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# **Gender and Literature**

issue editor

**ANNA NASIŁOWSKA**

**SŁAWOMIR BURYŁA** Manly Fascism

**AGNIESZKA DAUKSZA** KwieKulik as an Unknown:  
A Neo-Avant-gardist Laboratory of Experience

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## *Gender and Literature*

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# Foreword

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Anna Nasiłowska

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## The Post-Modern Man

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In late 2014, *Encyklopedia gender. Płeć w kulturze* [*Gender Studies Encyclopedia: Gender in Culture*] came into print. It offers a survey of contemporary inquiries into and examinations of gender in the Polish humanities, including contributions from feminist and gay studies scholars, as well as from experts belonging to other fields linked with their Western counterparts or, we may even say, inspirations. The compendium reveals a very significant disproportion. The entries discussing women and feminism are plenty, while the number of male-oriented entries is only a handful: *Men's studies/Masculinity studies*, *Male feminism*, *Hegemonic masculinity*, *Homosexual literature*, *Sexism*, *Backlash*, *Homophobia*, *Homosociety*, *Phallogocentrism*, and *Fatherhood*. And basically that is all. Far be it from me to criticize such a state of affairs, especially given the fact that I myself contributed to the book. Such a situation is a reflection of the asymmetry of academic interest in the constructs of masculinity and femininity. Masculinity has long been considered a certainty, an unconsciously internalized norm. We should also add that many of the inquiries launched from a feminist position often assumed the patriarchal norm as representative of the male position, even though that could be construed as a considerable simplification, even with regard to historical descriptions and periods in

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time where the presence of women in culture was more a rare exception than the norm. Developing the parallel field of men's studies would definitely work towards assuaging that asymmetry, especially given the fact that the field is not emerging in a vacuum but is already deeply indebted to feminism – years of deliberations and discussions on the status of cultural gender, intersectionality, and the performativity of gender roles pursued on behalf of feminism certainly give it a head start.

The essays included in this issue were published in Polish mostly in the 2015/2 issue, but – as it is wont to happen – the subject seeped through to subsequent issues of our bimonthly journal. As was the case with feminist issues (but not in Polish literature exploring these issues), forming a research thesis was possible primarily through reference to Western efforts exploring similar problems. The authors cite Alex Hobbs's *Masculinity: Studies and Literature* (*Literature Compass*, 2013/4), the *Handbook of Studies on Man and Masculinity* (ed. M.S. Kimmel) lexicon, M.S. Kimmel's *The History of Man: Essays on the History of American and British Masculinities*, and many other inquiries in the field. Above all, the authors, fully convinced of the validity and value of such points of view, problematize the issue of masculinity in Polish literature.

The shifts taking place in Polish popular culture are definitely hard to ignore. Machismo has faded out of fashion, and the culture seems to promote male figures that would popularly be called softies or metrosexual men. These labels, devised by journalists, nearly overused to death in a variety of magazines, and almost invariably invoking American terms without Polish counterparts, put their emphases on different areas: a softie can be gay but does not have to, a metrosexual man is, to an extent, the modern dandy, rather undefined in his preferences. And more recently, we have been witnessing the rise of another label promoted by the media: the lumbersexual man, an urban type wearing lumberjack garb and a full beard. It may be that the reason behind his emergence is the need to manufacture demand for another type of clothes and paraphernalia. After all, the lumbersexual is just another in a gallery of similar social stereotypes that have been steadily pumped out by the media, including the 1990s yuppie (short for young urban professional), and the more recent hipster, a creature of the economic crisis and representative of the precariat, his uncertain future decided by unfair employment practices. The yuppie worked in a corporation, took out mortgages, climbed the corporate ladder, and avoided asking questions about the future. Ten, twenty years later, the hipster was left with co-working spaces, non-governmental organizations, and alternative culture.

Naturally, these terms belong to the media discourse and describe reality as much as they create it. Each one was devised across the other side of the Atlantic, each has its own essayist origin and its own developmental dynamics. Although metrosexuality has long been the subject of many a piece in lifestyle magazine and tabloids, the lumbersexual type has been more of a recent phenomenon and its

fame seems to have fizzled out just as quickly as it emerged. If we examine terms like softie or metrosexual from the perspective of their ability to create demand, it will quickly become apparent that their potential in this matter is considerable. Men bearing these labels need a lot of cosmetic products and will not be satisfied with merely soap and a razor like their forefathers were. They will buy products and services that were once addressed only to women. That plus earrings, necklaces, maybe even rings – although that is not such a recent development, given that seventeenth-century European fashions went as far as expecting men to wear lacy garments. Additionally, the metrosexual stereotype is supposed to abolish the domination of dark and subdued colors in menswear. These men will also require a range of cosmetic procedures, including manicures, facials, and hair removal, which could open up whole avenues of new profit opportunities. If we were to look closely at the demographic that the concept of “new man” targets the most, we would probably become somewhat suspicious that the concept itself is being advanced by a hidden advertising agenda and that the advent of lumbersexuality itself is nothing but an attempt at diversification and raking in a new segment of customers, mostly those dissatisfied with the previously dominant dandyish elegance.

It is not entirely clear to me whether these behaviors ever really took root in contemporary Poland. The entire issue is rather complicated – some fashions remain purely theoretical, yet drive specific trends. On the other hand, the approach to color in menswear actually changed in the 2014/2015 season and one could spot more than a few men sporting bright orange sweaters. But do I personally know any softies? Well, maybe one. The same goes for the perfect hipster, an elusive creature seen only by magazine columnists who keep on producing stories about it. I have heard, however (from an acquaintance, but still), a story about a young beautician who had a male client ask her to remove hair from his entire body, including the most intimate areas. The story added that she was terrified at the request – which only testifies to the rarity of similar jobs. Most of the men I know would never visit a beautician, regardless of reason. Neither macho nor metrosexual, they are something in between, but on the other hand this is not a spectrum, so the matter gets even more difficult to pin down. Even if a man does not really go for the metrosexual style, it does not automatically make them a proponent of machismo. These “types” identified in literature tend to focus on social impulses manufactured by the economy. Veblen’s 1899 opus, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, exaggeratingly revealed the rampant, conspicuous consumption of the upper classes in the America. The more recent “types,” emerging primarily in the American mainstream, reflect conspicuous consumption in times of globalization and are linked with issues related to contemporary identity as outlined by Anthony Giddens in *Modernity and Self-Identity*.

Curiously, no parallel and equally ostentatious types addressed to women have emerged in the same timeframe. Within the same period, women had to content themselves with the single woman (like Bridget Jones) and accomplished profes-



sionals in pursuit of happiness – like the characters in *Sex and the City*. Consumerism has succeeded in colonizing the realm of womankind so that by now, there is no longer a need to convince women to subject themselves to the pressures of style and the ever-changing rhythms of fashion, which may augment their appeal, produce better sexual relationships, and improve (however briefly) their social status. On the one hand, investing in another pair of pumps seems ludicrous, while on the other, it may be perceived as wholly rational – at least as long as it translates into higher self-esteem and a greater chance of success. After all, enjoying the spoils of mass production is supposed to be the reward for our daily toils. And now, narcissistic men with a diminished sense of agency can also compensate through increased consumption.

While no one seriously posits that we are dealing with a “crisis of femininity,” the notion of a “crisis of masculinity,” however, keeps coming back not only in magazine columns but in serious sociological studies. One such inquiry can be found in Zbyszko Melosik’s *Kryzys męskości w kulturze współczesnej* [*The Crisis of Masculinity in Modern Culture*]. Besides, one only has to look as far as the Internet to see what is what... I believe that at least three of the attempts to identify the reasons for the crisis are flawed: the first, revolving around the notion that traditional masculinity is in decline and that masculinity itself is in peril. Such a notion is, first and foremost, founded upon faulty reasoning. The second is a patently false interpretation that identifies liberal feminism as the reason for the crisis of masculinity, antagonizing men and women, which at its core would go against the fundamental principles and objectives of liberal feminism; additionally, such an interpretation clearly overestimates the influence of feminism. The third type of reasoning revolves around the claim that we are actually dealing with a crisis of heterosexuality, given the widespread and fiery debates over gender and homosexuality.

This current issue of *Teksty Drugie* is not dedicated to exploring the crisis of masculinity – we have not succumbed to such ideology. Rather, it investigates diverse, historic, and contemporary forms of masculinity and takes a closer look at the validity of using gender studies analyses in literary studies.

*Translation: Jan Szelągiewicz*

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## Arachne and Athena: Towards a Different Poetics of Women's Writing

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**I**t is not easy today to say anything about the poetics of women's creativity without referring to the well-known metaphor of text as a fabric and the figure of the weaver, practically an emblematic image of the female artist. As Kazimiera Szczuka argues in the article *Spinners, Weavers, Spiders: Remarks on Works by Women*, all stories of Greek spinners – Penelope, Philomela, Ariadne, or Arachne – are really about the profound analogy between the act of spinning and women's narration, language and history.<sup>1</sup> Of course, Szczuka is here following the path of many Western second-wave feminists, who turned weaving into something more than just another writing metaphor – transforming it into a kind of founding myth of women's art, different from male creation in terms of both the inspiration and the language of expression.<sup>2</sup> The weaving metaphor has seduced researchers of women's literature even more strongly when it revealed

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1 Kazimiera Szczuka, "Przędki, tkaczki i pająki. Uwagi o twórczości kobiet," in Szczuka, *Kopciuszek, Frankenstein i inne. Feminizm wobec mitu* (Kraków: eFka, 2003), 27–45.

2 For instance Marta Weigle, *Spiders and Spinners: Woman and Mythology* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1982), Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1990).

its additional, non-human, one might say, meanings, and spoken about transgression. On the one hand, it referred to the divine universe over which old Parca/Moira/Clotho reigned, sitting at the loom, while on the other, it entered the microcosm of Nature, in which the animal Spider wove from her own body the thread that created the world.

It is undoubtedly also this semantic surplus that made the story of Arachne and Athena into a cultural myth, even though it may be just a poetic fairy tale, an apocryphal addition to Greek mythology invented by the Roman poet Ovid.<sup>3</sup> This does not change the fact that the history of the contest between the Lydian weaver and the goddess related in Book VI of the *Metamorphoses* is an ambiguous and dark tale about art in its human and inhuman dimensions. Nancy Miller's celebrated text "Arachnologies: The Woman, the Text, and the Critic"<sup>4</sup> attempts to interpret the scene of Arachne's meeting with Athena from the interpretive perspective of feminist theory. Miller also exhibits the ambiguity of the trope of female authorship, the ambivalence resting in the relationship between the creator and her work, between the text and the body, and between the speaking subject and the story itself.

Yet most later commentators on Miller's article expressly emphasise what we might call the lighter side of her critical project. As Anna Burzyńska puts it:

The metaphor of Arachne has proven to be very fruitful and inspiring in feminist criticism. First, it ennobled female creative subjectivity and female sources of the writer's art. Second, it demonstrated that women's creativity is an entirely subjective act – creating a work and at the same time creating oneself. Third, it reinforced the very common tendency in feminist thought to blur the traditional dualism between subject and object established in the androcentric conception of art. Fourth, it sustained the conviction that women's creativity comes from the body, as a peculiar emanation of female corporeality. Fifth and finally, it accentuated the connection between women's creativity and daily life.<sup>5</sup>

3 Scholars are not even certain whether the story of Arachne and Athena is of Greek origin, or much later, and Roman. See A. S. Byatt, "Arachne," *The Threepenny Review* 78 (1999): 20-23; Sylvie Ballestra-Puech, *Métamorphoses d'Arachné. L'artiste en araignée dans la littérature occidentale* (Genève: Librairie Droz S.A., 2006).

4 Nancy Miller, "Arachnologies: The Woman, the Text, and the Critic," in *The Poetics of Gender*, ed. Nancy Miller (New York–Oxford: Columbia University Press, 1986), 270-295. Page numbers are given in parentheses within the text.

5 Anna Burzyńska, "Feminizm," in *Teorie literatury XX wieku. Podręcznik*, ed. Anna Burzyńska and Michał P. Markowski (Kraków: Znak, 2007), 411. If not otherwise specified all translations of referenced works are provided by the translator of the respective article.

Arachnology, interpreted through the analogy of writing as the process of a spider weaving a web by spinning a thread from within itself, became yet another version of somatopoetics,<sup>6</sup> which was based on a universal idea of how women create. The most important indicators of this poetic were: autobiographism (writing from oneself) and corporeality (writing oneself), and these combined to form the call to “write your self” proposed by French critics of *écriture féminine*.<sup>7</sup> In her book *Cudzoziemki* [*Alienated Women*], Grażyna Borkowska combines these two traditions of feminist thought: the American and the continental, with an autobiographical “disclosure” forming the foundation of women’s poetics:

The story of Arachne is a vivid metaphor of women’s creativity – whatever you create, you create yourself. Whatever you disclose, you disclose yourself. By writing (or creating), women lie within a constructed discourse, incapable of distance, of breaking the bonds tying them to the text, incapable of concealing themselves, of blotting themselves out and escaping.<sup>8</sup>

Borkowska also wrote *Metafora drożdży* [*The Yeast Metaphor*], one of the first Polish attempts – and still an inspirational one – to define the phenomenon of women’s literature. Here, she emphasises another type of “disclosure”:

We can speak of women’s literature/poetry when the subject of the work discloses her gender, self-identifies herself in terms of sex.<sup>9</sup>

Of course, in our era after the “death of the author,” Borkowska means “disclosure” of the author within the text, which persuades her all the more that

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6 The aim of this article is not so much to challenge the category of somatopoetics as such as to show the problematic strategies for reading texts by women that result from acceptance of a reductionist means of understanding the relations between gender, the body and a text. On the limits existing in the very project of somapoetics, see “How to Embody the Body: On the Dilemma of Somatopoetics,” in *From Modern Theory to a Poetics of Experience*, ed. Grzegorz Grochowski and Ryszard Nycz (Warszawa: Peter Lang, 2014), 271–288.

