undertaken by Rita Gorgon's daughter and granddaughter appears to be an attempt to symbolically return the voice to the accused and to recreate the "feminine continuum".

KEYWORDS: Irena Krzywicka; the Gorgonowa case; the voice of women; femme fatale; Lviv; sadism; feminine continuum; stranger

1. Introduction

One of the most controversial criminal cases of the interwar period in Poland, known as the “Gorgonowa case”, reappeared in the public consciousness in 2014 when the daughter and granddaughter of a convicted murderer declared their intention to have the case reopened due to insufficient evidence (Daszczyński 2014). In this case of 1932, a woman of Yugoslav origin¹, Rita Gorgonowa, was accused of and sentenced for killing Lusja, the teenage daughter of the man she was living with, a wealthy engineer called Henryk Zaremba. The crime’s sexual aspect (the girl had been raped with a finger) and the gendered stereotypes according to which Gorgonowa was cast in the role of an evil, foreign stepmother, came together to create a perfect storm. Despite various inconsistencies in the prosecution’s narrative during the circumstantial trial as well as inconclusive evidence, Gorgonowa was first sentenced to death by a court in Lviv, and in a later appeal in Cracow to 8 years in prison. Most of the newspaper coverage of the case left no question regarding the defendant’s guilt: she was presented as a cruel, distant woman who exhibited no shame either for the crime she had supposedly committed nor for her questionable sexual morality in the years preceding the case, including (but not limited to) living with Zaremba without marriage.

The overwhelming persecution she experienced was of an indubitably gendered and sexist character, as it was her unsuccessful fulfilment of the role of a mother and of a respectable woman that was largely on trial in the court of public opinion. One of her few protectors at the time, a progressive journalist and writer Irena Krzywicka, commented on the injustice of the revisory trial coverage in her own reporting in a liberal Warsaw-based news-

¹ It was stated in the court files that Emilia Margerita Ilić was born in Očestovo, a small Dalmatian town near Knin. The same documents specify her nationality as Yugoslav. It is difficult to state clearly whether she was Serbian or Croatian, since until the last war in the former Yugoslavia the area currently belonging to Croatia was inhabited mainly by Serbs, who had been settling there from the beginning of the 20th century. The only clue, which could indicate that Gorgonowa was Serbian (though an uncertain one), is that in the judicial personal information sheet of the defendant, *Greek Catholic* was provided as religion. Cf: <pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rita_Gorgonowa#mediaviewer/File:AGAD_Gorgonowa_case_2.png>, 6.01.2015).

paper, “Wiadomości Literackie”², in 1933 and later reprinted in a collection of her court writings called *Sąd idzie* (The Court is in Session) in 1935. Krzywicka in *Wyznania gorszyicielki* (Confessions of the Offender) states that these articles played a crucial role in her career in “Wiadomości Literackie” (Krzywicka 2013: 298), and, according to Małgorzata Szpakowska, they brought her fame (2012: 169). Krzywicka’s account of the case was written from a specific standpoint: that of a journalist politically engaged in the fight for women’s rights and very critical of the bourgeois *status quo*. Krzywicka claimed that Gorgonowa was a victim of narrow-mindedness and of being perceived as a non-normative woman, which seems indisputable; however, the writer’s article about the case requires a deeper analysis with regards to the created image of Gorgonowa and the narrative of the trial. In this text, we will examine Krzywicka’s approach to the Gorgonowa case to explore the ways, in which the writer uses her subject to further her political goals. We will consider Krzywicka’s focus on the trial as a theatrical performance, on the elements of sadism evident in the court proceedings, and on Gorgonowa’s status of a foreigner within the framework of the topos of femme fatale and Gothicism to discuss how the narrative created by the writer was used to comment on the political women’s issues of the day, while at the same time silencing the subject of the story itself, Rita Gorgonowa. Finally, we will argue that while Krzywicka’s account was to some extent complicit in taking away the female subject’s voice, the attempts of Gorgonowa’s daughter and granddaughter to have her rehabilitated may be seen as a symbolic effort to give this voice back.

