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A woman assimilationist and the Great War: The Case of Aniela Kallas

This article focusses on the novel Czyściec (Purgatory, 1921) by assimilationist writer Aniela Kallas (alias for Aniela Korngut, 1868–1942). Written in the form of woman's diary from the period of the Great War, the novel diagnoses the war as a turning point in European and Polish history, and acknowledges the new character of the war manifested both in frontline fighting and in the civilians' circumstances. The work represents the war experience and likewise points to a crisis in the assimilationist movement, that is, marginalization of the Jewish perspective and the turn toward radical Polonization.

Gegenstand der Analyse ist der Roman Czyściec (Fegefeuer, 1921) von Aniela Kallas (Aniela Korngut, 1868–1942), einer Autorin der assimilatorischen Bewegung. Verfasst in der Form eines Frauentagebuchs in der Zeit des Großen Kriegs, der Roman diagnostiziert im Krieg einen Wendepunkt der europäischen und polnischen Geschichte sowie erkennt seinen neuen Charakter, der sich sowohl in den Kämpfen an der Frontlinie als auch in der Situation der Zivilisten manifestiert. Das Werk stellt die Kriegserfahrung dar und verweist zugleich auf die Krise der assimilatorischen Bewegung, d.h. auf die Marginalisierung der jüdischen Perspektive und die Zuwendung zur radikalen Polonisierung.

1. Watershed

There are a number of reasons to study literature and journalism by assimilationists' writing on the First World War in Poland. In the present article, I will focus on only one of many interesting problems: I am going to look at how early post-war texts combine the representation of wartime experience with signs of crisis in this social and ideological camp. I am also interested in how these authors diagnose the Great War as a turning point in the European history and politics, while at the same time portraying manifestations of ideological change on the local level.

First, I need to explain that I am using the term assimilationists in its simpler, historical sense, leaving aside the most recent debate on its validity and scope.¹ This is by no means an expression of conservative obstinacy or methodological backwardness. Assimilation is one of many complex and troublesome terms in the humanities. And rather than impose a single correct definition, the humanities have traditionally dealt with such cases by specifying various ways of understanding such terms. One must also bear in mind that no matter how revolutionary and subtle the terminology, we may wish

¹ For more on substituting current terminology for historical names of social and cultural processes, see Agnieszka Jagodzińska, Marcin Wodziński, Przedmowa [Introduction], in: Agnieszka Jagodzińska and Marcin Wodziński (eds.): Izraelita. 1866–1915. Wybór źródeł [Izraelita. 1866–1915. Selected Sources], Kraków 2015, pp. 7–16, here pp. 8–9.

to apply today to socio-cultural attitudes and programmes of the past, the circles involved in the ideological project for the emancipation and acculturation of Jews in the 19th and 20th centuries described their position using precisely the name assimilationists² – by which they were also called by their rivals and adversaries. Moreover, these circles themselves made efforts to define and redefine the concept of assimilation, which clearly shows their awareness of its ambiguity. At least since the early 20th century, a distinction has commonly been made between the process of acculturation and the assimilation project.³ My position is close to a recent suggestion by the historian Konrad Zieliński, who regards assimilationists as an ideological camp that “saw acculturation, integration, and eventual assimilation as the optimal solution of the Jewish question.”⁴

Assimilationists’ writings on the Great War represented several genres including journalism⁵ (published in the columns of periodicals such as *Izraelita* and *Rozwaga*), political leaflets, satirical pieces, and novels. The main subject of my analysis will be the novel *Czyśćciec* [*Purgatory*] by Aniela Kallas, which was published in 1921, but also included notes from the years 1914–1918.⁶ The author (actually Aniela Korngutówna, c. 1868 – c. 1942) belonged to a group of writers associated with the most important periodicals of the assimilationist movement: *Izraelita* [*The Israelite*] (1866–1915) in Warsaw and *Jedność* [*Unity*] (1907–1912) in Lwów [currently Lviv in Ukraine]. A peer and Galician compatriot of the notable assimilationist prose writer and journalist Wilhelm Feldman, she belonged to the first generation of Jewish women educated in Polish schools in Galicia.⁷ Kallas’ romances of reform⁸ remained in the shadow of the assimilationist output of men, which is consistent with feminist claims about the marginalization of women’s voice and experience in the male-dominated sphere of public discourse.⁹ Kallas’ biography and the course of her literary and ideological path reflect the pattern of women’s biographies

² Wilhelm Feldman: *Asymilatorzy, syjoniści i Polacy: Z powodu przełomu w stosunkach żydowskich w Galicji* [Assimilationists, Zionists and Poles: On a Breakthrough in the Conditions of the Jews in Galicia], Kraków 1893.