7 “Write your self – your body must be heard,” urged Hélène Cixous in “The Laugh of the Medusa,” trans. Keith Cohen, Paula Cohen, *Signs* 1 (4) (Summer, 1976): 880.

8 Grażyna Borkowska, *Cudzoziemki. Studia o polskiej prozie kobiecej* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IBL PAN, 1996), 13.

9 Borkowska, “Metafora drożdży. Co to jest literatura/poezja kobieca,” in *Ciało i tekst. Feminizm w literaturoznawstwie*, ed. Anna Nasiłowska (Warszawa: Instytut Badań Literackich PAN, 2009), 71.

“woman must put herself into the text,”<sup>10</sup> identify herself in it, and then reveal this fact to readers, which is what Cixous also calls for. Borkowska sees every other (more distanced or mediated) form of constructing relations between the author and her work less as camouflage than as a manifestation of ostensible power, self-delusion placing a question mark over the authenticity of the female signature. In her writings on literary history, she often speaks of the “poetics of self-restriction,” the fulfilment of a “strategy of mimicry,” which, though by no means rare, mostly characterises early emancipationist writers, who adopted it in patriarchal culture, imitating the language of men.<sup>11</sup>

It is worth asking, however, whether this was how Nancy Miller understood her project – as an affirmation of somatopoetics, in which the body for the woman author becomes not so much a means of creation, but the text itself, the text as spider web.

### 1. Arachne – the Headless Body

Ovid’s narrative appears clear:<sup>12</sup> Arachne, orphaned in childhood by her mother, daughter of Idmon, a poor dyer, so skilled in weaving that she is regarded as a pupil of Athena herself, is so proud of her talent that she refuses to acknowledge her “debt” to the goddess. She even claims that she could duel with her to prove her excellence and that she is equal to Athena. Pallas is not keen on the contest, and appears in the form of an old woman to warn the mortal of the consequences of her pride, yet Arachne angrily spurns her advice. The pauper’s clothes fall away, and Athena is already sitting at the looms and weaving a tapestry: in the centre, she places images of the rulers of Olympus, and in the four corners, scenes symbolically representing the tragic fates of those who wished to match the gods. The whole thing is bordered by an olive branch of peace. Arachne, meanwhile, presents mortals: Leda, Europa, Antiope, Danae, Proserpine, Medusa – all of them led astray insidiously by the gods, and mostly by Athena’s father Zeus. “A real bull you’d think, / And real sea” (124), to each the girl “gave their own / Features and proper features of the scene” (124), finally surrounding everything with a narrow band of ivy and flowers. Ovid has no doubt that this marvellous work by her rival makes Athena jealous. The incensed goddess tears up her tapestry, and strikes Arachne herself

10 Cixous, “The Laugh,” 875.

11 Borkowska, *Cudzoziemki*, 180.

12 Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. A. D. Melville, introduction and notes E. J. Kenney (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987). All quotations from this edition; hereafter page numbers are given in parentheses within the text.

several times on the head with the boxwood shuttle. The disgraced mortal tries to hang herself, yet the goddess takes pity, and turns her into a spider.

“Live!” she said, / “Yes, live but hand, you wicked girl, and know / You’ll rue the future too: that penalty / Your kind shall pay to all posterity!” / And as she turned to go, she sprinkled her / With drugs of Hecate, and in a trice, / Touched by the bitter lotion, all her hair / Falls off and with it go her nose and ears. / Her head shrinks tiny’ her whole body’s small; / Instead of legs slim fingers line her sides. / The rest is belly; yet from that she sends / A fine-spun thread and, as a spider, still / Weaving her web, pursues her former skill. (125)

According to Miller, this is a story about institutionalised violence in which topics of gender, politics, and art are interspersed. There is also no doubt that this transformation of the weaver into a spider has nothing affirmative about it, but is a form of repression and degradation, because it results in the woman’s creative energy being imprisoned inside the body of an arachnid. For her tapestry-protest, Arachne is punished by the removal of her head and being pushed to the limits of “femininity” – from now on, she is “restricted to spinning outside representation, to a reproduction that turns back on itself. Cut off from the work of art, she spins like a woman.” (274)

Like a woman, but not like an artist – this is a surprising statement, problematic from a feminist perspective. It runs alarmingly close to the misogynous stereotype of the female author so convincingly reconstructed by Krystyna Kłosińska in her analysis of the recurring images and tropes in the statements of nineteenth-century literary critics: women writers are “spinners of banal reality,” “literary weepers,” and “cows grazing on gossip.”<sup>13</sup>

Yet Miller is consistent: throughout her article, a key role is played by the differentiation between weaving, that is the artistic production of pictures, and spinning, that is a mute lamentation unable to present and at the same time unrepresentable. The former model of women’s expression is represented by Arachne, but before her transformation, and the latter by Ariadne, “a figure of the feminine other created by masculinity” (270), who is unable to escape the role of being a victim culture ascribes to her. But “Arachnologies” is not about a direct juxtaposition of these two female figures: in relating the histories of two mortal women beguiled and abandoned by gods, Arachne ultimately creates her tapestry for Ariadne too, so that her traumatic experience finally receives its narrative form.

13 Krystyna Kłosińska, “Kobieta autorka,” in *Ciało i tekst. Feminizm w literaturoznawstwie*, 94-116.

Nevertheless, Miller is opposed to affirming Arachne's headless spider form. She regards flirting, as she puts it, with "an aesthetics of the decentered (in fact decapitated) head" (274), as the amusement of a subject who has already read herself, and in culture constantly experiences the Barthesian effect of *déjà lu*. And yet, when we enter the sphere of women's output, "under-reading" continues to apply, as the pictures created by women still seem like representations without a cultural framework. This is what Miller is searching for in the signature that both Athena and Arachne leave on their tapestries. So it is not so much about some kind of resuscitation of the Cartesian subject slayed by Barthes, understood as the author's extratextual, psychobiological instance, but rather about going beyond the opposition of internal and external, joining together in the act of interpretation of the cultural and the textual, the public and the personal, what is in the centre of the image and its edges. Only then will it be possible to discern the splice of politics, aesthetics, and autobiography that interests Miller, as well as to historicise the authorial signature. Reflecting upon the question of the material nature of a literary text, the critic is not satisfied with delighting in the beauty of the spider's web, but also looks at the place where reality begins to shine through. Here, she is clearly following the path of Virginia Woolf, who in *A Room of One's Own* also used the metaphor of literature as a spider's web, while also pointing out the rather unmetaphorical senses that it conceals.

[...] when the web is pulled askew, hooked up at the edge, torn in the middle, one remembers that these webs are not spun in mid-air by incorporeal creatures, but are the work of suffering human beings, and are attached to grossly material things, like health and money and the houses we live in.<sup>14</sup>

Contrary to the deconstructionists – Roland Barthes, Geoffrey Hartman, and Joseph Hillis Miller who elected to examine the fabric woven, rather than listening to the story of the weaver<sup>15</sup> – the author of "Arachnologies" wants to

14 Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (London: Penguin Classics, 2002), 43.

15 Apart from Barthes's very well-known books (*The Pleasure of the Text* and *S/Z*), in which the metaphor of text as fabric appears, Nancy Miller disputes the interpretations of the deconstructionists, referring to the weavers themselves: Ariadne, Penelope, and Arachne. She cites Joseph Hillis Miller, "Ariadne's Broken Woolf," *Georgia Review* 31 (1997); Geoffrey Hartman, "The Voice of Shuttle: Language from the Point of View of Literature," in Hartman, *Beyond Formalism: Literary Essays, 1958-1970* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970). She allows us to track the places in the text in which the interpretive paths of feminism and deconstruction diverge. Miller, an ardent structuralist and poststructuralist at the same time, comments upon this dissonance with ironic truculence: "Philology makes odd bedfellows" (Miller, "Arachnologies," 285).

read “against the weave of indifferenciation to discover the embodiment in writing of a gendered subjectivity” (272). Yet at the same time, contrary to theoreticians of *écriture féminine*, she is interested not in the “corporeality of a female text,” but in the authorial subjectivity embodied in the text and still understood in personal terms.<sup>16</sup> Finding this will only be possible when we face up to the seductive force of both the Ovidian narrative and deconstructive theories, which emphasise the importance of the spider’s web and spider rather than the punished artist. This is why Miller understands arachnology not in terms of a postmodern neologism, but as a catachresis that is here an expansion (or perhaps an abuse, as the Greek etymology of the word states) of the meaning of an existing word, now shifted into the field of interpretation theory. A catachresis fills the gaps in the dictionary – creating analogies without which certain areas of reality would remain unnamed. The body plays a considerable role in such cases, as in the phrases “foot of the mountains” or the “lip of a cup,” which do not have any other, non-metaphorical equivalents in the language. This is an entirely different “necessity” from that ingrained in the plot of a myth, or that which Grażyna Borkowska had in mind when she wrote of women’s inability to escape from their own body-text. Just like Halina Filipowicz, who in her article *Against “Women’s Literature”*<sup>17</sup> recalls the misogynistic, anti-women approach of this “epithet” of literary criticism that the term “women’s literature” was in the past, Nancy Miller warns of enclosing the interpretation of women’s writing within the poetics of the “headless body” imposed on women (as culturally appropriate to them).

To remember Arachne only as the spider, or through the dangers of her web alone, is to retain the archetype and dismember, once again, with Athena, the subject of its history: to underread. (288)

She tries to contradict this herself, touching the place in which the spider became attached to its web and thus emphasising the connection between

16 It was no coincidence that in the 1990s, and thus during the autobiographical boom, Miller published the collection of feminist essays *Getting Personal*, developing a further critical project named personal criticism. This was again an attempt to create her own theory of the personal, which may, but does not have to, overlap with the category of the autobiographical. On the dissonance between French theories and arachnology, as well as the personal criticism project, see Krystyna Kłosińska, “Między esencjalizmem a dekonstrukcją: Nancy Miller” [“Between Essentialism and Deconstruction: Nancy Miller”], in Miller, *Feministyczna krytyka literacka [Feminist Literary Criticism]* (Katowice: Wydawnictwo UŚ, 2010), 299–356

17 Halina Filipowicz, *Przeciw literaturze kobiecej, in Ciało i tekst. Feminizm w literaturoznawstwie*, 222–234.



power – gender – and representation. She believes that this, as she puts it, “topographic” reading will make it possible to “attach meaning to this female fable” (270), restoring Arachne’s voice from before the transformation: Arachne the weaver, Arachne the artist.

Miller recommends an interpretative “overreading” of “underread” places. Embracing this challenge, I reread “Arachnologies,” Ovid’s poem, and also various feminist commentaries of the story that I know as if I were doing so for the first time. I was rather surprised to learn that one more “underread” place in the myth is the figure of Athena: her tapestry and her signature left on it. So who is Athena in feminist investigations on women’s mythology of creation and women’s poetics?

## 2. Athena – the Bodiless Head

The mythology that underlies patriarchy has not changed. Everything described in the *Oresteia* is still taking place. Here and there we still see the emergence of some useful Athenas, who spring whole from the brain of the Father-King, dedicated solely to his service and that of the men in power. They bury the women who fight patriarchy under the sanctuary so as to eliminate any troublesome challenge to the new order laid down for households, the order of the city-state, the only order from now on. These useful Athenas, perfect models of femininity, always veiled and clothed from head to toe, very respectable, can be recognized by this sign: they are extraordinarily attractive – which doesn’t mean they attract – but they really aren’t interested in making love.<sup>18</sup>

The “phallic woman,” “guardian of the patriarchy,” pseudo-woman, daughter-law;<sup>19</sup> undoubtedly, Athena is an antiheroine of feminist critique, a bad sister who betrayed the female community. Although Nancy Miller seems to discern the ambivalence lying in the very figure of the goddess, whose attributes are a shield and helmet, but also a spindle, in the end she deliberately chooses not to reinterpret her.<sup>20</sup> She writes about her in categorical terms: “Thus, outwomaned,

18 Luce Irigaray, “Body against Body: In Relation to the Mother,” in *Sexes and Genealogies*, trans. G. C. Gill (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 12–13.

19 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Displacement and the Discourse of Woman,” in *Displacement: Derrida and After*, ed. Mark Krupnick (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983).