2. The political game

Krzywicka’s aim in writing about the entirety of the Gorgonowa case, two trials, and her earlier life, is quite clear. It was of interest as an emblematic example of the way, in which women who did not fit into the traditional conservative ideal of a bourgeois morality could easily be crucified

²“Wiadomości Literackie” was a weekly newspaper of the social liberal profile, the sole representative of this movement in the mainstream Polish culture at the time. The newspaper declared open-mindedness and lack of prejudice (Górnicka-Boratyńska 2001: 200–203; Szpakowska 2012).

for sins real and imagined by the community and the state itself. There was a number of confluences in Gorgonowa's life story that made her a perfect subject for Krzywicka: she was a victim of a hypocritical society and patriarchal ideology, a system that forced her to make impossible choices to survive and then punished her for them. According to Krzywicka's narrative, Gorgonowa got married as a teenager and was left by her husband as a result of malicious rumours spread by the husband's family; she had to abandon her son, move, and earn a living doing odd jobs. Meeting Zaremba, who offered her a job as a tutor for his children, was an opportunity to improve her condition, albeit at the assumed price of having a sexual relationship with her employer. All women's issues evident in this story were the phenomena, against which Krzywicka was actively fighting in her political and social engagements, such as the double standard for male and female sexuality, the difficulty of finding a respectable job for a woman, and the social judgment that came with breaking out of the role of a good mother and a virtuous woman.

The author did not spare strong words to single out the elements of the process and its coverage, which she considered to be especially abhorrent:

the pains, suffering, falsehood, and cruelty, rooted in the crime of Brzuchowice³, these hungry shrews, stoning the accused woman, Zaremba, "the perfect father", and the disgusting atmosphere of the Lviv obscurantism. It's life, pitilessly exposed, grotesquely and monstrously twisted, dangerous like a plague (Krzywicka 1998: 81–82).

Her narration of the Gorgonowa case made it clear that she was interested less in the human story she was describing, and more in using this particular case to shed light on the social problems, against which she wanted to galvanize the public opinion, including narrow-mindedness, moral hypocrisy, and unequal treatment of women.

Krzywicka placed most of the blame for the unjust treatment of Gorgonowa on the institutions of the bourgeoisie: the judgmental community of neighbours and later spectators in the court, and the "perfect Polish family" that Gorgonowa was presumed to have invaded, both ready to consider the accused guilty from the very beginning. Each of these institutions

³ Even though Zaremba's villa was in fact located not in Brzuchowice, but in nearby Łączki, the crime was commonly referred to as having happened in Brzuchowice. The first process took place in Lviv, the nearest big city (Żurek 1975: 6–7).

played a role in silencing Gorgonowa's voice in accordance with the social reality of the time, a factor additionally emphasised by Krzywicka in her narration.

The bourgeois society was embodied not only by the jury and other members of the court, but also by the people who rejected Gorgonowa when she was still living with Zaremba and who turned on her as soon as she was accused. They were presented as small-minded, hypocritical, and obsessed with the sensational version of the crime as well as with the sordid details of Gorgonowa's previous sexual and romantic life. Interestingly, Krzywicka also clearly considered Gorgonowa's early life to be of great importance to the story, as she recounted what little was known on the subject, all the while using the most grandiose and dramatic language imaginable. As a result of the difficult circumstances of her youth Gorgonowa, described by the writer as an innocent child, was forced to face the difficulties of the life of an unmarried foreign woman in Lviv, which eventually resulted in her relationship with Zaremba.