³ For more on the ways in which Polish-Jewish journalism distinguished between assimilation and cultural assimilation, that is acculturation, see my book *Polish-Jewish Literature in the Interwar Years*. Translated from Polish by Abe Shenitzer, Syracuse 2003, p. 33–35. It is also worth noting that in the last decade of the 19th century assimilationists distinguished between the programme of assimilation and the process of assimilation: “Assimilation is more than a programme – it is a historically inevitable process that stretches over many years and generations”: Feldman, *Asymilatorzy*, p. 58.

⁴ K. Zieliński: *Neoasymilacja. Przyczynek do badań nad myślą polityczną Żydów polskich* [Neo-Assimilation. A Contribution to Studies on the Political Thought of the Polish Jews], in: *Wokół akulturacji i asymilacji Żydów na ziemiach polskich* [Acculturation and Assimilation of Jews in Polish Territory], Lublin 2010, pp. 69–84, here p. 69.

⁵ See Dariusz Kiszczak: *Wolne Słowo i Leo Belmont wobec pierwszej wojny światowej* [Free Word and Leo Belmont on the Great War], in: Eugenia Łoch/Krzysztof Stępnik (eds.): *Pierwsza wojna światowa w literaturze polskiej i obcej. Wybrane zagadnienia* [The Great War in Polish and Foreign Literature. Selected Problems], Lublin 1999, pp. 161–169.

⁶ For more on the introduction of the author’s personal notes from 1915 into the novel, see A. Kallas: *Czyśćciec*, Gdańsk 1921, p. 87.

⁷ Having completed a boarding school, Kallas attended the Jagiellonian University as an unenrolled student, where, among others, she listened to lectures by Stanisław Tarnowski, an eminent historian of Polish literature. She later collaborated with Polish and Jewish periodicals, including the above-mentioned weeklies *Izraelita* and *Jedność*, as well as the *Polish Wiek Nowy* [New Century] (1911–1930). My biographical information on the author comes from J. Cz. [J. Czachowska]: Aniela Kallas, in: *Współcześni polscy pisarze i badacze literatury. Słownik biobibliograficzny* [Modern Polish Writers and Literary Scholars: A Biographical and Bibliographical Dictionary], vol. 4, Warszawa 1996, pp. 22–24. A biographical note on Aniela Korngutówna is also included in *Polski słownik judaistyczny* [Polish Judaic Dictionary], vol. 1, Warszawa 2003, p. 822. I wrote on Kallas’ output in greater detail in the article *Kobiece narracje asymilatorskie w Galicji. Twórczość Anieli Kallas* [Women’s Assimilationist Narratives in Galicia. The Works of Aniela Kallas] in Eugenia Prokop-Janiec: *Pogranicze polsko-żydowskie. Topografie i teksty* [Polish-Jewish Frontier. Topographies and Texts], Kraków 2013, pp. 139–153. In the present article, I draw on some of my earlier conclusions about the author’s works.

⁸ I am referring to the typology of the “Jewish novel” proposed by Michael Galchinsky: *The Origin of the Modern Jewish Woman Writer. Romance and Reform in Victorian England*, Detroit 1996.

described by Carole B. Balin in the book *To Reveal Our Hearts. Jewish Women Writers in Tsarist Russia*. Balin claims that Jewish women in Eastern Europe were particularly attracted to secular culture and political activism because, among other reasons, it was these fields that saw the relaxation of restrictions imposed on women by traditional Jewish society in regard to its characteristic model of gender roles. As she writes, this phenomenon was favoured by “tacit permission for Jewish women to engage in secular learning.”¹⁰ Moreover, the tradition that allowed men to devote themselves entirely to religious studies while women had to support the family, paradoxically, stimulated women’s activism in public life. The writer’s ideological involvement in favour of emancipation, assimilation, integration, feminism, and socialism represents some of modern ideological choices available in this field.

2. A woman’s wartime diary

Czyścić, Kallas’ first novel published in independent Poland, takes the form of a woman’s wartime diary. The quotations from author’s personal notes from the year 1915 introduced the explicit interplay between fiction and autobiography in the novel. The presence of autobiographical traces in *Czyścić*¹¹ became more obvious in the early 1930s, when Kallas published a *vie romancée* titled *Zapolska*.¹² It includes explicitly autobiographical motives: one of the characters, Ania – an author of plays staged in Kraków theatres, friend and confidante of Gabriela Zapolska (a noted Polish feminist woman writer of the *fin de siècle*) – is Kallas’ deliberate self-portrait. Wartime episodes, as well, especially an account of the evacuation from Lwów, threatened by Russian invasion, link the tale about Zapolska with *Czyścić*, in which the plot revolves around the female protagonist’s escape to the west, from Lwów to Kraków, and her subsequent return to the city recaptured by the Austrians.