20 “Athena herself raises problems of identity and identification – whose side is she on? – I have not tried to answer in this paper. Nor have I discussed the ways in which this is a story [...] that takes place between women” (p. 290).

and in phallic identification with Olympian authority, the goddess destroys the woman's countercultural account: she »rent the embroidered web with its heavenly crimes« (273). According to Miller, Pallas is symbolically stripped of a body, because she "identifies not only with the gods, but with godhead, the cerebral male identity that bypasses the female" (273). Whereas the critic uses the Arachne–Ariadne pairing to explain the difference between a rebellious, creative woman weaver with her own voice and the "female victim," seduced and abandoned by a man, embodying the male fantasy of womanhood, the opposition between Athena and Arachne seems even too obvious. Athena, "covered from head to toe," is paradoxically transparent, and clearly removed from gender concerns – she creates her tapestry and leaves her signature on it, yet this does not find an interpreter. This is not because the goddess produces her work in a different way from Arachne. On the contrary, both seem to represent the same "workshop" approach to art understood in terms of *techne* rather than *ars*. This is also not entirely clear in Ovid's narrative, but we can conjecture that, whereas Athena prefers a more enigmatic narrative of "symbolic signs," Arachne used realistic images to express herself. Yet this is not enough to compare these two types of creativity, which is why Miller – unlike Cixous, Irigaray, and Kristeva, or also Borkowska, following their lead – does not concentrate on the formal differences of language or style. The actual difference between the protagonists' tapestries concerns the sphere of representation and the question of rebellion – the goddess's fabric is a theocentric depiction of repressive power, which in the name of order disciplines impudent rebels, while Arachne's work is a female-centric protest against the authorised abuses of this power. And since in this interpretation (as in many feminist theories of subversiveness), only that which is anti-phallogocentric is defined as female,<sup>21</sup> Athena is condemned to exile beyond the borders of her own sex, and becomes a symbolic "man." From now on, she will be treated as a "masquerader" in a truly female world, a false woman, one with a man's head.

The Gallant Maiden, born from the head of her father and with no mother, does not feel closeness and solidarity with other women – like in Aeschylus' *Oresteia* – she is closer to the brutal, harsh, and rational world of men, heroes, and rulers. Circumspect yet wrathful, ambitious but also obstinate, proud and ruthless. What might be a possible definition of the art that Athena would

21 For many scholars, identifying womanhood with anti-phallogocentricity or anti-patriarchalism became a foundation of women's writing theory. I will only mention Cixous's words: "A feminine text cannot fail to be more than subversive. It is volcanic; as it is written it brings about an upheaval of the old property crust, carrier of masculine investments; there's no other way. There's no room for her if she's not a he. If she's a her-she, it's in order to smash everything, to shatter the framework of institutions, to blow up the law, to break up the 'truth' with laughter." Cixous, "The Laugh," 888.

patronise? Perhaps one that is rational; a record of cool intellectual analysis of an object rather than testimony of a subjective experience; formally perfect, but lacking in feelings; contemptuously turned away from petty, mundane affairs; asexual? Certainly, it would not fit within the limits of somatopoetics.

And yet this interpretation of the myth seems to me to be too simplistic, falling apart in a place that is crucial for feminist critics – the patriarchal origin of Athena's birth. After all, Hesiod in *Theogony* also mentions her mother Metis, the pre-Olympian goddess of wisdom and justice, in the oldest tales also known in the form of the snake-haired Medusa, whom Zeus devoured when she was pregnant. In the subsequent, later texts of the post-Homeric era, however, the traces of this matriarchal genealogy are blurred. All that remain are individual symbols entwined in patriarchal narratives – Pallas' epithet "poly-metis" ("giving much advice"), the snake lying at her feet, the head of Medusa on her shield and a set of incoherent characteristics.

If Athena was the armed and ferocious god of war, then why did the Greeks regard her as a defender of the betrayed and the maker of the most important rules in her world protecting the weak? Even the rather uninquisitive Jan Parandowski noticed this flaw of inconsistency in the monumental depiction of Athena, citing her commandment:

Do not deny anyone water or fire. Do not show a false path. Do not leave a body unburied. Do not kill an ox leading a plough.<sup>22</sup>

If the goddess was supposed to be the embodiment of male virtues, why was she also the greatest teacher of women's work and art – weaving, pottery, cooking – and also a carer for those giving birth? Pronaia, Ergane, Polias, Promachos, Parthenos, Pallas, Hygieia – whatever name she is given, she eludes explicit (let's call it patriarchal) symbolism. Following the research of Jane Ellen Harrison, Robert Graves in *The Greek Myths* writes of Athena as a combination of two embodiments of the matriarchal goddess triad – the awe-inspiring old woman and the maiden.

J. E. Harrison rightly described the story of Athene's birth from Zeus's head as "a desperate theological expedient to rid her of her matriarchal conditions." It is also a dogmatic insistence on wisdom as a male prerogative; hitherto the goddess alone had been wise.<sup>23</sup>

22 Jan Parandowski, *Mitologia. Wierzenia i podania Greków i Rzymian* (Londyn: Puls, 1992), 64.

23 Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths: The Complete and Definitive Edition* (London: Penguin, 2011 [1955]), 46. It is interesting, as well as somewhat alarming, that Athena was restored to the feminist imaginarium, so to speak, not by the works of Graves or Harrington, but

The reason I mention this displaced, motherly genealogy of the mythological Athena is not only to show “how it really was,” but to avoid being led astray by the seductive power of all myths and mythologies, which turn history into nature, take an effect as a cause, and explain what was by what is. In the case of Arachne’s story, it may well be that some feminist commentators believed too much in the patriarchal fairy tales of the bad sister, with the result that Athena the spinner and her tapestry vanished completely from the feminist imaginarium, and with it the admittedly problematic, but important questions about women’s involvement in the patriarchy and the structures of power. On Athena’s tapestry, punishment for impertinent mortals is handed out by Hera – another “phallic woman”? Is feminism today really incapable of a more complex analysis of the relations of gender and power? And by this I do not mean ignoring the difference between the two tapestries, replacing Arachne’s story with that of Athena, or nullifying questions about the link between ethics and aesthetics, but rather the normative way of understanding the category of womanhood, used (even today) to discipline women.

This is an interesting track insofar as feminist critique is continuing to struggle with methodological problems: how should we read those texts of women which take the side of reason, and not the body, and do not fulfil the model of somatic writing regarded as culturally feminine or are not different from the male means of expression, in either form or content? Does a text with a traditional, non-avant-garde form, by a female writer not tackling so-called women’s, emancipationist subjects, automatically become a non-feminist text, meaning non-womanly, that is patriarchal text?<sup>24</sup> Do classically oriented female authors who are intellectually distanced from their textual “I,” or opt for avant-garde experiment over autobiographism, falsify their experience as women, have a problem with their identity, and become suppressed victims of patriarchal schizophrenia, or do they bolster themselves by donning men’s hats and speaking in the voice of others?<sup>25</sup>

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by Camille Paglia, a pupil of Harold Bloom, who describes herself as the “anti-feminist feminist.” See Camille Paglia, *Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 80–86.

24 I mention this sequence of identifications not because I consider these concepts to be identical, but to illustrate the way of thinking about the relations between a women’s text and patriarchal culture that continues to be present in feminist practices. See Małgorzata Büthner-Zawadzka, *Warszawa w oczach pisarek. Obraz i doświadczenie miasta w polskiej prozie kobiecej 1864–1939* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IBL PAN, 2014).

25 Here I am paraphrasing the most common ways of explaining the ambivalent, frequently ironic relationship to the category of “womanhood” presented by the female writers to whom my subsequent research is devoted: Irena Krzywicka (as the author of “Jazgot

Since the 1980s, researchers of women's literature have been trying to grasp the problem of the dual coding of women's literature in tradition, which is manifested in, as Elaine Showalter put it, the double-voiced nature of women's text, and according to Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, the female affiliation complex.<sup>26</sup> It is crucial in both questions to ascertain the places where the heritage of the "mother" and the "father" intersect, cross or come into conflict. The figure of Athena – as a peculiar incarnation of this ambivalence – might tell us something interesting about the cultural place of the woman author in tradition, but also about how women function within diverse institutions of power.<sup>27</sup>

Nevertheless, it seems necessary to me to tackle these questions today, not only because of the increasingly restrictive modes of feminist reading and the still excessively predictable canon of texts that female researchers wish to explore, but also on account of the strategy, well known to critics and historians, of erasing gender and "attaching" male heads to those women writers who manage to enter the canon. Denied their womanhood, turned into honest "literary aunts," unread and gathering dust, wheeled out only for special jubilees, their anachronistic nature puts readers off. Orzeszkowa, Konopnicka, Przybyszewska, Dąbrowska. Must it be thus?

### 3. Maria Dąbrowska – Corrected Biography, Corrected Works

That vaguely cross-eyed little dwarf, with her mane cut pageboy style, was the last creature on whom I could focus my erotic passions. I knew

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niewieści albo przerost stylu" ["The Clamour of the Womanly or the Excess of Style"], Stanisława Przybyszewska (as a proponent of the idea of asexual, non-gendered writing), Maria Dąbrowska (as a national writer-institution) and Anna Bojarska (as an author of political romances and the collection *Madonna pekaesów, czyli wyznania czytelnika-samicy* [*The Commuting Madonna, or Confessions of a Female Reader*]).

26 See Joanna Krajewska, "»Kobiety kompleks przynależności« i historia literatury" ["»The Feminine Complex of Belonging« and Literary History"], in *Fifteen Shades of Polish Feminism: Literature, Culture and Gender Discourses in Polish Academia. Women Online Writing Journal* 3 (2014), ed. Urszula Chowaniec, Monika Świerkosz, <http://www.womenonlinewriting.org/issue-no-3-history-of-polish-feminism-in-academia-in-polish.html>, accessed July 11, 2015.

27 Nancy Miller quotes Mary Jacobus in *Reading Woman*, arguing: "Like Lucy Snowe and Charlotte Brontë, a feminist critic is »bound, if she is to gain both a living and a hearing, to install herself within the prevailing conventions of academic literary criticism«" (270). This is complicated (fortunately!) by thinking about the anti-system tendencies of feminism and feminist critique within patriarchal power structures.

nothing about what would eventually become general knowledge among the readers of her diaries, that is, about her erotic side, so to speak.<sup>28</sup>

This was how Czesław Miłosz described his fellow writer, making direct allusions to the deficits of womanhood that rendered him incapable of looking at her as a female being. She seems so extremely asexual to him that she is completely lacking in gender – like a child or a dwarf. Grażyna Borkowska tones down these words only slightly in her book about Dąbrowska and Stanisław Stempowski.

In her ordinary modest male clothing she does not look very feminine. She resembles a young lad rather than an attractive woman.<sup>29</sup>

Later, she stresses the writer's aversion to make-up, fashionable outfits, caps, hats and all the trappings of femininity popular in the inter-war period. Indeed, in her sporty costumes Dąbrowska does seem to differ from the cultural model of womanhood represented, for instance, by Zofia Nałkowska. This is also visible in her first attempts at literary criticism, in which she distances herself from heroines embodying the type of passive, feeble, society femininity, calling them "faunesses," "lacy," "pretty waifs made of Majolica," "little dolls with hearts made of *biscuit fin*," "swung by male lust and their own whim."<sup>30</sup> Dąbrowska also does not consent to the tragic fate and sacrifice of Stefan Żeromski's female protagonists. She is evidently searching in literary tradition for a paragon of female strength and agency.

Her position regarding her own corporeality, sexuality, and gender – which can be reconstructed on the basis of her *Diaries* – is affirmative. She is happy with herself: she is shapely, lithe, she likes her body, exercises, washes in cold water, likes to sun herself and bathe nude in summer, and is a passionate ice skater in winter. Until the end of her life she enjoys receiving compliments from those close to her and strangers about her legs, bust, hairstyle, clothes, and even hygiene (a lady selling towels in devastated post-war Warsaw: "You're a real Mrs. Clean"), and responds positively to the wooing of men she

28 Czesław Miłosz, *Miłosz's ABC's*, trans. M. G. Levine (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001), 94.

29 Grażyna Borkowska, *Maria Dąbrowska i Stanisław Stempowski* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1999), 58.

30 Referring to her critical debut, a review of Maria Jehanne Wielopolska's *Faunesses* [Faunesses], and her review of Żeromski's *The Faithful River*. See Maria Dąbrowska, *Pisma rozproszone* [Scattered Writings], vol. 1, ed. Ewa Korzeniewska (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1964), 36, 46.

meets. In fact, even in her old age Dąbrowska accentuates her vitality, attractiveness, and strength – as a woman, one might add, since she perceives herself in accordance with her gender, not outside of it. Within this image there is also sexuality, treated as a natural life energy that eludes “social” or “cultural” precepts. For her whole life, she was fascinated by both men and women, and sex evidently brought her pleasure since she confides in a friend in a letter from 1933 with unconcealed regret: “Celibate for a year, the first time since I was eighteen.”<sup>31</sup> Dąbrowska had lovers of both sexes, and more than once in the *Diaries* she underlined the relationship between writing and loving, between creativity and sexuality, although – perhaps unlike Nałkowska – she also discerned the negative side of this connection and the various contradictions of such a philosophy of artistic creation (and life).