However, in her narration about Gorgonowa, Krzywicka omitted several significant facts. One is that Gorgonowa, born in Dalmatia (1901) – the Austrian part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire – moved to Lviv with her soldier husband in 1916. The move itself was nothing out of ordinary, since the Austro-Hungarian Empire noted strong migratory flows, but Galicia itself attracted a relatively small number of immigrants because of the low level of economic development (Walaszek 2007: 210). Dalmatia was going through an economic crisis then, which also might have influenced the decision of young Rita, already married at the time of leaving her homeland. The change of the marital status might have been an opportunity to enter a new environment more easily, so the marriage with Gorgon did not need to have such tragic results as described by the columnist.

Contrary to Krzywicka's vision, Lviv may not have greeted Gorgonowa as xenophobically as the description of its inhabitants suggests. During the Second Polish Republic the city was culturally differentiated, multi-lingual and multi-faith. Even the fact that Gorgonowa was Greek Catholic probably did not have a greater impact on her social status, since according to Second General Census in Poland of December 9th, 1931, approximately 16% of the total population of Lviv declared their membership in the Greek Catholic church (the Roman Catholic church and Judaism

prevailed). Despite the ostensibly good situation of migrants, their inflow caused tensions, and the strangers coming from other parts of the Empire, often competing with the autochthons for a job, were exposed to the wide range of discrimination.

Social ostracism particularly strongly affected single women (Walszek 2007: 213), as confirmed by Krzywicka, who described Gorgonowa's life in Lviv as wandering and fighting for a job when "she hears only one offer: for the starvation wage – hard work and intercourse with the employer" (Krzywicka 1998: 136), and the men and potential employers met by the woman "use the threat of hunger to force the girl to submission and then benefit materially from her work" (Krzywicka 1998: 136). When some years later Gorgonowa met Zaremba and moved in with him, she had little choice in the society that offered no support or employment for a woman in her situation, married but separated from her husband. As a result of the double standard for male and female behaviour in the bourgeoisie, Gorgonowa's sexual history was also considered a vital part of the trial; she felt the need to present herself as completely innocent because any hint of an erotic life outside of marriage would be linked to criminal tendencies in the eyes of the court (Krzywicka 1998: 136–137). In her own commentary, Krzywicka argued that it was social circumstances that forced prostitution on women, a stance typical not only of her own writing, but also of other reformist writers and journalists of the time, such as Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński, Zofia Nałkowska, or Wanda Melcer.

The writer's choice to not only relate Gorgonowa's life story, but also to make it as dramatic as possible, speaks loudly of the intent of the text. It was meant to go far beyond just the one criminal case, invested as Krzywicka may have been in its conclusion: the purpose was to argue for a much broader social change, one that would prevent women similar to Gorgonowa from being judged for what, while typically considered immoral behaviour, was often in fact a result of unavoidable circumstances. As if predicting the common objections to her writings, Krzywicka agreed that "these are very private matters, very intimate," while at the same time pointing out that they are the necessary cost of getting the truth (Krzywicka 1998: 134). This rhetorical move of rejecting the silencing of the "private" and "intimate" matters as unworthy of public consideration was a strategy Krzywicka had in common with latter feminist activists, who summed it

up in the slogan: “the personal is political” (Hanisch 1969). The Gorgonowa case could in fact serve as a striking example of the broader political and economic issues being obscured by the talk of an intimate, scandalous family drama.

The family that Gorgonowa supposedly invaded and poisoned with her sinful presence was the most revered institution of the bourgeois society, and one criticised by Krzywicka in strong words:

[t]his asylum of bourgeois ideals that she imagined during her hungry tribulations, this sacred hearth, in which all the neighbours, all the servants considered her an intruder. Drunkenness, delirium tremens, insanity, erotomania, this is the psychological impact of this respected family (Krzywicka 1998: 142).