⁹ Before 1914, Kallas was assessed by her colleague critics rather harshly – much more so than other Jewish women authors, uninvolved in supporting the assimilationist programme. While warmly praising women translators, Roman Glasser, the author of the sketch “Literaci Żydzi we współczesnym piśmiennictwie polskim” [“Jewish Writers in Contemporary Polish Literature”], published in 1904 in the Zionist *Rocznik Żydowski* [Jewish Yearbook], mentions her in the following passage: “Although completely insignificant literarily, A. Kallas (Aniela Korngut) is a very prolific author of novels and short stories, some of which draw their subject from the life of Jews.” (R. Glasser: *Literaci Żydzi we współczesnym piśmiennictwie polskim*, in: *Rocznik Żydowski* (1904), pp. 142–158, here p. 157). A characteristic comment on her writings can also be found in *Współczesna literatura polska* [Contemporary Polish Literature] by Wilhelm Feldman. Noting a change in attitudes towards Jewish topics in the novel, he lists authors to whom this subject matter is important, and – without naming any specific titles – he mentions in passing that Jews “are portrayed in gray in a number of short stories [...] by A. Kallas (Aniela Korngutówna [...]).” see Wilhelm Feldman: *Współczesna literatura polska 1864–1918*, with introduction by T. Walas, vol. 2, Kraków 1985, p. 221.

¹⁰ C. B. Balin: *To Reveal Our Hearts. Jewish Women Writers in Tsarist Russia*, Cincinnati 2000, p. 8: “It has been argued that those Jewish women of Eastern Europe who chafed under the gender division and consequent educational restrictions of traditional Jewish society found secular culture and political activism particularly alluring. It has been argued further that women’s entrance into secular culture and politics was largely facilitated by a work ethic among the traditional Jewish community that legitimated female financial support of the scholar’s family, as well as indifference to and thus tacit permission for Jewish women to engage in secular learning.” The model of gender roles in traditional Jewish culture and its modern transformations are analyzed by Paula E. Hyman: *East European Jewish Women in an Age of Transition, 1880–1930*, in J. R. Baskin (ed.): *Jewish Women in Historical Perspective*, Detroit 1998, pp. 270–286.

¹¹ I am applying the distinction, introduced by Małgorzata Czerwińska, between a deliberate self-portrait and unintentional traces; see Małgorzata Czerwińska: *Autor – podmiot – osoba. Fikcjonalność i niefikcjonalność [Author - Subject - Person. Fictionality and Non-Fictionality]*, in: Małgorzata Czerwińska et al. (eds.): *Polonistyka w przebudowie. Literaturoznawstwo – wiedza o języku – wiedza o kulturze – edukacja* [Reconstructing Polish Studies. Literature studies - Linguistics - Knowledge of Culture - Education], Kraków 2005, pp. 216–221.

¹² A. Kallas: *Zapolska. Powieść biograficzna [Zapolska. A Biographical Novel]*, Warszawa 1931.

Literary works in the style of personal documents juxtapose different attitudes, which is also a characteristic of autobiographical texts.¹³ According to Małgorzata Czermińska, a recognized expert on autobiographical writing, in such literature, attitudes of confession and testimony usually merge and overlap. Their oscillation is an important structural element of Kallas' novel, but a particular stress is placed on eye-witnessing. The position of the diarist as an eyewitness of or a participant in the events being related is emphasized on many occasions, especially in the descriptions of crowd scenes. According to the rule that knowing means seeing, the extent of knowledge is determined primarily by the narrator's point of view. Focalization signals recur in the text with striking frequency:¹⁴ "I was standing on the balcony, and I could take in a broad expanse of the long street with its adjacent squares" (p. 20), "I looked out the window to survey the surroundings" (p. 27), "I wanted to see..." (p. 32), "as I looked hard, I could see" (p. 76), "I was standing on elevated ground, from where I could take in the opposite «positions» and the city in between" (p. 66), "[...] I've come here to *see everything*" (the author's emphasis, p. 71). The field and frame of view depend on the vantage point. In *Czyścić* a number of such points are carefully specified: a tenement balcony, a site by the railway, a compartment in an evacuation train, a city street, a field hospital room, quarters in the rear of the frontline, a hill overlooking the battlefield. Whatever has been seen can be remembered: "My memory absorbed that picture" (p. 34), asserts the narrator. The witness perspective is sometimes also built through descriptions of other sensory experiences – especially the sounds and smells of war, such as the rumble of shellfire or the stench of clotted blood.¹⁵ The privileged role of eye-witnessing is also evident in quotations. The narrator's personal diary entries include testimonies from other eyewitnesses: copied fragments of letters, as well as quotations from oral reports and conversations.