What in fact happened was that first critics and then literary historians had a problem with the image, full of cracks and inner contradictions, of the writer, whose personal life became the subject of much speculation, insinuations, or overt gossip. There was conjecture as to the reasons for what Miłosz called her “erotic side,” and what Borkowska saw as the dissonance between the ethical and erotic side of her work, and there were various attempts to justify, understand, explain,<sup>32</sup> or even exploit it. Błażej Warkocki mentions the widespread supposition that the writer’s support for the communist authorities was related to her “disordered erotic life,” to which she had become something of a hostage.<sup>33</sup>

As a result of all this, Dąbrowska’s biography was subject to constant revisions. One way in which this was expressed is, I would argue, the nullification of her relationships – the intellectual ones, friendships and love affairs – with women, who, unlike in the case of the writer’s male partners – Marian Dąbrowski, Stanisław Stempowski and his son Jerzy, and even her lover Jerzy Czop – are actually “underread.” As a result, scholars usually regard Dąbrowska as an “Athena springing from the head of Zeus,” an “eternal pupil of her men,” who shaped her as a woman and a writer. Indeed, she

31 Quoted in Borkowska, *Maria Dąbrowska i Stanisław Stempowski*, 100.

32 “One might ask whether the writer’s erotic awakening, loosely connected to rules regulated by ethics, does not stem from the same folk source observed in childhood,” Borkowska, *Maria Dąbrowska i Stanisław Stempowski*, 50.

33 Błażej Warkocki “Safona Kowalska,” in *Różowy język. Literatura i polityka kultury na początku wieku* [Pink Language: Literature and the Politics of Culture at the Beginning of the Century] (Warszawa: Krytyka Polityczna, 2013), 81. Although he does not say as much, Warkocki is probably alluding to Wiesław Paweł Szymański’s article “Maria Dąbrowska – uroki dworu” [*Maria Dąbrowska – Charms of the Manor House*], *Arka* 42 (1992): 42, 25-48, which was critical of Dąbrowska the communist.

often spoke of the invigorating influence of male company, but at the same time she said much about her friendships not only with Anna Kowalska or Stanisława Blumenfeld, but also Zofia Nałkowska, Zofia Poniatowska, Stefania Stempłowska, Kazimierz Muszałówna, Wanda Kociełło, as well as her sister Jadwiga and mother Ludomir Gałczyńska Szumska. Historians (even those sensitive to gender issues) have done much to erase or neutralise the controversies concerning the homosexual aspect of some of these relationships.

Of course, such behaviour is certainly related to certain unspecified bisexual predispositions, but in itself it was not to do with any perversion. On the contrary, in its naturalness, its instinctive following of the voice of the heart or body, it was utterly innocent, almost childlike.<sup>34</sup>

For some, then, a lascivious, erotic side, and for others a childlike innocence – it would appear that historians and critics lack a language to describe the fractured internal tensions and inconsistencies in the biography of the writer, who was awarded canonical status in schools. Towards the end of her life, Dąbrowska herself became irritated by this dual image – reverential and yet infantile – that professors of Polish literature created for use in school readers and on the occasion of jubilees. In her *Diary*, she gives a sarcastic account of a conversation with one such professor, Zdzisław Libera.

You make me so virtuous, you turn me into a moralising old aunt, please allow me to be unvirtuous.  
 “Well, it’s hard to demonise,” he answered [...], and that was the most intelligent thing I heard from that professor.<sup>35</sup>

Dąbrowska was fully aware that her own biography also had idiosyncratic places; in her private notes, she saw these as a dialectic of nocturnal and diurnal thoughts. She openly admitted that she frequently did not recognise herself in them, since in her life she had often succumbed to various influences that caused an incessant and irremovable discord between experience and representation. And yet she was willing to accept this, since she confidently added:

<sup>34</sup> Borkowska, *Maria Dąbrowska i Stanisław Stempowski*, 121.

<sup>35</sup> Maria Dąbrowska, *Dzienniki 1914–1966 w 13 tomach. Pierwsze pełne wydanie w 13 tomach [Journals 1914–1966 in 13 Volumes: The First Full Edition in 13 Volumes]*, vol. 13 (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo PAN, 2009), 69. Except for footnote 42, all quotations come from this edition: hereafter page numbers are given in parentheses at the end of quotations.



[...] I was loath to correct a text written some time ago in the opaque sense that this “otherwise” was also a kind of truth bearing witness about myself and about my life. (vol. 3, 127)

While Anna Kowalska, the first reader of Dąbrowska’s diaries, accused her of falsehood and distortion of reality,<sup>36</sup> the writer herself left many furrows, wrinkles and rough patches in her image, as she believed strongly in the multiple truths of a diary, abandoning the simple opposition between authenticity and forgery. Unlike Dąbrowska, her readers and critics seem unable to believe her words, cleansing her biography of the particularly worrying places of ambivalence or interpreting them as a sign of inconsistency, and even hypocrisy. In 1935, the writer noted with regret that her relationship with the much older Stempowski was gradually depriving her of her youthful energy and vitality, and had enclosed her life within his family matters and social contacts. Borkowska is perplexed, asking “How might one explain these bitter, rather unfair and rather untrue words?”, before concluding that “there is not much sense in this, there is pity and misunderstanding.”<sup>37</sup> The scholar also found it impossible that Dąbrowska could regret her wasted youth spent at Stempowski’s side, while to the same degree treasuring and loving him.

This strategy of revision is also clearly manifested in the reception of her works, especially *Nights and Days*, her most important work. Tadeusz Drewnowski,<sup>38</sup> like most interpreters of the novel, considers its main psychological-moral theme to be “Barbara’s coming to terms with Bogumił’s attitude,” and argues that Dąbrowska “relishes ridiculing and belittling Barbara

36 I wrote about this in the paper “Athena i Arachne? Anna Kowalska i Maria Dąbrowska we wzajemnej lekturze dzienników” [“Athena and Arachne? Anna Kowalska and Maria Dąbrowska in a Mutual Reading of Diaries”], given at the conference *Czytanie... Kobieta, biblioteka, lektura* [Studying... Woman, Library, Reading], held at the University of Szczecin on 23-24 April 2015 – the article is to be published in the post-conference proceedings.

37 Borkowska, *Maria Dąbrowska i Stanisław Stempowski*, 112-113.

38 I appreciate the enormous work done by Tadeusz Drewnowski, who as editor of Dąbrowska’s diaries and author of *Wyprowadzka z czyśćca* [Moving out from Purgatory] attempted to problematise the image of the author, criticised after 1989 for anachronism, anticlericalism, provinciality and political conformism. As for the issues of gender that interest me, however, Drewnowski admits that he is insufficiently sensitive and attentive; see Tadeusz Drewnowski, “Nie tylko odpoczwiona (z Tadeuszem Drewnowskim rozmawia Elżbieta Sawicka)” [“Not only Rested: Elżbieta Sawicka in conversation with Tadeusz Drewnowski”], in *Wyprowadzka z czyśćca. Burzliwe życie pośmiertne Marii Dąbrowskiej* [Moving out of Purgatory: The Story Posthumous Life of Maria Dąbrowska] (Warszawa: PIW, 2006), 111.

at every step.”<sup>39</sup> In 1960, during the ceremony at which Dąbrowska was awarded the title of *honoris causa* at the University of Warsaw, Julian Krzyżanowski called the heroine of *Nights and Days* a “shrew,” an opinion that Drewnowski sees as legitimate, albeit inelegantly expressed.

In her *Diaries*, Dąbrowska made no secret of her indignation at this.

To say that one reads the novel engrossed, in spite of the unlikely shrew Barbara, would be a scandal for an ordinary reader, but for a literature professor, it’s a multi-level scandal!

To think that it mainly was for this character, for Barbara, that the novel came about. (vol. 12, 40-41)

Dąbrowska tried, unsuccessfully, to win equal treatment for the character of Barbara in her novel, and rued the fact that no one but Zofia Nałkowska and a few foreigners discerned the significance and innovativeness of this literary heroine. This leads her to comment in the *Diaries* on an interpretation of *Nights and Days* by Stefan Gołębiowski, a school teacher from Bieżum – an interpretation that she had stumbled upon:

He noticed Barbara! No critic or historian has ever been interested in Barbara, although the whole novel rests on her. Barbara is the mother of our time. She is the element of night in *Nights and Days*. The prototype of all (or one of them) who are alienated, questioning and suspicious of life, its meaning, value and safety. If I myself treat her with a touch of irony and distance, that is to protect myself from showing excessive solidarity with her unease. (vol. 12, 208)

Interestingly, Drewnowski quotes the very same passage from the *Diaries* in his book *Rzecz russowska* [*The Russów Matter*], and quickly nullifies the writer’s voice, correcting, so to speak, a possible reading of her work.

But these interpretations have their limits, and it is impossible to go so far – as the author later imagined it – as to make Ms. Barbara the catastrophist the mainstay of the novel. From such an angle, *Nights and Days* would turn to dust.<sup>40</sup>

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39 Tadeusz Drewnowski, *Rzecz russowska. O pisarstwie Marii Dąbrowskiej* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1981), 201.

40 *Ibid.*, 204.

Grażyna Borkowska, meanwhile, expresses the difference between Nałkowska's and Dąbrowska's diaries by picturing them as two opposites functioning as contradictions of each other. And so, whereas Nałkowska writes (as a woman) "herself and from herself," effacing the boundary between life and art and gladly reaching for the boundless resources of her energy as a woman, "Dąbrowska is the suicide-writer type, conflicted with the material of her art, experiencing an ambivalent sensation of love and hatred for her work. Everything she writes comes in an incredible tension and physical effort. She writes in pain [...]. She squeezes out every last drop."<sup>41</sup> Arachne and Athena?

This model of reading, in which Dąbrowska's writing is compared in radical terms with that of other (by implication more feminine) authors is still exercised by historians trying to describe her indeed difficult and complex – in its personal and literary dimension – relationship with Anna Kowalska. Yet it is worth listening to the voice of the writer herself, who conceived her need to be different as a positive. When a literary critic responded to the publication of *Nights and Days* by comparing her to Zofia Nałkowska, Dąbrowska readily concurred with a friend's verdict that, whereas "Ms Zofia sews her things ornately from costly and real silk," she "chisels granite." None the less, she immediately added, this did not change the fact that for all these differences she regarded the other woman as "alongside Colette and Undset, the greatest female writer of our time."<sup>42</sup> So there is room here both for somebody else's differentness and for the need for recognition of one's own literary autonomy. Rather, then, than juxtaposing the literary Athenas and Arachnes as deadly rivals, let us try to describe their art from the perspective of a continuum in terms of literary history, but also poetology, which, in the case of women authors, remains to be fully studied in Poland.<sup>43</sup>

The final word should go to Maria Dąbrowska, who remains the mistress of piling up complications, and who, like Barbara Niechcic, used the language of dreams to tell of her deepest concerns:

On the verge of night, around 12, I fell asleep with the light on. A nightmare – I want to get to the telephone and get tangled in a web of copper

<sup>41</sup> Borkowska, *Cudzoziemki*, 245.

<sup>42</sup> Dąbrowska, *Dzienniki [Diaries]* (six-volume edition), ed. Tadeusz Drewnowski, vol. 1 (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1988), 308-309.

<sup>43</sup> The call for a return to "poetological" research in Polish gender studies was made by Arleta Galant, who placed it within a broader cultural turn in literary history. See Arleta Galant, "Feministycznie o historii literatury i zwrocie kulturowym. Przypisy do dwóch projektów" ["Feministically on Literary History and the Cultural Turning: Footnotes for Two Projects"], in *Fifteen Shades of Polish Feminism*.

wires – No way to untangle myself – in the end I pull copper wires out of myself, and then, as if from the old “seal” fur I’m wearing – I pull out various crumpled things – including the lining of the grey fur – Horror – How did that get in me? Did I steal it? – I want to throw the fur lining in the fire – Anna doesn’t give it to me – Anna, who doesn’t look like Anna, but like the New York Statue of Liberty – hard, cold and powerful – only her smile is alive, but unpleasantly meaningful – attempts to embrace and kiss me, seeing that I’m distracted and decomposed – Every touch causes me unbearable pain – everything hurts acutely, even my chin, which she touches with her finger. I cry in fear: “It hurts – Everything hurts terribly.” (vol. 13, 240)

*Translation: Benjamin Koschalka*

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Aránzazu Calderón Puerta

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## The Theme of Rape in Ida Fink's *Aryan Papers* and Tadeusz Śłobodzianek's *Our Class*

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The structure of domination is inscribed into the bodies of women.<sup>1</sup>

In recent years the subject of violence against Jews, including Jewish women, in World War II has become an increasingly frequent topic of public debate. I wish to focus on two forms of representing sexual violence: in the first, it emerges as a symbol of Polish–Jewish relations; in the other, it reveals the continuity of patriarchal structures as the organizational model underlying the entirety of social relations. I analyze and interpret gender-based violence (specifically the theme of rape) in two literary texts associated with the Holocaust: the play *Nasza Klasa* (*Our Class*)<sup>2</sup> by Tadeusz Śłobodzianek, and the short story

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1 Asun Bernárdez, Irene García Rubio and Soraya González Guerrero, *Violencia de género en el cine español* (Madrid: Instituto de Investigaciones feministas de la Universidad Complutense, Editorial Complutense, 2008), 52 (translated here from the author's own translation).

2 Tadeusz Śłobodzianek, *Our Class*, trans. Ryan Craig and Catherine Grosvenor (London: Oberon Books), 2009. The book was awarded the Nike Prize in 2010.