It was perceived as an institution of hypocrisy, in which strict morality was espoused for the purpose of hiding the injustice and suffering inherent in the patriarchal model of the family. In this particular family, which only appeared perfect from the outside, Krzywicka cast Zaremba as the villain of the family drama: he was the one who made his daughter and the murder victim, Lusia, and Gorgonowa, competitors and enemies (Krzywicka 1998: 139). As a result, in Krzywicka’s eyes it was ultimately Zaremba, and only he, who could be held responsible for the murder of Lusia, if Gorgonowa had indeed been guilty. This lack of consequence – where Krzywicka played the devil’s advocate and disregarded her previous contention that Gorgonowa must have been innocent – is yet another suggestion that the study of the case was supposed to reveal larger social problems, and Krzywicka used this particular situation to argue that all well-off men of a certain social status were inherently guilty in a patriarchal society.

3. The performance of justice

Krzywicka’s political aims are quite apparent in her piece, as she continuously referred to the institutional problems exemplified in the Gorgonowa case. She also employed particular archetypes, topoi, and metaphors in an attempt to draw a compelling picture of Gorgonowa and the circumstances of her trial, thus making her case against the bourgeoisie even stronger. These methods, including the focus on the theatricality of the proceedings

and elements of Gothicism and sadism present in the narrative, had an additional, perhaps unintentional effect, of silencing the subject of her work.

Krzywicka described the revisory trial as *commedia dell'arte* taking place in the great *theatrum*, where everyone had a particular significance (either as one of the main actors, or a member of the audience), played an assigned role, where everything was determined by the script (Krzywicka 1998: 104, 116–117). The events taking place in the courtroom described by the writer were not the only ones showed in terms of a performance taking place on a stage. In Krzywicka's view, the on-site verification "played out" in Brzuchowice was yet another component of the performance in the Gorgonowa case.

To describe the Gorgonowa case the writer used the topos of "collusion between men" (Kraskowska 2003: 181–182). She recalled the crimes of particular men against Gorgonowa, such as the doubtful gestures and scoffs of the judge or Gorgon's responsibility for his wife's life, and showed absence of women in the courtroom in any role other than of the audience ("We are used to seeing women everywhere. Their absence here, where the life of a woman is adjudicated, is inappropriate, almost abhorrent" [Krzywicka 1998: 83]). This is done in order to accuse the patriarchy not of a single woman's tragedy, but of a tragedy of "all sentenced to hell of childbirth and miscarriage, bonded, deceived and abused" (Kraskowska 2003: 182–183). The writer – in accordance with her own opinion, also adopted by the progressive journalists from her environment – demonstrated therefore that the Gorgonowa case was "a crime on the female abdomen – the curse of being a woman in a system founded on sacrificing women" (Araszkiewicz 2009).

4. The sadistic theatre

Theatricality of the proceedings allowed Krzywicka to reveal the close connection between the spectacle of the power and sadistic pleasure of domination⁴. The authorities of the justice system and the audience abused the accused woman mentally and physically. The judge reacted to Gorgonowa's statements with irritation, his face expressions and scoffs clearly

⁴ Cf. Williams 2010; Atraud 1994.

full of disbelief and disapproval as he questioned witnesses in such a way as to hear the expected answer (Krzywicka 1998: 104–106). The spectators created an atmosphere of terror, hatred and violence. The sadism evident in the reportage was to some extent linked to the “collusion between men” and thus was an element of the accusation of the patriarchy’s oppressive attitude to women. It is worth noting that, in Krzywicka’s view, women, described as disgusting shrews and bloodthirsty creatures, contributed to the support of this system significantly (Kraskowska 2003: 182; Szpakowska 2012: 170).

Krzywicka wrote: “[m]any elderly man find quite a satisfaction in sentencing a pretty woman. To release the defendant would be similar to catching a bird in a trap, and then releasing it. Where’s the fun in that?” (1998: 89). The image created by Krzywicka suggests a close link between the cruelty present in the patriarchal system, and sexual desire. In *The Economic Problem of Masochism* (1924), Freud indicated that the pleasure principle is intertwined with the death drive in the human mind. Libido’s role is to neutralise this drive in such a way as to transfer it to the objects in the external world. According to Freud, “[t]hen we would deal with the drive to destroy, to capture, the will of power. Some part of this drive would serve the sexual function directly, where it would play a significant role. That is sadism itself” (Freud 2007: 275). It seems that the physical and mental violence towards Gorgonowa, humiliating and harming her, brought a sense of sexual bliss in a symbolic sense, thus becoming a symptom of the dominance-submission relationship (Marzec 2011: 220–233; Matuszewski 2002: 299–302).