But the imperative of seeing, remembering, and bearing testimony, which is given so much emphasis,¹⁶ also serves another purpose than the mere documentation of collective, political history. The passage "I'm writing all this down so that you know" (p. 134) reveals the private character of the entries, addressed by the diarist to her husband, from whom she has been separated by war. In spite of this purpose, the entries are not dominated by intimate and self-analytical themes – they also refer to a number of public issues and deal with ideological, philosophical, and religious problems, which are more often found in intellectual diaries.

¹³ A classic description of this phenomenon is presented by Małgorzata Czermińska in her book *Autobiograficzny trójkąt. Świadectwo, wyznanie i wyzwanie* [Autobiographical Triangle. Testimony, Confession and Challenge], Kraków 2000.

¹⁴ I am interested mainly in focalization on the level of perception. For more on the levels of focalization, see Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan: *Text: Focalization*, in Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan: *Narrative Fiction. Contemporary Poetics*, London and New York 1994, pp. 71–85.

¹⁵ This is the case, for instance, in a scene of riding on an evacuation train, in which the leitmotiv is the smell of blood felt by the narrator: Kallas, *Czyścić*, 1921, pp. 25–26.

¹⁶ It is worth adding that this imperative is characteristic of women's literature of personal document related to the First World War. See Maria Zdziarska-Zaleska: *W okopach. Pamiętnik kobiety lekarza batalionu* [In the Trenches. A Diary of a Woman Doctor of Battalion], Warszawa 1934.

3. “Our homeland shall resurrect (itself)”¹⁷

Focalization techniques, mentioned above, are an element of the narrative perspective.¹⁸ In Kallas’ novel, this perspective is a product of gender, national, religious, social, and political filters. The text combines different viewpoints: those of a woman, civilian, and Pole. Interestingly, the Jewish component of this intertexture is marginalized. It should be pointed out that Kallas – to borrow Carole Balin’s expression – “muted her Jewish voice”¹⁹ even in some works written before 1914. Apart from assimilationist narratives, short stories about “our Jewish world”²⁰ and plays drawing on the Jewish past in Europe, her pre-war output also includes dramas on Polish historical events, and tales of the Polish world of artists, nobility, and peasants. Nevertheless, the scarcity of Jewish motives in a novel that can be regarded in some of its parts as a social panorama, is particularly striking. The marginalization of the Jewish perspective is evident most clearly perhaps by the way in which the theme of pogroms is introduced. In Jewish, Polish-Jewish and German-Jewish literature devoted to the Great War, extensive depictions of pogroms were among indispensable war scenes.²¹ A single-sentence mention of pogroms appears in *Czyściec* as only one of many elements in a catalogue of war atrocities: “The Moskals have already occupied the eastern part of the country. Pogroms were staged in towns with a majority of Jewish population. In villages, manors have been plundered. People are fleeing in panic.”²²

By contrast, the Polish perspective in the novel is radically emphasized. In the very first paragraphs, Kallas refers to “Litania pielgrzymka” [“Pilgrim’s Litany”], a work by Adam Mickiewicz, and to his prayer for “a universal war for the freedom of peoples,” which will lead to the resurrection of Poland. The August of 1914 is interpreted in precisely this context of Romantic thinking: “[...] a great war has come and pitted against each other three states to which the Polish nation has been bound with chains of serfdom... ”²³ The outbreak of the great European conflict is thus incorporated into Polish mythology, becoming an episode in a narrative about national rebirth. The characters, divided by their political orientation and opinions on social issues, are united in a common belief that “this historical cataclysm will restore Polish independence” (p. 49). Soldiers of Piłsudski’s Polish Legions are presented as heirs to the spiritual legacy of Mickiewicz. Described as noble knights, they are worshiped as the only idealists in army ranks, who sacrifice their lives, waging a just war in obedience to the “dictates of the soul” (p. 13). The hope in its regenerative power is overshadowed, however, by the awareness that it is a

¹⁷ Kallas, *Czyściec*, 1921, p. 49.

¹⁸ I adopt Manfred Schmeling’s definition of perspective as a kind of cultural filter that determines the structure of the represented world: *Opowiadanie o konfrontacji: Inny w narracji współczesnej* [Narration on Confrontation: The Other in Contemporary Narrative], in: Zofia Mitosek (ed.): *Opowiadanie w perspektywie badań porównawczych* [Narration in the Comparative Research Perspective], Kraków 2004, pp. 13–26.

¹⁹ Balin’s expression: *Jewish Women Writers in Tsarist Russia*, 2000, p. 201.

²⁰ Such is the title of one of Kallas’ first literary efforts: *Nasz żydowski światek. Z pamiętników przyjaciółki* [Our Jewish World. From a Friend’s Diary], Sambor 1893.