“Aryan Papers”<sup>3</sup> by Ida Fink, published in English translation in the collection *A Scrap of Time and Other Stories*. In this essay I attempt to assume a “qualitative perspective that calls attention to the manners in which violence is employed, to the ways in which actors and their actions are legitimized, and to the variation in the values associated with their treatment depending on the author’s gender.”<sup>4</sup> I am also interested in performing a comparative analysis that reveals whether the perspective – and, by extension, the manner of narration – is conditioned by the gender of the speaker and their affiliation with the dominant social group.

### 1. An Exposé of Sexual Violence?

Tadeusz Słobodzianek’s staging of *Our Class* won him acclaim as an author who had succeeded in exposing the most drastic manifestations of the violence that had been an inherent part of life in Poland during World War II, including sexual violence. The latter had been traditionally overlooked in Holocaust discourse, as discussed repeatedly by the authors of the book *Sexual Violence against Jewish Women during the Holocaust*.<sup>5</sup> For centuries, this particular type of violence has been a means of exerting control over the female body, as evidenced by Joanna Bourke’s study of Great Britain, Australia, and the United States,<sup>6</sup> as well as Georges Vigarello’s research in France.<sup>7</sup> Three female characters in *Our Class*, Dora, Rachelka and Zocha, are victims of rape.<sup>8</sup> Słobodzianek has the courage to depict sexual aggression, deconstructing some of its attendant cultural myths in the process, the majority of which have been used as cultural and historical justifications for the act.<sup>9</sup> Among them is

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3 Ida Fink, “Aryan Papers,” in *A Scrap of Time and Other Stories* trans. Madeleine Levin and Francine Prose (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1995), 63–68.

4 Bernárdez et al., *Violencia*, 83.

5 “It was an experience that [...] is not easily reconciled with traditional Holocaust narratives.” Quoted in *Sexual Violence Against Jewish Women During the Holocaust*, ed. Sonja M. Hedgepeth and Rochelle G. Saidel (Hanover, London: Brandeis University Press, 2010), 129.

6 Joanna Bourke, *Rape. A History from 1860 to the Present Day* (London: Virago Press, 2007). Chapter: “The Home.”

7 Georges Vigarello and Alicia Martorell, *Historia de la violación. Siglo XVI-XX, Ediciones Cátedra Colección Feminismos* (Madrid: Cátedra, 1999); Georges Vigarello, *Histoire du viol* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1998).

8 Two of them are Jewish women: Dora and Rachelka, who later converts to Catholicism.

9 Copious evidence can be found in *Los violadores* and in *Histoire du viol*.

the myth that rape is committed by outsiders. In each instance of sexual violence committed in the play, the perpetrators are the girls' classmates: familiar and supposedly trustworthy individuals.

While the play decries sexual violence against women, depicting it in all its cruelty, it effectively justifies rape to some extent by employing symmetry. *Our Class* consistently juxtaposes the suffering of women with a certain positive aspect of this suffering, casting the women as victims – a role traditionally ascribed to them by patriarchal society. In two instances, this aspect acquires a “higher moral nature.” Zocha claims to have given herself to Zygmunt to save Menachem's life.<sup>10</sup> Her words reinforce a patriarchal stereotype according to which a woman has not been raped if she is not injured or did not fight off her attacker. Rape is thus trivialized.

In order to survive, Rachelka must marry her Polish Catholic classmate Władek, who sheltered her during the war. Though she clearly does not love Władek, she must be with him in order to survive. She is left with no choice: either she seeks refuge, or she dies immediately. In the scene of Rachelka and Władek's wedding night, we witness rape in the full sense of the word. The playwright ruthlessly depicts the violence inherent in the notion that in marriage (that is, from the moment both sides sign the marital contract), the woman's body must always be available to the husband, that it must be at his disposal, even if it is against her will. This notion – the prevailing norm in Western culture not too long ago – is discussed at length by Joanna Burke in the chapter titled “The Home.” Słobodzianek bluntly exposes the sexual violence to which women were traditionally submitted to in the institution of marriage, as was Rachelka (later named Marianna following her conversion to Catholicism), who, as a Jew facing persecution during the war, found herself in a situation of forced subservience.<sup>11</sup>

And yet in Słobodzianek's portrayal of the relationship between Rachelka and Władek, the violence is never fully exposed. Elsewhere, when Władek once again saves Rachelka's life, she appears to “adore” her “savior.” “He was hurtling towards us on that thing like Errol Flynn charging to save Mary Pickford.”<sup>12</sup> This scene, which follows that of their wedding night, depicts Władek not as a rapist husband, but as a “brave knight” coming to her rescue.

10 “I let him have his way with me. Anything so they wouldn't search for Menachem.” Słobodzianek, *Our Class*, 69.

11 As we later discover, the main character of Ida Fink's “Aryan Papers” finds herself in a similar predicament.

12 Słobodzianek, *Our Class*, 64.

Rachelka's words thus reinforce another patriarchal stereotype,<sup>13</sup> namely, the notion that women need men to save them, and that they return the favor by offering adoration and sexual availability, which once again thrusts them into a traditionally passive role. Rachelka/Marianna's subsequent life story casts doubt on this idealized, romantic image. And yet the author somehow mitigates and downplays the significance of sexual violence (which, in the case of Rachelka/Marianna, is already part of an exchange, a ransom for her life) by juxtaposing it with the higher goal of salvation, and more importantly – as we later learn – by granting her a particular and limited role within the play.

Dora presents a more intriguing case. She is depicted as a woman who is the object of male desire, a fact emphasized in the theatrical production of the play.<sup>14</sup> Dora is the victim of a gang rape; she defends herself, offering no hint of consent to sexual intercourse. "She was really struggling, but the boys held her tight."<sup>15</sup> And yet her behavior and the words she utters immediately afterward confirm one of the most deeply-rooted patriarchal myths about rape: that when a woman says "no," she actually means "yes." Dora says:

I went bright red. [...] I fought back, tried to kick them off. [...] I screamed, but I could feel myself getting wet [...] I felt a pleasure I'd never known. [...] The worst thing about it was how much everything hurt. I'd been raped by that pack of savages and I'd actually felt pleasure. [...] I couldn't get the image of Rysiek's eyes out of my head. Wild and beautiful.<sup>16</sup>

All of this verges dangerously close to the belief that "women secretly want to be raped"<sup>17</sup> and that they "need to be overpowered by men to feel sexual pleasure."<sup>18</sup> We once again encounter a stereotype that, as Bourke observes, has historically served to legitimize sexual violence. According to one oft-repeated claim, women themselves "solicit rape" in order to "effectively [alter]

13 I describe him as a "merciful rapist" in another article. See Aránzazu Calderón Puerta, "Ciało (nie)widzialne: spektakl wykluczenia w *Przy torze kolejowym* Zofii Nałkowskiej," *Teksty Drugie* 6 (2010).

14 A young and attractive actress was cast in this role. The effect is compounded by her costume and a style of acting that emphasize her sexual qualities.

15 Słobodzianek, *Our Class*, 39.

16 *Ibid.*, 38–40.

17 Joanna Bourke, *Rape*, 68. The author devotes an entire chapter to the subject.

18 *Ibid.*, 71.



the balance between blame and responsibility.”<sup>19</sup> Dora openly reaffirms the idea that “she got what she wanted” (that is, brutal sexual intercourse!), and goes as far as to suggest a broader interpretation, according to which women fantasize about being raped... It is their dream to be gang-raped! Dora’s words retroactively strip away the significance of sexual violence, inviting the idea that despite her resistance, she essentially experienced no suffering—quite the contrary (the text mentions pleasure no fewer than three times!). One might pose the question: what model of female sexuality is Słobodzianek promoting by equating pain and pleasure? (Masochism would be an appropriate, if restrained, answer.)

It is greatly significant that the sexual violence is justified by the women themselves. All three of the female characters trivialize it, thus reproducing the very patriarchal discourse of which they are the victims. Each of them ultimately acquiesce to sexual violence as the lesser evil, or even as a source of pleasure (as we discovered above), which should certainly be considered an aberration.

At a higher level, the male–female relationships in the play (i.e., the couples Menachem and Zocha, Rysiek and Dora, Władek and Rachelka) stand in as symbols of Polish–Jewish relations. The violence perpetrated against Jews by Poles is personified in the rape of Dora and the forced marriage between Władek and Rachelka. The stereotypical “Judeo-Communist” imagery finds its reflection in the relationship of Zocha and Menachem, and in the manner in which he later abandons her.<sup>20</sup> The women in one community seemingly feel an “irresistible attraction” to men in the other community, an apparent reflection of their fascination with the Other. This sort of fascination mitigates the play’s actual condemnation of sexual violence. Słobodzianek draws on erotic symbolism in an attempt to depict the ambiguity of Polish–Jewish history and likely the symmetry of grievances between the two communities.<sup>21</sup> Though he exposes sexual violence, he fails in committing to a full accusation as his use of rape as a symbol diminishes its relevance as a specific and peculiar instance of violence.

Women play supporting roles in the system of symbolic relations. Among the ten characters featured in the drama, only three are women. But

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>20</sup> *Nasza Klasa* was inspired by events that took place in the village of Jedwabne, Poland. Menachem’s story is based on the life of Szmul Wasersztajn, who in reality had no association with communism.

<sup>21</sup> Słobodzianek is dismissive of Polish patriotism and the resistance movement. In the rape scene, Zygmunt says to Zocha: “Now listen to me Zocha. We’re not just some band of hooligans, we’re the Polish fucking army.” *Our Class*, 69.

this is more than just a matter of numbers and insufficient representation. The men act, while the women remain passive. They act out the traditional model of “being a woman,” which involves “transferring to one of the men in the family or her surroundings the right to employ force. [...] The bravery of women has more to do with devotion and personal sacrifice than with the ability and right to use force.”<sup>22</sup> The women in *Our Class* feel compelled to give up their own bodies, and that is the extent of their passive resistance. They represent the nation only in suffering, as the victims of the actions carried out by others.

This cannot be said of the male characters. They represent the nation wherever it is active. Their lives are not marked by their bodies and sexuality, as women’s lives are, but by action and decision-making. The men in the play assume a range of ethical, political, and religious stances (communism, resistance, Catholicism, Judaism, etc.). The life stories of women, by stark contrast, are inevitably defined by their emotional and erotic relationships with men. Dora, Rachelka and Zocha are largely – though perhaps not exclusively – locked within the body-object paradigm.<sup>23</sup> They are not depicted as autonomous agents. None of them rebel, take up arms, or display any emotional or sexual initiative. “Women do not act: things simply happen to them,” meaning that “history is told from the viewpoint of male characters (in the cognitive and, in many cases, epistemological sense).”<sup>24</sup>

## 2. A History Lesson?

The generalizations about gender, its symbolic nature, and the relevance it acquires in the play become particularly apparent when we consider the Polish subtitle of *Our Class*: “Fourteen lessons in history” – this history, we are to assume, is that of Polish–Jewish relations. Słobodzianek’s concept of “history” and “nation” is openly male-centric, to the exclusion of women. Capital-H History is written by men, because it is they who act. Their experiences are the fundamental components of the narrative that later becomes History.

The “symmetrical” and circular structure of *Our Class* affirms this observation. The death of the two sons – the male progeny – of Zygmunt and

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22 Bernárdez et al., *Violencia*, 87.

23 Perhaps herein lies the explanation of the puzzle that is the scene of Dora’s rape. One might ask: to what degree is it simply a depiction of male erotic fantasies (the excitement elicited by a woman’s “no”) and to what extent does it transform the viewer (the male viewer, of course) into the voyeur he has become as a result of traditional film (as Teresa de Lauretis observes in her seminal essay).

24 *Ibid.*, 112–113.

Menachem is shown as a personal trauma, albeit one that acquires a symbolic dimension: it is akin to the divine, biblical punishment for the sins committed by the group, represented here by the fathers (Poles and Jews, respectively). The severed continuity of the male lineage is revealed to be an ominous augury, one that becomes all the more apparent when juxtaposed with Abram Baker's stories about being the patriarch of his large family in the United States. Along with the ending of the play, this new symmetry (the loss of Zygmunt and Menachem's male children contrasted with Abram's plentiful progeny) appears to reaffirm the most traditional family model, one in which women serve little purpose other than to reproduce. Thus it is only the male progeny that are ascribed significance: according to the play, it is only men who can represent their communities.

A child, if it is to count, must be a man. The woman disappears from the symbolic realm. The best evidence of this – returning to the subject of sexual violence – can be observed in the fact that the loss of a son is a traumatic tragedy and an allusion to a greater “justice,” while rape essentially has no consequences, either for the image of the community (men are the ones who face punishment for their crimes; raped women are merely the objects of men's actions, and their experiences have no symbolic consequences) or in the characters' personal stories, in which the relevance of the act is diminished. The loss of a son provokes trauma; being raped does not.