Another component of the world built by Krzywicka was the aesthetics of sadism noted in the description of the on-site verification. The villa in Brzuchowice and its surroundings, where suffering and bliss were intertwined, seemed to be transferred from the 19th century gothic romances. Depravity was present everywhere in this place, and it aroused the worst human passions. We should note the inspiration by the concept of beauty characteristic for the romantics, according to which beauty is soaked with suffering, deterioration and death (Praz 2010: 37–67). The gothic convention with its transgressive potential⁵, can be used by Krzywicka to present

⁵ Cf. Ellis 1989; Gazda et al. 2002; Heiland 2004; Gilbert, Gubar 1979.

social tremors, concerns of that time and intense social emotions. In this perspective, gothic elements employed by Krzywicka are a way of looking at the Gorgonowa case as at a sign of fear of changing social situation and class structure (Phillips 2014: 170–174).

The gothic elements of the villa and the clear contrast between the external glamour of the house and the kitsch of the interior was used by Krzywicka to express a profound contempt for the bad taste and, indirectly, for the bourgeois morality, whose typical features were a focus on appearance and hypocrisy.

The description of Gorgonowa herself was yet another element fitting in the aesthetics of sadism and derived from the convention of Gothicism. Krzywicka drew two images of the accused for the reader, which did not seem to match, but in Krzywicka's work were in fact connected. The first of the images presented Gorgonowa as a devastated and degraded woman, more a phantom than a woman of flesh and blood. "You can see her [Gorgonowa] through the window, a black phantom against the background of white phantoms of the garden", "gloomy, stony, wrapped in the fur up to the chin, **often huddled**", "the accused **shivers** in her fur" (Krzywicka 1998: 113, 107, 85; emphasis by the authors of the article). The other image of Gorgonowa evoked to some extent the topos of femme fatale, a dangerous intruder in a traditional Polish family and community. This was where factors far removed from the conservative Polish model of purity, such as the erotic tension between a man and a woman, the issues of "dirty" sexuality, nudity and body, arose. The use of the topos of femme fatale was additionally complicated by an element of ethnic strangeness, represented in the accused's foreign beauty and emphasised by the writer.

5. The beautiful stranger

Even before her appearances came into play, Gorgonowa's very surname, which sounded strange and menacing, created the sense of foreignness. In the judicial documents there was a polonised version of the name and surname, Emilia Małgorzata Gorgonowa. Krzywicka, as well as other journalists who reported the case, generally referred to her as Gorgonowa,

sometimes adding a diminutive of the name Margerita, Rita, the use of the foreign version of the name yet another proof of her strangeness⁶.

The mythological association with Gorgona, evident for Krzywicka both in the name and in the accused's appearance, was also clearly crucial⁷. The writer looked for physical similarities between the mythical creature and Rita Gorgon:

This woman is similar to the "real" Gorgona, this Greek mask; not bad, on the contrary, beautiful, but with the open mouth screaming the tragedy out loud, not someone else's, but her own horror. For Gorgonowa this face, this name are undoubtedly an aggravating circumstance, the touch of fate which marked her as guilty (Krzywicka 1998: 132).

As can be seen in the quoted words of the journalist, the physical appearance of Gorgonowa attracted the attention of all the people observing and commenting on the proceedings, and influenced the perception of the accused. This beauty was often linked with her southern genes, as some classic ancient features were found in her face:

At the Adriatic coast there are probably many such faces, which show the features of ancient immortality. (...) There is some irregularity as well, to make her slightly more intriguing: the high cheekbones resemble those on the heads of Leonardo, and below them there is a vague and disturbing smile (Krzywicka 1998: 131).