²¹ I discussed this subject in greater detail in the article *Writing World War I: The Case of Polish-Jewish Literature*, in: *Jahrbuch des Simon-Dubnow-Instituts*, no. 12 (2014), pp. 193–214, here p. 205–206.

²² Kallas, *Czyściec*, 1921, p. 10.

²³ Kallas, *Czyściec*, 1921, p. 1.

tragic, fratricidal struggle among “Poles from the territories annexed by different foreign powers” (p. 12).²⁴

The religious aspect of Polishness is particularly emphasized: the narrator of *Czyśćciec* is a Polish Catholic woman, who frequently manifests her national enthusiasm and religious zeal. Introducing Polish characters in her earlier works (*Ona i oni* [*She and They*] (1909), *Dziecko* [*Child*] (1913)), Kallas never highlighted their attachment to Catholicism with equal ostentation.²⁵ Characteristically, in *Czyśćciec* heroine’s effusive Catholicism is combined with a distanced attitude towards Judaism. This is shown in a scene in which the narrator hears a Jewish soldier and a Catholic priest praying together in a field hospital: “They were whispering together a prayer, whose words I did not understand. Only two words, uttered more loudly, have stuck in my mind: *Shema Yisrael...*” (p. 79). *Shema Yisrael* – the widely known Hebrew prayer phrase – is presented as entirely meaningless and puzzling, as a mystery to her.

The combination of national and religious elements is also manifested on the symbolic level. Kallas draws here on popular and conventional signs. The recurring image of crucified Christ and Easter rituals are associated with the current suffering and future resurrection of Poland, while the diarist repeats the classic messianic formula: “the sacrifice and suffering experienced have brought salvation to Poland and to the entire humanity” (p. 86). More importantly, the Catholic perspective is crucial to the historical and philosophical message of the novel. Searching for the sense of horrifying war experiences, the narrator discovers it by referring to a religious interpretation of time.²⁶ The war is called purgatory, and thus it is placed in the teleological order of history as a transitional era of suffering through which the world is purified and improved.

The belief in the teleological course of history gives sense to war experiences in an ideological, secular interpretation, as well: “[...] the lives of millions of people who passed away prematurely have not been sacrificed in vain. Their sorrowful lament and loud complaints [...] will grow day by day and week by week into an immense power. It will strike like a sledgehammer against oppression and injustice, against all the border posts and class egoism, against the power of capitalism and the imaginary greatness of hereditary rulers, against all this despotism of usurped power over human beings.”²⁷ The above fragment is noticeably saturated with ideological rhetoric: the war is made part of a scenario of struggle for a new social order founded on freedom and justice and the motivation for the future revolution.

As can be seen, in her novel Kallas draws on various rhetorics and on various grand narratives: national, religious, and ideological ones. All of them share a common model of the world, in which the essential categories are development and its purpose, change and improvement, while the essential subjects are the nation and humanity – “as the heroes of

²⁴ The significance of the theme of fratricidal struggle in Polish literature devoted to the First World War is discussed by Dorota Kielak: *Wielka wojna i świadomość przełomu. Literatura polska lat 1914–1918* [The Great War and a Sense of Watershed. Polish Literature of the Years 1914–1918], Warszawa 2001, p. 144.

²⁵ See, for instance, the descriptions of the protagonist’s visits to Kraków churches and her prayer in the Wawel Cathedral: Kallas, *Czyśćciec*, 1921, pp. 94, 97.

²⁶ For more on the significance of the Catholic doctrine of purgatory for the concept of time, see Richard K. Fenn: *The Persistence of Purgatory*, Cambridge 1995.

²⁷ Kallas, *Czyśćciec*, 1921, p. 134.

liberty.”²⁸ Its deepest motivation is the faith in a higher order, which includes the approaching “new times” (p. 89) and “the new shape of Europe and re-born Poland” (p. 90). The same model can be found in her pre-war assimilationist novels, which usually end with proclamations of faith in “a better, more beautiful tomorrow.”²⁹ They also appear in *Czyścić* in depictions of Poland that is “free, independent, united, young and creative, hungry for grand deeds” (p. 109).

4. The gender of civilians

Kallas’ novel contrasts national hopes, political myths, and social attitudes with war experiences of women and civilians. The diary is written by a member of Galician intelligentsia: a woman writer, modern, socially engaged woman, soldier’s wife. The opening scene of this novel is the heroine’s farewell to the husband, called up into the army, the end of family life, the beginning of war. It is soon followed by exile from her home full of “books, paintings, and flowers” (p. 133), evacuation from Lwów, wandering with a group of refugees, and service in a field hospital.