In *Our Class* women's bodies are places upon which conflicting male communities (Polish and Jewish) inscribe their own texts. Women and the violence inflicted upon them become symbols. The meaning of the relationship between Jews and Poles is made apparent by the treatment of women's bodies and the depiction of erotic relationships with women. The women themselves do not count. Slobodzianek unambiguously decries sexual violence as impermissible, yet he uses it as a symbol of male relations, and in doing so strips it of its significance as a personal tragedy. While ostensibly criticizing the practice, he himself repeats (perhaps unwittingly) the gesture of inscribing meanings on the female body. Perhaps herein lies the explanation for the bizarre scene involving Dora. Not only is she a woman and a Jew – that is, a specific and unique subject – but she is also a symbol of relations among men. She experiences pleasure because that act is, in fact, not about her, but about the mutual fascination between two hostile communities. “The female body is seen as the »symbolic representation of the national body.«”<sup>25</sup>

25 Ruth Seifert, “Krieg und Vergewaltigung. Ansätze zu einer Analyse,” in *Massenvergewaltigung. Krieg gegen die Frauen*, ed. Alexandra Stiglmayer (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1993), 101. Quoted in Brigitte Halnmayr, “Sexualized Violence against Women during Nazi ‘Racial Persecution,’” in *Sexual Violence against Jewish Women during the Holocaust*, 31.

Ultimately, despite its promise to attempt a bold revision of history – a successful attempt, if only in part – Tadeusz Słobodzianek’s play exposes elements of the symbolic patriarchal structure while at once treating them as something natural and intrinsically understandable. He uses them, but stops short of interrogating the power structure that organizes the gendered images. Although the “»history« in which female figures appear is more modern and egalitarian” because it makes room for depictions of sexual violence, the “»story« ultimately pushes the women aside and into supporting roles.”<sup>26</sup> The patriarchal order is thus recreated and naturalized, because the “image of women remains influenced by more or less subtle forms of symbolic violence”: in this case, ones that operate at the level of nation-groups. I concur with the authors of *Violencia de género en el cine español* when they state that: “what we need is more than just a story that would recognize the existence of female figures; we need »stories« [histories and Histories] that would be told from the female point of view and would also depict conflicts that involve women.”<sup>27</sup>

### 3. Surviving the Holocaust

That is precisely what Ida Fink does: tell a story from the female perspective. In *Aryan Papers*, she also deals with the issue of rape, but does so using a significantly different approach. Fink relates the experience of a young Jewish girl who falls victim to the sexual coercion of a Polish blackmailer. Her oppressor demands sexual favors in exchange for allowing her to purchase false papers that would prove her Aryan descent, giving her and her mother their last hope for salvation.

The experience of sexual violence is narrated from the perspective of a terrified victim. We see her nervous anticipation: “in her anxiety she had forgotten her handkerchief”<sup>28</sup>; when she attempts to mentally escape the situation in which she is trapped, “the clinking of glasses, and shouts from the kitchen hurt her ears; but when she shut her eyes, it sounded almost like the ocean.”<sup>29</sup> We witness the woman’s internal struggle: “Perhaps he won’t come, she thought, relieved, then instantly terrified, because if he didn’t come that would be the end of everything.”<sup>30</sup>

26 Ibid., 114.

27 Ibid., 116.

28 Fink, “Aryan Papers,” 63.

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid.

The suffering further manifests itself in the girl's body, which Ida Fink's story also presents as the place where male domination materializes: "When he entered, her legs began to tremble and she had to press her heels against the floor to steady herself."<sup>31</sup> Despite her best efforts, the young Jewish girl can not control her nerves: "Her legs were still trembling as if she had just walked miles; she couldn't make them stay still."<sup>32</sup> The blackmailer's easy-going yet cynical demeanor stands in stark contrast to that of the female character: "Come on, let's eat. This calls for a celebration,"<sup>33</sup> he says to the girl, who, meanwhile, "was afraid that she would pass out; she felt weak, first hot, then cold. She wanted to get everything over with as quickly as possible."<sup>34</sup>

This exchange, which takes place in a public place, shows how the *szmalcownik* (professional blackmailer) employs chivalry and protectiveness to cover what is essentially sexual and financial coercion. What is more, he appears unwilling to let the matter be settled once the sexual transaction is done, instead making it apparent that more "trysts" of this sort could be expected: "Send me your address and I'll come to see you; I've taken a liking to you."<sup>35</sup>

As soon as the girl enters the room in which the "contract" is to be consummated, her anxieties resurface: "If I throw up, she thought, he'll chase me out of here and it will all be for nothing."<sup>36</sup> The victim resorts to the psychological mechanism of apologizing for both the oppressor and herself in an attempt to muster courage and cope with the situation:

It probably doesn't take long, she thought. I'm not afraid of anything. Mama will be happy when I bring the papers. I should have done it a week ago. We would already be in Warsaw. I was stupid. He's even nice, he was nice to me at work, and he could have informed.<sup>37</sup>

This psychological mechanism is often encountered in victims.

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 64.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 66.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

Fink's narrative tactic allows the reader to access the internal experiences of the characters, revealing the degree to which the ostensibly consensual sexual intercourse is essentially rape because of the inequality and power relations between the partners. What we witness in "Aryan Papers" is rape because we cannot assume that a person consents to sexual intercourse when she/he does so in circumstances of coercion, which occurs when the person faces the lack of material resources, the abuse of power, or deception.<sup>38</sup>

Well, if it is, in fact, a matter of life or death...

Fink's narrative exposes the workings of patriarchal power in combination with violence against the excluded. In this instance, the Jewish woman's body is made available in a twofold manner: as a woman and as a member of a discriminated group. Fink depicts the continuity between sexual violence and that which is described as the "norm" in patriarchal societies: chivalry and paternalistic protectiveness that obscure a hidden system of violence which remains invisible from the inside. This is brutally revealed in the final scene, in the way the main character is treated once intercourse is over. The following is an exchange between the *szmalcownik* and an acquaintance, which occurs in the girl's presence:

"Who's the girl?" he asked, entering the room.

"Oh, just a whore."

"I thought she was a virgin," he said, surprised. "Pale, teary-eyed, shaky..."

"Since when can't virgins be whores?"

"You're quite a philosopher," the other man said, and they both burst out laughing.<sup>39</sup>

The text ends with the exposure of the victim to the view of others (the presence of a third party, a witness) and her verbal humiliation, only adding to her suffering: "She could barely stand and once again she felt queasy."<sup>40</sup> We witness the classification of women according to the patriarchal virgin-whore stereotype, the category of lesser or greater "sexual purity" that has been internalized by women themselves and which determines, to a significant extent, their own bodies and sexual behavior. Similar experiences are shared by

38 As authors of the chapter "The Rape of Jewish Women during the Holocaust" point out in the book *Sexual Violence*.

39 Fink, "Aryan Papers," 67–68.

40 *Ibid.*, 67.

many women Holocaust survivors, who feel “shame and guilt of having [had] to resort to [their] sexuality in order to survive,”<sup>41</sup> although these emotions typically remained unspoken. “As perpetrators of rape know all too well, rape silences women in a way that deliberately alienates them from their families and communities.”<sup>42</sup>

In sum, “Aryan Papers” tells a H/history from a personal perspective, a viewpoint that is very close to that of a victim of sexual violence. Fink depicts the social and cultural conditions that engender this particular form of violence. She explains how the victim comes to see herself as guilty, thus deepening her own humiliation; how she is cowed into silence and made to experience shame, guilt, and the loss of self-respect. Yet the author does not permit violence against women to be treated as a symbol nor let it be mitigated by references to a “higher order” such as the “nation.” We find ourselves at the antipodes of Dora’s experience of pleasure, yet – in my view – very near to the trauma that affected thousands of women during the Holocaust. The shortcomings of Słobodzianek’s text are revealed in juxtaposition with Ida Fink’s story and the literary strategies she employs. *Nasza Klasa* aspires to open a new space in culture that would welcome stories about Jewish–Polish relations, yet this space turns out to be incomplete. As is often the case, narrative structures of this type fail to consider the female perspective and explain how little difference there is between rape and torture. As Zoë Waxman observes, “rape and sexual abuse – the violation of one’s body at the hands of someone seeking to cause both physical and mental pain – is one of the loneliest and most alienating things that can happen to a person.”<sup>43</sup>

*Translation: Arthur Barys*

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41 Zoë Waxman, “Rape and Sexual Abuse in Hiding,” in *Sexual Violence*, 130.

42 *Ibid.*, 129.

43 *Ibid.*, 132.

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 Eliza Szybowicz
 

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## Shame or Pride? Unwanted Pregnancy and Abortion in Novels for Girls in the Polish People's Republic and Today

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**1.**

In *Bukiety wiejskie* [*Country flowers*], Ewa Ostrowska's short-story reportage dating from the late 1950s,<sup>1</sup> the new postwar political order calls for letting go of shame as a tool for exerting power over women. The setting of the story is a village in Bełchatów county, a place until recently vaguely reminiscent of Reymontian Lipce. Here, if a girl has "sinned," she is smeared with dung and banished from the village along with her bastard child. That is why the main, albeit already dead, heroine – the well-off "daughter of Józef Wróbel" – "nurtured [...] her great fear of shame, of human condemnation, and when the fear matured within her, and when she could no longer conceal it, she went there, where more than one had already ventured before her." The girl's mother was afraid as well, not calling the doctor in time as a result, and burying "this shame – a child corrupted by a village hag" underneath a pear tree. Nevertheless, "the true story of Józef Wróbel's daughter" – as the narrator of undefined gender tries

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<sup>1</sup> First printed, probably, in the Łódź-based weekly *Odgłosy* [*Reverberations*], after 1958, reprinted in Ewa Ostrowska, *Tort urodzinowy* [*Birthday Cake*] (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Łódzkie, 1965). If not otherwise specified all translations of referenced works are provided by the translator of the article.



to convince us – begins at her lonely grave. A disgraceful death has brought about positive political change. Previously, dogs were often unleashed on socialist agitators who praised, alongside education and technical civilization, liberalization from social norms (“it’s no sin to bear a child without a husband”) and informed motherhood (“one should not have too many children”). Now they find themselves before an audience that deliberates “how things really are with that shame.” The village becomes a part of the modern world. People rarely think about Wróblówna, but if not for her premature death, they would still have lived behind an invisible wall of ignorance and violence. Unnamed, mute, lonely, she has become the sacrifice that brings about progress. Shame will kill no longer.

In young adult novels for girls written in the period of the Polish People’s Republic (PRL) neither unplanned pregnancy nor (subsequent) abortion will play a central part and have a strong political significance. These events are never the fate of the novel’s primary heroine, but rather one of her friends. The former is too independent and self-aware to fall victim to such misfortune. As she is in full control of her life, she refrains from becoming sexually active and, therefore, avoids the risk of pregnancy.<sup>2</sup> This is a domain of romantics with a propensity to submit to male will. Nevertheless, the protagonist will engage in her friends cause both emotionally and practically. The help she extends to her peer will portray her as a modern girl who not only refuses to be appalled by the circumstances but is also ready to openly criticize moral absolutism. She helps a human being (of the female sex) in need.

Małgorzata Fidelis<sup>3</sup> writes that the image of a modern girl promoted throughout the long nineteen-sixties (by *Filipinka* for example) was ambivalent, at best. On the one hand, it implied an endorsement of emancipation. On the other, it stirred anxieties over whether the new possibilities, especially those brought by moral or sexual freedom, would be appropriately made use of. A girl personified innocence and progress, but she could easily become the symbol of demoralization. Therefore, there was a need to specify this modern

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2 The earliest motif of anticonception, as far as I now, and very progressive at that, was featured in a small novel by Anna Frankowska, *Halina* (Warszawa: Młodzieżowa Agencja Wydawnicza, 1988), whose heroine defends her sister, who is on the pill, from their bigoted mother.

3 Małgorzata Fidelis, “Czy jesteś nowoczesną dziewczyną? Młode Polki a kultura konsumpcyjna w latach 60,” trans. Anna Rogulska, *Teksty Drugie* 2 (2015). See also Iwona Kurz on the types of girl in films after 1955 (and in Eastern-Bloc rock-and-roll): Iwona Kurz, “Dwuzłotówki w kieszeniach na kino. Elżbieta Czyżewska – dziewczyna z fotosu,” in *Twarze w tłumie. Wizerunki bohaterów wyobraźni zbiorowej w kulturze polskiej lat 1955-1969* (Warszawa: Świat Literacki, 2005).

freedom by creating a standard of limited individualism, of restrained consumption and sexuality, guided by the primacy of intellectual development. This principle also influences the novels for girls to a certain extent. It proclaims the disappearance of traditional morality with its disciplinary instrument of shame and proposes a new, far less oppressive, normativism. The themes that are of interest for the current argument are obviously related to legislative acts, such as the progressive bill on the permissibility of terminating pregnancy passed into law on April 27, 1956.<sup>4</sup> Henceforth, a teenager's pregnancy remained a disgrace only for an obsolete part of society. For modern young women, it was premature maturity, a hindrance in the realization of their educational and professional plans, an economic burden, a harm for both the expectant mother and her future child. In short, it was a greater evil, in light of which abortion seemed like a better, though tragic, choice. Let us take a closer look at various iterations of this story, its protagonists and the discourses that give it structure.