In the course of describing the phenomenon of Rita Gorgon's beauty, Krzywicka exoticised her to some extent, and blamed society's hatred on her disquieting face ("a rare, gloomy beauty" [Krzywicka 1998: 119]). The beauty of Gorgonowa differed from the type of female beauty fashionable at that time ("replaced by an athletic female body, by all these small, slender girls" [Krzywicka 1998: 131]), so it became incomprehensible and irritating – especially for women. Her withdrawn behaviour, which would certainly not meet the expectations of the mob waiting for sensation and scandal, also added to her distinctness. Her modest facial expression, lack

⁶According to Wiczorkiewicz, diminutives were frequently used to stress someone's inferior status, childishness, immaturity (2011: 254).

⁷In feminist critique, Gorgona is often read as a symbol of something new and refreshing, her scream understood as an attempt to fight for her own right to speak, fight for the necessity of taking a typically female experience into account. Thus it can be seen as an attempt to achieve the right to be a subject (Cixous 2001: 168–187).

of emotions and her silence indicated carefully kept secrets (Krzywicka 1998: 107). Krzywicka considered her majestic, almost theatrical gestures to be the reason for the lack of understanding of the spectators gathered in the courtroom.

Gorgonowa's silence can be considered as a strategy to protest patriarchy. She seemed to understand that there was no place for listening to the woman's voice, that in this society she could only be ridiculed, accused of lying and met with complete lack of comprehension, since in the patriarchal world her voice simply did not exist. Similarly, Krzywicka's choice not to let Gorgonowa speak can be perceived not only as an act of appropriation of the narrative to further her political goals, but alternatively, as acknowledgement of the impossibility of truly making a woman's voice heard in a patriarchal society.

The exotic and erotic ideals work together, so her foreignness could be considered in the context of sexual phantasies (Araszkiewicz 2009; Praz 2010: 163–271). In this way, “a beautiful girl from the South” (Krzywicka 1998: 133) was presented as *pars pro toto* of foreign women who had a devastating impact on the local community and caused its demoralisation. She fulfilled all the conditions of becoming – to use the term introduced by Rene Girard – a *scapegoat*: foreign because of her origin and the sinister surname, different because of her infernal beauty, and in addition from the lower social class. The relationship with Zaremba and other relationships with men coming to light during the trial broke sexual and moral taboos. The death penalty was to be a ritual murder, which was the condition for the lives of Lviv and Cracow inhabitants to become peaceful again and for their guilt to be expiated.

6. The silenced voice

An attentive reader of Krzywicka will notice that in the course of describing the so-called Gorgonowa case the author wrote little about Rita Gorgonowa herself. The vast majority of the text constituted speculations about the collusion of patriarchy, the sadism and theatricality present in the proceedings. When, finally, the Polish feminist was about to give the floor to Gorgonowa, almost in the last words of her article, she finally

approached the accused and sat next to her on the bench, but allowed her only a few sentences, even though the last part of the text was entitled *Rozmowa* (The Conversation). In this short dialogue with Krzywicka, Gorgonowa said:

“Have you heard his testimony? I lived with him for six years, two children, four abortions! I wish he at least wouldn’t lie so brazenly. (...) I am shivering when I recall her eyes and voice – I felt the truth in them and I will never stop feeling it”. If she had shouted it out loud in the court, perhaps the jurymen would have hesitated? But she could tell it only to another woman (Krzywicka 1998:149).

These words suggest that Krzywicka was aware of her privileged status as a woman and thus a potential confidante for Gorgonowa, yet she chose to severely limit the accused’s words and replace them with her own interpretation of the events.