Unlike the feminist “prodigal daughters” of Kallas’ earlier works,³⁰ the protagonist of *Czyścić* does not fight for a new position for women, but rather accepts the traditional roles assigned to women in wartime: she participates in “women’s committees” organizing “assistance for the Polish soldier” (p. 4), takes “Samaritan courses,” and “serves as a nurse” (p. 37) in a frontline hospital. More importantly, she accepts her woman’s identity as an identity built in relation to a man. Her absent husband remains the most important and closest person in her life, whom she unhesitatingly acknowledges as her superior, portraying him as her spiritual and artistic guide and mentor. Her inferior and dependent position manifests itself in the classic feminist theme of having no space to work in: in the newspaper office, the protagonist has no room of her own, nor even her “own desk,” and eventually she is assigned precisely the place vacated by her conscripted husband. Kallas’ novel can be read as a work representing women’s literature in the sense proposed by Elaine Showalter – as writings focused on women’s experience and on rendition of everyday life.³¹ Another assimilationist’s novel on the Great War – Wilhelm Raort’s (Józef Rappaport 1887–1941) novel *Za cesarza ... fragmenty życia pozafrontowego* [For Emperor...Snapshots from a Life behind the Front] (1921) could testify to the difference between women’s and men’s war narrations. Raort adopts man’s perspective and spins the story on male and soldiers’ experiences in the army³². Characteristically, in *Czyścić* one of the diarist’s special foci of interest is the wartime everyday life of civilian population, especially the conditions of the poor, disadvantaged, and excluded: peasants, the urban poor, women, and children. She describes extensively preparations for evacuation, provisioning problems in cities threatened with invasion, the organization

²⁸ I am referring here to the terminology of Jean-Francois Lyotard: *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, translated by Geoff and Brian Massumi, Minneapolis 1984, p.31.

²⁹ A. Kallas: *On i oni wszyscy* [He and All of Them], Warszawa 1910, p. 221.

³⁰ See A. Kallas: *Córki marnotrawne* [Prodigal Daughters], Lwów 1914.

³¹ Elaine Showalter: *Toward Feminist Poetics*, in: Elaine Showalter (ed.): *The New Feminist Criticism. Essays on Women, Literature and Theory*, London 1986, pp. 125–143.

³² Wilhelm Raort: *Za Cesarza... fragmenty z życia pozafrontowego* [For Emperor...Snapshots from a Life behind the Front], Lwów 1921.

and journey of refugee transports. Preoccupation with everyday problems dominates, for instance, in a description of a visit in barracks for the refugees, called – in a Kafkaian style – “a penal colony” (p. 54). In what reads like a journalistic report, she presents in detail their living conditions, sanitation, and medical care. The question of refugees always gives rise to analyses of the functioning of the Austrian administration, ineffectual, corrupt, and unable to create a decent system for the care of those in need. This is because, for civilians, the main state institutions in wartime are not only the military, but also administrative authorities or, to be precise, the bureaucracy to which they are subject. Kallas portrays it as an inhumane apparatus of power, which turns former citizens into almost prisoners.

Another focus of this woman’s narrative are the scenes of the “abomination,” “monstrosity,” (p. 10) and “wickedness of war” (p. 34). Many of them are related to the fate of civilians. For now, as the narrator observes, “not only frontline soldiers are in danger, but also civilians, whether they live in a peasant hut, manor, or tenement” (p. 9). The diarist is horrified especially by public executions of alleged spies and by the crimes of punitive expeditions. A contemporary reader will note the similarity of many scenes in *Czyścić* to gruesome pictures of another war to come: “Mothers threw their children out of the windows and jumped after them” (p. 70).

War experience portrayed in *Czyścić* from a woman’s perspective is above all the experience of losing one’s private space, one’s home; it is an experience of exile and wandering. Evacuation is carried out by railway transports. Refugee trains travel along Galician routes: Lwów – Gródek Jagielloński [currently Horodok in Ukraine] – Sambor [currently Sambir in Ukraine] – Kraków. When recounting the journey, the narrator is often situated “by the railway track” (“I roamed along the railway track with other people.” (p. 27)). This particular place will soon play a unique role in Polish literature devoted to the Second World War.³³ It must be emphasized that Kallas’ narrative about the Great War is placed in a modern setting of railway tracks, loading ramps, and railway stations.³⁴ The Lwów station, for instance, is described in *Czyścić* several times. But this edifice, a pride of the city and a symbol of its modernity and European character, appears in the novel as a place annexed and devastated by war: it is a rallying point for civilians and a stopover for withdrawing troops, a camping ground for refugees, strewn with wounded soldiers

5. Modernity and war

Kallas observes that the Great War has an unprecedented, modern character. It manifests itself not only in frontline fighting, but also in the position of civilians. Although “the European countries have pledged to respect civilian population in case of war” (p. 41), the Hague Convention protecting civilians is notoriously violated, and all

³³ I am referring here to a classic short story by Zofia Nałkowska from her volume *Medaliony* [Medallions]. A site by the railway track is also crucially important in short stories by Tadeusz Borowski. For the motif of the railway “terminus” in Polish literature dealing with the Second World War, see Wojciech Tomasiak: *Ikona nowoczesności. Kolej w literaturze polskiej* [Icon of Modernity. Railway in Polish Literature], Wrocław 2007.