## 2.

In novels for teenage girls, termination of pregnancy was often portrayed as the only available option for those heroines who were not fully emancipated – who were compromised more by their dependency on a man (of which their pregnancy was a result) than by the pregnancy itself. Dzidka from *Tancerze* [*Dancers*, 1961] by Elżbieta Jackiewiczowa, terminates her pregnancy to be spared the “disgrace” that would result from being a maiden with a child in the provincial town of Świebodzin. According to her, a woman without a husband is a woman without importance: “She was ashamed of loneliness as if it were a disgrace.”<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, in her flight from one stigma, she risks another. The docile stance assumed by the heroine entails a casualness of sexual relations, which she is ready to establish almost instantaneously, if only the prospective candidate introduces himself in a suitable manner. It is a form of contract. Paweł, in exile from Warsaw, is in need of a sexual partner. He therefore untruthfully introduces himself as a “delegate of the Polytechnic.” Dzidka, on the other hand, needs a husband with standing and therefore she

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4 Małgorzata Maciejewska, “Aborcja w PRL-u. Ustawa o warunkach dopuszczalności przerywania ciąży z 1956 r. w kontekście feministycznym,” in *PRL bez uprzedzeń*, ed. Jakub Majmurek and Piotr Szumlewicz (Warszawa: KiP, 2010); the work has serious factual errors. Małgorzata Fidelis, “O sile społeczeństwa nie świadczy ilość. Ustawa aborcyjna z 1956 roku,” in *Kobiety, komunizm i industrializacja w powojennej Polsce*, trans. Maria Jaszczurowska (Warszawa: W.A.B., 2015).

5 Elżbieta Jackiewiczowa, *Tancerze* (Warszawa: Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza, 1977), 155.

– literally – gives herself to him. She considers their sexual relations, and the pregnancy itself, to be a guarantee of marriage. Her parents, after they recognize the high social standing of their potential son-in-law, are also a party in this contract and allow the young lovers much freedom, thus in fact playing the part of procurers.

There is a peculiar correlation between Dzikka's attitude and pregnancy. As if the fear of shame attached to loneliness is a conceptual tool and attracts the shame of unmarried maternity. Ula, the main protagonist of *Tancerze*, chooses to begin her sex life in a domestic partnership, with an accompanying positive shamelessness. She surrenders to her own desire rather than to her boyfriend; she does not even care much for romanticizing the relationship afterwards, although, as her flustered partner says: "every girl [...], to save her honor at the least, says that she loves."<sup>6</sup> In her case, sexual intercourse does not increase dependence. Ula does not think in terms of "shame" and "disgrace." And she is not threatened by pregnancy, even though there is not a word alluding to anticonception in the novel. Emancipation is more effective than the pill. Meanwhile, Dzikka's pregnancy reveals the illusory nature of the contract. The girl is not a party to, but rather an object of the agreement. Abortion is also something that is forced upon her and she "completely relies" on Paweł even in matters of organizing it. The enterprise requires secrecy and, therefore, money. What it buys is the discretion of a private practice, which would not be available in a public county hospital. The cost is not too high. And so a laborer and a clerk can afford the luxury of upholding the appearance of petit bourgeois morality. The law presupposes the agency of the woman, but social reality does not live up to that standard. Shame is still an instrument of control. Paweł, therefore, takes out a loan "from the workers union" and arranges a trip to Gorzów. The whole enterprise fills the boy with disgust and the girl with regret over her lost dreams, but this is caused by mutual disenchantment and not by the perceived transgression of anti-abortion norms. Their shame-like feelings have, therefore, a humanistic background. Dzikka, partly of her own accord, is deceived, humiliated, and objectified. This is the problem – not the pregnancy and its termination.

Maria Ziółkowska's 1972 novel, *Światła w cudzych oknach* [*Lights in Their Windows*], tells a similar tale, this time about children from foster care who come of age without any inherited capital. Can personal virtues of the girls – sexual restraint being one of them – guarantee success in life as official promises lead to believe? All of them find out, sooner or later, that they do not stand a chance. Monika gets into trouble because of her powerful need to rid herself of the blemish. Again, the fear of one shame leads to another. Socially

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6 Ibid., 281.

determined feelings of inferiority influence much of the heroines' behavior. Sensible Agata is aware of this and attempts to rid herself of her inferiority complex, but the romantic Monika is unwittingly guided by it in her actions. The former believes that Poland gives the opportunity for emancipation and improving one's social status, although only to a certain point, of course. The latter considers a relationship with a male with good social standing to be the token of achievement in life: "Because you have a boyfriend both for yourself and for showing off. This pride of having him is a part of love. I wanted to show the girls, friends, and professors that I am not some miserable poor girl from a foster home, an object of human sympathy..."<sup>7</sup> She combines romanticism with cunningness.

Upset, Agata says that Monika "softens [for the boy – E.Sz.] like warm butter." The latter does not take a university entrance exam, she concedes to a consummation of the relationship, and lives in her boyfriend's villa in a state of complete dependency. She adopts a false emancipation project laid out by this golden boy. She allows herself to be coerced by a (wrongly conceived, shameless) modernity. Sexual freedom as an argument used by a cynical Don Juan is, by the way, a frequent theme in novels for girls from the period. Monika casts aside her inhibitions and builds her pride by rejecting conventional propriety and etiquette. Her friends attempt to shame her in a benevolent way, but they fail as she overcomes her own previous doubts by confronting those very friends. Still, she does not dare look straight in the eye of her beloved teacher, the single individual who could help her properly reappraise the circumstances she has found herself in. It seems that Monika, even when she becomes pregnant, still cannot grasp her true status. She is still proud of what she should be ashamed of – of her "position as a carefree woman, spoiled by her beloved, living in relative prosperity."<sup>8</sup> Again pregnancy, just as in Jackiewiczowa's novel, is a consequence of a greater shame – dependency upon a man, which is seen by the other heroines of *Światła w cudzych oknach* as lack of honor and ambition.

In truth, the pride stemming from self-sufficiency is fragile. Hela, disenchanted by her first job, envies Monika, who "isn't an underling in some sweltering kitchen."<sup>9</sup> Satisfaction from her first paycheck disappears with the realization that it is not enough to cover basic needs. A working girl, who has nothing to be ashamed of, lives on the brink of poverty, and the shameless one lives in luxury. Appearances can be deceiving. Only the latter's pregnancy

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7 Maria Ziółkowska, *Światła w cudzych oknach* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo Lubelskie, 1972), 40.

8 *Ibid.*, 152.

9 *Ibid.*, 118.

becomes an irrepressible symptom of a suppressed reality, a chance for disillusionment in confrontation with the opinion of society. “I am taking my revenge for the years of misery, wandering, and trouble,” says Monika. “And maybe it is only now that your true trouble, true misery, begins? [...] people often see their sorrow only after it was seen by their friends and acquaintances. And your sorrow will start to show any moment now,” her friend replies. The shame of dependence and pregnancy is amplified by the shame of abandonment. The miscarriage and hospitalization that follow only accelerate her exposure. After reading *Tancerze* we know that a public hospital is a place where shame is exacerbated. In Monika’s case, there is just one small step from exposure into an altogether different sphere of disgrace – prostitution. If previously she overcame her inhibitions in the name of love, she can overcome them again when Hela is in need of money, especially as she herself is partly to blame for the debts. Ziółkowska, writing this new *The Wages of Sin*, implements the logic of a slippery slope and the final downfall coincides with an ultimate sacrifice; however, in this case, it is not for a man, but for a friend.

On the one hand, control through shame by public opinion is sometimes cruel and destructive, but on the other hand, it is an indispensable compass. Nevertheless, contrary to the didactic message of the novel, in the plot it is of no importance what model a girl follows. Reticent Agata, Monika’s mentor for whom a kiss equals engagement, becomes a victim of sexualization in the workplace. The intrigue takes place, all in all, only in the mind of a director’s jealous wife, who suspects her husband of having an affair with his secretary, but the heroine hands in her notice fearing a scandal. Society brings young women to a common, obscene denominator: both the abandoned pregnant mistress and a chaste hard-working girl are forced to flee from shame.

### 3.

A modern girl, aiding a friend in overcoming private troubles, appears in *Słoneczniki* [*Sunflowers*, 1962] and *Paladyni* [*Paladins*, 1964] by Halina Snopkiewicz, as well as in *Zapach rumianku* [*The Scent of Chamomile*, 1969] by Krystyna Siesicka. The plot of Snopkiewicz’s two volumes is set at the turn of the fifties, in an already historical era that was marked by the illegality of abortion. Shame and fear circle around ironic Lilka, but she herself remains untouched by them. An unwanted pregnancy and its termination is something that women discuss with each other in confidence. The heroine overhears her mother and a neighbor talk about their common acquaintance, a war widow who will be scorned because she is expecting a child. Lilka’s mother, a medic, had proposed that she will “help her sort things out,” but the women declined her offer. The two try to understand why the proposition was turned down. Maybe

she is afraid? "I was really scared when I terminated my third pregnancy,"<sup>10</sup> the neighbor reminiscences. Of the three women, one has had an abortion and another can as well, because a third is willing to help her, but it is still a matter of utmost secrecy. An extramarital pregnancy is met with societal disdain, and abortion arouses fear, probably because of its illegality. The teenager formulates her own postulate, devoid of the social and legal context, that states that the case should come down to a woman's informed choice. Snopkiewicz, therefore, makes her heroine restate the argument for reproductive rights in terms of human rights, a perspective that was absent in the public debate at the time when the law was changed 1956.<sup>11</sup>

Lilka is surrounded by old catholic and new communist forms of puritanism, with adherents of both approaching extramarital pregnancy with great moral unease, which is completely unfamiliar to the heroine: "In class, the uproar as in Sarajevo after the Archduke's murder. It turned out that Zosia Ogórnikówna, a plump and apathetic blonde, was pregnant. She was immediately expelled from school without explanation, so that we wouldn't become corrupted."<sup>12</sup> Lilka shares neither the moral panic of the prestigious high school's administrative staff, nor her friends' excitement (which is the opposite of official restrictions). She does not condemn Zosia, but neither does she feel sorry for her. She should be "a person" and be "rational", but she turned out to be "a stupid brat" that now has "one in the oven." She could have been "whatever she wanted to be," but she foolishly condemned herself to diapers and purees. It is not only a question of morality and shame, but of emancipatory pragmatism that may well be worth "grim celibacy", as Lilka sardonically puts it.

This harsh judgement does not stop Lilka a few years later from arranging an abortion for a friend from her college dormitory. An act of female solidarity is a part of a spontaneous project aiming to reform the official model of the women's liberation movement. Lilka, a staunch ZMP (Związek Młodzieży Polskiej – Union of Polish Youth) activist, together with her friends, tries to use the organization as a space for emancipation, striving to gain autonomy within the imposed boundaries. She criticizes the ritualized actions and newspeak full of exalted slogans, according to which termination of pregnancy is proof

10 Halina Snopkiewicz, *Słoneczniki* (Warszawa: Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza, 1973), 136.

11 Fidelis, "O sile społeczeństwa," 210-222. Fidelis writes that during de-Stalinization, the "previous epoch" was criticized for an overabundance of ill-conceived equality that led to a caricature of social order and to demoralization. Snopkiewicz does not yield to this tendency – she depicts current history as insufficiently egalitarian and too prudish.

12 Snopkiewicz, *Słoneczniki*, 205.

of irresponsibility. In the world of *Paladyni*, pregnancy is a form of catholic shame while abortion a form of socialist shame. Lilka is thus defeated and removed from the ZMP – one of the charges against her, not explicitly stated at the meeting, is that she has “wasted Honorka’s child.”

Honorata, although she has no money, decides to discontinue her studies, give birth to and raise the child on her own. The internalized shame of Honorata, and her heroic declarations, arouse Lilka’s resistance. The language used is euphemistic, but still pointedly accurate. Lilka is ready to support Honorata, “whatever her decision.” Finally the distressed victim asks: “Your mother is a doctor, right?” Lilka knows that they are talking about “what is forbidden by the law.” For her, “a week of virtuous emotions” is more than enough, and she promises to help. Honorata’s ethical scruples is brought on by the ZMP code of conduct: “I despise myself, but I don’t have the strength. Lilka, if you only knew what a price I pay for all this!” In turn, Honorata is rebuked by Lilka with a play on words: “If mother agrees to negotiate, it will cost you nothing.” She treats the whole affair as a purely organizational and financial endeavor, and with her humanistic cynicism annuls the oppressive shame and feelings of guilt. She ends the letter to her mother, which she writes in a similar tone, in the following way: “If some friend of yours finds himself in possession of an ethical code corresponding with these needs – please write to me soon, at once.”<sup>13</sup> She also asks her mother to treat the whole thing as if it “was happening” to her, because she could also “find herself in such circumstances.”<sup>14</sup> This identification of solidarity with Honorka is political in character, and not in any way sentimental.

The heroine is annoyed by the aura of illegality, prudery, and concealed condemnation – by the pathos substituting the discourse of reproductive rights. The problem is not in the paragraphs, but in the silent disapproval against a member of the Union who has helped another member regain control over her life. According to the chairwoman, Honorata had wanted to do what was “right” and now she is “sad” as Lilka has “turned her into Justyna straight out of a Nałkowska novel.” What the heroine views as restoration of dignity is considered a degradation from the official perspective. The collective condemns, but not in an open manner, as if in fear that part of the shame could fall onto the accusers. It is a matter that is not discussed publicly, but which has consequences in the public sphere – removal from the organization. This may be the reason why Lilka ignores other allegations and in her final political act addresses just the one that was never explicitly stated. She aims

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13 Halina Snopkiewicz, *Paladyni* (Warszawa: Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza, 1964), 32.