Although Krzywicka believed that Gorgonowa, as an adult woman, needed to defend herself, she did not allow her to speak out – much like the court, which did not let the accused present her own narrative, but only asked questions. Gorgonowa was merely a ventriloquist’s dummy, whose voice reverberated in Krzywicka’s statements. The accused was deprived of the right to speak in such an evident way that she became almost transparent, a tool and an opportunity for Krzywicka to present her political views. Krzywicka admitted it, saying: “Right, but where is Gorgonowa here? – the reader asks. We are going to talk about her, but later. I admit that I am interested in this case because of the multi-faceted contact with the judicial court” (Krzywicka 1998: 110). In this way, Gorgonowa was placed between the conflicting parties: the political power of the time represented in the court activities, public opinion, and the critics of the system (including Krzywicka), who all spoke for her; therefore, Gorgonowa became a subaltern subject (Spivak 2011). Krzywicka, instead of representing the accused, only presents her, which deepens the passive position and subordination of Gorgonowa and limits her subjectivity. The columnist reproduced stereotypes about her origin, appearance, and the behaviour resulting from them. She strengthened the stereotype of the woman from the South, unbridled and mysterious, thus becoming – to use the term introduced by Chinua Achebe – a *purveyor of comforting myths* (Achebe 1977: 784). She disapproved of exoticising the accused, but at the same time she

fell into the trap of presenting Gorgonowa as a stranger, marking invisible borders between the alleged centre (in her view that would be Lviv and Cracow) and the marginal South where the accused came from.

While this narrative choice is rather problematic from the point of view of contemporary feminist ethics of representation, according to which the subject of a journalistic or academic material has to be given the opportunity to speak in her own voice as much as possible, we also need to appreciate this text as a part of a larger-scale strategy employed by progressive journalists in the specific political and social circumstances of the Polish interwar period. All the legal, economic, and social inequalities and injustices revealed in Gorgonowa's story were crucial issues in the fight against conservative moral hypocrisy and patriarchy, which was Krzywicka's main priority, both as a journalist and an activist. This is perhaps why she decided to use this particular case as an example of the broader social issues.

The contemporary developments in Gorgonowa's story, that is her daughters' attempts to have the case reopened, are therefore worth exploring as a significant addendum to Krzywicka's own narration. Ewa Ilić, the daughter Gorgonowa gave birth to in prison, does not remember her mother well as they were separated when she was very young. Her childhood, spent in orphanages, was marked by the crime: the girl was taunted by other children as the daughter of a murderess. Gorgonowa's fate after she was released from prison is unknown, she never made contact with her child again. Now nearing the end of her life, Ewa wants to put her mother, and at the same time her own past, to rest. Proud to look like Gorgonowa, she claims that she wants to fight for her mother's good name for as long as she is alive, and is supported in these efforts by her daughter (Daszczyński 2014). By telling their own story, of the legacy of the crime they experienced and how it affected their lives, Gorgonowa's daughter and granddaughter work to symbolically give Rita her own voice back. The actions of these matrilineal descendants might be interpreted as an attempt to build a "feminine continuum," one created of traumatic past and attempts to make one's peace with it, with the awareness that the life of Gorgonowa and that of her daughter and granddaughter have always been connected.