³⁴ For more on the connection between modernity and railway travel, also see Wojciech Tomasiak: *Pociąg do nowoczesności. Szkice kolejowe* [Entrained by Modernity. Railway Sketches], Warszawa 2014.

armies attack defenceless women, children, and the elderly, using “all technical means at their disposal” (p. 41). As Kallas notes, fighting involves for example the use of new means of transport: aeroplanes and automobiles. These inventions are employed for humanitarian as well as for murderous purposes, inspiring both awe at the achievements of civilization and horror at their destructive potential. For an aeroplane can bring relief to our troops besieged by the enemy, or, if used by the enemy, it can drop bombs on our city. Modern military technology is a manifestation of the dark side of progress. “Nowadays, with such technology of lethal means, if war lasted a few more months, they would slaughter half of Europe” (p. 4), the narrator observes.

Modern war also introduces new methods of fighting. These include interpretative manoeuvres aimed at managing the emotions of the masses and collective imagination.³⁵ Judith Butler calls such manoeuvres the frames of war. Their basic mechanisms consist in selecting, excluding, or rejecting certain perceptions and representations of reality. According to Butler, the techniques employed to structure the field of view, to regulate minutely what is presented and how it is presented, are not only of a visual, but also of a discursive nature.³⁶ Kallas notes this type of war activities, which restrict the freedom of private and public discourse on war. She presents it from the position of a reader of censored letters from the frontline and propagandist war bulletins. Censorship and propaganda determine what can be said and heard about the war, or what can be shown and seen. The reports and pictures are supposed to praise the bravery of our army and to demonstrate the ineptitude of the enemy, by using – despite the actual course of events – a narrative of our victory and of the enemy’s defeat.

In Kallas’ novel, the horror at the manifestations of modern total war, at the extent of its attendant atrocities and destruction, is accompanied by a sense of the inadequacy of language, which is incapable of conveying these new experiences: “what was happening then completely defies description” (p. 88), comments the narrator. Shocking scenes are sometimes presented in an oneiric style that blurs the boundary between reality and nightmare. Elsewhere, the lack of her own adequate language leads the author to experiment with various artistic conventions of representing national catastrophes and martyrdom. In such cases, representational clichés are often provided by painting (e.g. scenes from *The Raft of the Medusa* by Theodore Gericault or *March to Siberia* by Artur Grottger). Among literary models, the most important are the Romantic depictions of lands of death, “graves and crosses,” symbolic scenes of “Polish catacombs,” and realistic pictures of defeated Polish national uprisings, such as descriptions of “mangled human remains pecked by ravens and crows” (p. 71).

The diarist catalogues not only wartime atrocities, but also fears that they evoke. Her interpretation of communal behaviour points to fear as the main psychological spring of action. The universal fear of the “Moloch of war” (p. 5), a deity hungry for human sacrifices, leads to socially constructive action as well as to brutal, anti-social acts. These

³⁵ See Dorota Sajewska: Doświadczenie żołnierza. Estetyczne i polityczne ramy nowoczesności [Soldier’s Experience. Esthetic and Political Framework of Modernity], in: Przegląd Humanistyczny [Humanities Review], no. 4 (2014), pp. 53–62, here p. 58–59.

³⁶ Judith Butler: *Ramy wojny. Kiedy życie godne jest oplakiwania*, translated by Agnieszka Czarnocka, Warszawa 2011, pp. 13–17. For the English version, see Judith Butler: *Frames of War. When is Life Grievable*, New York 2009.

fears may be overcome or alleviated, among others, by participation in the activities of the “home front.”

According to Katarzyna Sierakowska,³⁷ the literature of personal document written in the years 1914–1918 reveals differences between the cultural norms for expressing fear by men and women. Women have the right to show emotions, and women’s expression of fear – as a response to disturbed stability – is socially acceptable and can therefore be much freer. Kallas’ protagonist takes advantage of these norms, noting and analyzing her reactions to wartime events: her mood changes, anxiety, crying, fainting, bouts of fear, panic attacks, and symptoms of nervous breakdown. She considers herself an oversensitive woman who finds it difficult to meet her civic obligations: “My flesh creeps at the sight of the wounded, and the reek of disinfectants makes me dizzy. I’m trying to overcome revulsion, but it costs me a great deal of effort” (p. 4). Her account chronicles women’s wartime fears: the fears of a broken family, losing home or the husband called up to the frontline, social demoralization, and anarchy.³⁸

Feminist literary critic Inga Iwasiów argues that marginalized, unofficial and non-canonical autobiographical woman’s narrative “[...] has a special value for thinking on modern society and its attitude towards war [...]”³⁹. Kallas’ novel could serve as an argument for such understanding of the subversive potential of the woman’s voice for the official ideologies.

Conclusion

The question of a position of assimilated Jews in future independent Poland was one of the key topics in assimilationist press in the years of the Great War. In the columns of the monthly “Rozwaga. Miesięcznik Społeczno-Literacki” (1915–1918) edited by Henryk Nussbaum the tendency to stress the Jewish difference was criticized, and Poland and Polishness were claimed the highest values.⁴⁰

After 1918, the former assimilationists choose different forms and fields of social activity. One of the available choices is a radical Polonization. An example is Wilhelm Feldman, who during the Great War writes feature articles explaining the Polish *raison d'état* to the European public,⁴¹ engages in pro-independence activities, and ultimately receives baptism. Kallas’ novel is a testimony that the writer’s evolution took her in a

³⁷ Katarzyna Sierakowska: Lęk przed śmiercią, bezdomnością, demoralizacją. Polki i Polacy 1914–1918 [The Fear of Death, Homelessness, and Demoralization. Polish Men and Women in 1914–1918], in: Przegląd Humanistyczny, no. 6 (2014), pp. 6–18, here p. 17.

³⁸ There are recurrent pictures of the victims of wartime deprivation and dehumanization: prostitutes walking the streets and children “playing war” (Kallas, *Czyściec*, 1921, pp. 102, 112).

³⁹ Inga Iwasiów: Centralna pleć cywila [Civilian’s Central Gender], in: Sławomir Buryła/Paweł Rodak (eds.): *Wojna: doświadczenie i zapis. Nowe źródła, problemy, metody badawcze* [War: Experience and Representation. New Sources, Problems and Research Methods], Krakow 2006, pp. 399–415, here p. 401.

⁴⁰ Polacy-Żydzi i Żydzi Polacy [Poles-Jews and Jews-Poles] in *Rozwaga*, no 12 (1916), pp. 243–245; Resurrecturi in *Rozwaga*, nos 10–11(1916), pp. 207–209, Nowe zadania Polaków wyznania mojżeszowego [New aims of Poles of the Mosaic persuasion] in *Rozwaga* nos 5–6 (1917), pp. 136–140.

⁴¹ See Wilhelm Feldman: *Zur Lösung der polnischen Frage: offener Brief an Herrn George Cleinow*, Berlin 1914; *Die Zukunft Polens und der deutsch-polnische Ausgleich*, Berlin 1915; *Die Wünsche der Polen*, Berlin 1915; *Deutschland, Polen und die russische Gefahr*, Berlin 1915; *Die Polen auf der Anklagebank*, Berlin 1917; *Der gegenwärtige Stand der Polenfrage: Materialien und Anregungen*, Berlin 1918; *Vor der neuen Teilung Polens. Offenes Schreiben an Herrn Friedrich Neuman*, Berlin 1918.

similar direction. Moreover, it helps to explain the Polish conversion of assimilationists in a broader ideological context. The key is the experience of the Great War, not so much as a turning point, but rather as a crisis in European culture. The picture of the West (Prussia, Austria) that dominates in *Czyściec* is that of a barbarous civilization, no different from the barbarous East (Russia). The military conflict is interpreted as a clash of European imperialisms,⁴² and all the belligerent countries are portrayed as despotic and oppressive towards their citizens.

The writer shows a strongly anti-German (or rather anti-Prussian) attitude. But her attitude towards Austria becomes radically critical as well.⁴³ In this sense, *Czyściec* is also a novel about the end of Galicia and the Austro-Hungarian monarchy: about the moral decay of state institutions, defeat of the army, and “dissolution of the social order” (p. 9). Against the backdrop of this European crisis, the situation of Poland, waging a “just war” for her freedom, appears to be quite different. It is striking, however, that the plot of the novel, published in 1921, ends before the end of the Great War – at the threshold of Polish independence, which will test the last of assimilationist faiths.

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⁴² Kallas claims that the war is a consequence of “imperialist whims” and has “imperialist purposes” (Kallas, *Czyściec*, 1921, p. 9).

⁴³ It is worth mentioning that in his novel *Raort* represents the same critical attitude towards Austro-Hungarian Monarchy.