Literature

- Achebe Ch., 1977, *An Image Of Africa*, "Massachusetts Review" no. 18, pp. 782–794.
- Araszkiewicz A., 2009, *Sprawa Nieznalskiej a proces Gorgonowej*, "Obieg", <www.obieg.pl/teksty/5848>, 15.01.2015.
- Atraud A., 1978, *Teatr i jego sobowtór*, trans. J. Błoński, Warszawa.
- Cixous H., 2001, *Śmiech Meduzy*, in: *Ciało i tekst. Feminizm w literaturoznawstwie – antologia szkiców*, ed. A. Nasiłowska, Warszawa, pp. 168–189.
- Daszczyński R., 2014, *Wolali na mnie Gorgonicha*, "Gazeta Wyborcza. Duży Format", <http://wyborcza.pl/duzyformat/1,137939,16002686,Wolali_na_mnie_Gorgonicha.html>, 15.01.2015.
- Drugi powszechny spis ludności z dn. 09.XII.1931 roku. Mieszkania i gospodarstwa domowe. Ludność. Stosunki zawodowe. Miasto Lwów, 1937*, Statystyka Polska, Seria C, Zeszyt 58, Warszawa.
- Ellis K.F., 1989, *The Contested Castle. Gothic Novels and the Subversion of Domestic Ideology*, Urbana–Chicago.
- Freud S., 2007, *Ekonomiczny problem masochizmu*, in: idem, *Psychologia nieświadomości*, przeł. R. Reszke, Warszawa.
- Gazda G., Izdebska A., Pluciennik J. (eds.), 2002, *Wokół gotycyzmów. Wyobrażenia, groza, okrucieństwo*, Kraków.
- Gilbert S.M., Gubar S., 1979, *The Madwoman in the Attic. The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, London.
- Górnicka-Boratyńska A., 2001, *Stańmy się sobą. Cztery projekty emancypacji (1863–1939)*, Izabelin.
- Hanisch C., 1969, *The Personal is Political*, in: *Notes from the Second Year: Women's Liberation: Major Writings of the Radical Feminists*, eds. S. Firestone, A. Koedt, New York, pp. 76–78.
- Heiland D., 2004, *Gothic and Gender. An Introduction*, Malden.
- Karta ewidencyjna oskarżonej Margerity Rity Gorgon*, <pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rita_Gorgonowa#mediawiki/File:AGAD_Gorgonowa_case_2.png>, 6.01.2015.
- Kraskowska E., 2003, *Piórem niewieścim. Z problemów prozy kobiecej dwudziestolecia międzywojennego*, Poznań.
- Krzywicka I., 1998, *Sąd idzie*, Warszawa.
- Krzywicka I., 2013, *Wyznania gorszycielki*, Warszawa.
- "Literatura na Świecie" 1994, no. 10 (special issue *Markiz de Sade*).
- Marzec W., 2011, *Zapomniani protoplaści. Archeologia refleksji o sadyzmie i masochizmie*, "Teksty Drugie" no. 4 (130), pp. 220–233.
- Matuszewski K., 2002, *Okrucieństwo u Sade'a*, in: *Wokół gotycyzmów: wyobrażenia, groza, okrucieństwo*, eds. G. Gazda, A. Izdebska, J. Pluciennik, Kraków, pp. 299–308.
- Phillips U., 2014, *Gotycyzm*, in: *Encyklopedia gender. Pleć w kulturze*, eds. M. Rudaś-Grodzka, K. Nadana-Sokołowska, A. Mrozik, K. Szczuka, K. Czacot, B. Smoleń, A. Nasiłowska, E. Serafin, A. Wróbel, Warszawa, pp. 170–174.

- Praz M., 2010, *Zmysły, śmierć i diabeł w literaturze romantycznej*, Gdańsk.
- Spivak G., 2011, *Czy podporządkowani inni mogą przemówić?*, przeł. E. Majewska, "Krytyka Polityczna" no. 24–25, pp. 196–239.
- Szapkowska M., 2012, "*Wiadomości Literackie*" *prawie dla wszystkich*, Warszawa.
- Walaszek A., 2007, *Migracje Europejczyków 1650–1914*, Kraków.
- Wieczorkiewicz A., 2011, *Hotentocka skóra Saartjie Baartman*, "Teksty Drugie" no. 4, pp. 253–274.
- Williams L., 2010, *Hard core. Władza, przyjemność i „szaleństwo widzialności”*, trans. J. Burzyńska, I. Hansz, M. Wojtyna, Gdańsk.
- Zawiszewska A., 2010, *Życie świadome. O nowoczesnej prozie intelektualnej Ireny Krzywickiej*, Szczecin.
- Żurek E., 1975, *Gorgonowa i inni*, Warszawa.