14 *Ibid.*, 100.

to confront the oppressive shame and disclose<sup>15</sup> her abortion, although she has not had one. She intends to justify her absence from class with a forged medical record. A doctor refuses to issue a falsified document due to the illegality of abortion. Nevertheless, Lilka gets a stamp that reads “gynecologist” and an illegible Latin name of some random disease. The heroine sends this document to her university hoping that it will be read as confirmation of an “induced miscarriage.” She stages this self-disclosure as a denouncement of the allegedly impartial politics of the state.

Lilka resists the pedagogy of heroism, which limits freedom of choice through shame. Kasia, the heroine of Siesicka’s novels, denounces for the same reason the right to life as an absolute value. The heroines argue differently, but both are pragmatists. Idealistic standards only multiply the suffering of the woman and the child born out of an unwanted pregnancy. In *Paladyni*, what puts a stop to scruples associated with abortion is a vision of a young mother trapped between diapers and puree’s, in *Zapach rumianku*, a vision of a foster home full of children suffering from lack of emotional warmth. The events taking place in the second novel are contemporary, with access to abortion easy and free of charge, the only problem lying in the public disapproval that is presupposed, something that can be avoided through a trip to a voivodship hospital. Discretion costs as much as a short journey, and is not even worth mentioning. The real subject of the novel are the relationships within a group of young people who have been brought together by Renata’s personal secret. This abortion support group forms beyond the sphere of intimacy. The narrator, Rafał – Kasia’s boyfriend, reluctantly becomes a part of the endeavor which seems to him, at first, somebody else’s problem.

There is mention in the novel of shame felt before the parish priest, which bars Renata’s parents from accepting the child, although their financial standing is good. Nevertheless, the primary embarrassment, though masked by anger, is depicted in the discomfort and anxiety Rafał experiences when he is introduced to girly matters. Kasia and Pola (co-opted due to her status as future nurse) do not mind his unease and anger; they suggest a different set of emotions and an altogether different language when they oblige the boy to act “honorably” and donate blood for use in the procedure. The word honor in the context of “this affair” arouses his protest, but finally Rafał reluctantly decides to “give blood.” Before this happens he will impress Kasia by insisting on an (impossible) marriage, which would shield Renata from the social degradation resulting from her

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15 Snopkiewicz’s idea predated by seven years the act of French and German women who collectively incriminated themselves in the press in 1971, therefore expediting the abolishment of the abortion ban in their respective countries. See Kazimiera Szczuka, *Milczenie owieczek. Rzecz o aborcji* (Warszawa: W.A.B., 2004), 58–61.



shame. Kasia values this unattainable ideal, but she thinks and acts realistically – the potential father disappeared, and the potential mother is unfit for the trials awaiting her. Rafał must understand that she is not motivated by cynicism and that his girlfriend, if she were to find herself in Renata's shoes, "would do the same." From a neutral observer's point of view, he becomes an unsettled passive participant. Afterwards he acts as a moralist outraged by relativism ("a child is a child, that's it, period. [...] for me the value of life is beyond question"<sup>16</sup>). At this stage, he falls back on the argument, also reiterated in *Paladyni*, according to which abortion equals irresponsibility. Finally, partly comprehending the girls' viewpoint, he declares himself as an unconvinced ally, ready to grant physiological legitimacy to the cause.

#### 4.

The two final decades of the Polish People's Republic (PRL) were marked by a change in the official rhetoric, which was motivated by concern with the falling birth rate and by the expansion of pro-life discourse of the church, pressuring the state to limit access to abortion.<sup>17</sup> The rules of the literary genre of interest to us were dictated in the 1970s and 1980s by Małgorzata Musierowicz. Her *Mila Borejko*, in contrast to the novelistic mothers from the sixties, had not one or two, but four children (which she all loved). The topic of unwanted pregnancy did not fit into the both entertaining and idealized model of such novels. And it was also rarely mentioned in other works, rather as an afterthought, and what is more, two different registers were employed in its depictions. For example, in the year 1979, two novels were published. The first was Anna Frankowska's *Przecież to wszystko* [*That's It*], the second was Maria Józefacka's *Dziewczyna nie ludzie* [*The Girl and Not the People*]. A significant discrepancy between the two novels is evident. In the first, the conflict between a mother and her teenage daughter is laid to rest when the older heroine confesses to the younger that she did not want to give birth to her and contemplated terminating the pregnancy. Overcoming shame is proof of trust, admitting to fear and helplessness initiates a previously unachievable intimacy and partnership. In the second novel, the most admirable heroine, an old wise woman from the lower classes, lends her voice to a fully developed pro-life discourse. She illuminates feebleminded Ewa

16 Krystyna Siesicka, *Zapach rumianku* (Warszawa: Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza, 1972), 114.

17 Fidelis, *Kobiety*, 267–268, 329, n. 106. See also Agata Chałupnik, "Legalizacja aborcji: dwa tysiące na skrobankę," in *Obyczaje polskie. Wiek XX w krótkich hasłach*, ed. Małgorzata Szpakowska (Warszawa: W.A.B., 2008), 181.

that by planning this “procedure,” she is attempting to “kill a human being.” For the mentor, “every life is sacred,” and one should “pay” for their “mistakes.” The only way to act responsibly, and therefore to avoid shame, is to decide to give birth, never to have an abortion, as it would be an even greater, irredeemable shame.

The above mentioned rule will return in novels intended for teenage girls, with even greater force, at the time of the public debate on the prohibition of abortion. Since the early 1990s, several books have been written which explore the consequences of an unexpected and inconvenient teenage pregnancy, discussing it much more openly than had ever been done before.<sup>18</sup> The picture of modern immodesty was constructed primarily in opposition to the logic of shame and insincerity, associated with the PRL period, that was embodied by the heroines’ mothers. They are the ones who are concerned with what people will say. They slap and berate their daughters, call them whores, yell: “Such shame! Such shame!” Their incessant screaming shakes the foundations of the homes they live in, which the young mothers plan to leave as soon as possible, to begin their life according to modern norms. Nevertheless, the more the authors try to persuade the reader that an extramarital pregnancy is no shame, the more suspicious those rebuttals sound. A fervent negation of one shame not only demonstrates its power, it is also supposed to divert attention from other shames that are simultaneously being constructed. Almost all of these novels represent pro-life ideology and omit the discourse of women’s right to choose, which was abandoned at the end of the 1960s. They execute a simple narrative scheme governed by a concealed abortion taboo. The legal prohibition should have softened the moral panic, which nevertheless had grown to such a degree that abortion vanished almost completely from the genre’s repertoire. Generally, the heroines do not even consider having a procedure. The attention of the reader is diverted by a symbolic uproar around substitute issues, discordant and contradicting the plot’s shameful core.

Some writers, like Rodziewiczówna in *Macierz* [*Mater*, 1903], have their heroines build their self-esteem on illegal motherhood. Pregnant women present their state as if they were saying proudly: let them see us. Magda – the eponymous heroine of Marta Fox’s novel – after giving birth hangs diapers and bodysuits on the balcony like a “bloodied sheet after consumption.” To her mother’s disparaging warning that she will be “a girl with

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18 I will analyze the novels: *Magda.doc* and *Paulina.doc* by Marta Fox (1996 and 1997, respectively), *Małe kochanie, wielka miłość* by Ewa Nowacka (1997), *Ono* by Dorota Terakowska (2003), *Język Trolli* and *Żaba* by Małgorzata Musierowicz (2004 and 2005), as well as *Niechciana* by Barbara Kosmowska (2013).

a child,” she answers: “I am a girl with a child, whichever way you want to look at it.”<sup>19</sup> The mother in Dorota Terakowska’s novel *Ono* [*It*] frantically advises her pregnant daughter: “cover IT with something [...] anyone can see that you’re pregnant!” Ewa asks: “And aren’t I?” and she walks in the middle of the street to show the neighbors that “IT exists. Because IT exists. And that I am not ashamed of IT. IT do you hear me? I am not ashamed of you.”<sup>20</sup> In Barbara Kosmowska’s *Niechciana* [*Unwanted*], Kasia opens up on an internet board for underage mothers, she shares her decision of giving the child up for adoption: “Unfortunately, I neither want to raise it, nor be a mother to it. I don’t feel ready. And I am not ashamed that I can speak this out loud”; underage mothers “don’t need to feel ready for everything that is to come.”<sup>21</sup> Confession-confrontation always relates to pregnancy and maternity, never (as is the case in Snopkiewicz’s novel) abortion. Unpreparedness for the role of mother and the right to choose are declared only by Kosmowska’s heroine, who, nevertheless, does not even consider abortion. Providentially, a beloved aunt offers to adopt the child. Probably giving the child up to someone beyond the immediate family would be too great a transgression against the norm.

PRL novels have accustomed the readers to condemnation and compassion towards the victims of their own carelessness, docility, or of insufficient sexual education. Contemporary heroines are, usually, not ashamed of these traits. Previously, a modern girl did not become pregnant because she was too independent and enlightened for that. Now, a modern girl gives birth no matter the cost, without giving too much thought to the causes of her predicament. A harsh self-critique is formulated only by sixteen-year-old Kasia (Kosmowska), who uneasily divulges “her greatest secret. Measured in kilograms of stupidity,”<sup>22</sup> that is her conviction that the first intercourse cannot lead to conception. Those who have real reason to feel ashamed are unfaithful partners. The “whole” blame is theirs, or it otherwise falls on the family of the perpetrator, which dissociates itself from the whole affair. This is the basic thesis in *Język Trolli* [*Trolla’s Language*] and *Żaba* [*Froggy*] by Małgorzata Musierowicz. Fryderyk, not minding the state Róża found herself in, decides to take up a prestigious fellowship in Houston, for which he is severely criticized. His brother and sister are dismayed by his actions, and they feel a kind of embarrassment by proxy, which is therefore multiplied and seems almost physiological: “Froggy felt that shame is choking her. She sweated and felt sick.

19 Marta Fox, *Paulina.doc* (Wrocław: Siedmioróg, 1997), 77.

20 Dorota Terakowska, *Ono* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2003), 229-230.

21 Barbara Kosmowska, *Niechciana* (Łódź: Literatura, 2013), 179.

22 Kosmowska, *Niechciana*, 128.

She had to lean against a wall. Oh, how deeply she was ashamed of him.”<sup>23</sup> Symptomatically, the Borejkos do not expect Fryderyk’s family to offer any financial support (this would be shameful), but hope for their cheerful acceptance. In turn, the faithless hero of *Niechciana* is faced with societal rejection. His friend breaks with him (“I don’t keep with filth. I have a rule”), he is shunned by acquaintances (“And another sad fact. Nobody decent will invite you to a party. People now know what you are. You’ve been nicknamed ‘daddy-o’, if you want to know!”<sup>24</sup>), another potential victim of this high school Don Juan will be informed about his deed.

## 5.

Juxtaposing contemporary novels with those from the PRL period exposes a fundamental difference between the two. Whereas before an untimely pregnancy brought with it the risk of degradation, now it almost instantly turns into maternity, considered a prestigious social role, to which one can, and should, mature rapidly. The heroines are not deprived of anything, on the contrary, they mature, develop, broaden their horizons, and increase their assets. “A child” in the womb brings out the best in the girl and in her benefactors. In the beginning she has nothing besides debts and obligations – in the end, after a miraculous metamorphosis, she triumphs.<sup>25</sup> A novel turns into a catalog of gains and achievements. Nevertheless, beyond this obtrusive affirmation there hides an inglorious reality.

Magda (Fox), a perfect daughter, is dependent on a toxic mother. She will never overcome guilt, but pregnancy’s therapeutic value is greater than years of psychoanalysis. “Negative experiences” can “be detrimental” to a “child’s development,” therefore Magda breaks with her mother and the model she represents. The decision to give birth is the sign of positive egoism, a modern mother will not burden her offspring with her sacrifice. Magda despite/ because of her pregnancy passes Matura with flying colors and gets into college, so that in the future she will not blame her child for not completing her education. She also achieves financial independence. Her beauty grows, her figure improves: “my waist became even more defined, because it was

23 Małgorzata Musierowicz, *Żaba*, (Łódź: Akapit Press, 2005), 105.

24 Kosmowska, *Niechciana*, 174.

25 This is not a story of emancipation in a modern sense as the transformation of the heroine occurs because of her future child, which seems like a variant of Klementyna Hoffmanowa’s argument of women’s education as better training for traditional roles.

emphasized by my bosom, which was bigger than before.”<sup>26</sup> She still attracts the attention of boys. Therefore, she embodies the ideal defined by magazines for women, though she is too sophisticated to read them. Spontaneously, she also takes care of proper nutrition. In short, she is the best of mothers, which is confirmed by Paulinka’s development and her good nature. Magda breastfeeds without problems, “proud” that she “fulfills her maternal duties as Nature intended.”<sup>27</sup> Because she does not know pleasure, she remains a virgin. Therefore, she can experience a proper sexual initiation. Beside passion and fulfillment, she also feels the need to make her sexual satisfaction public: “I wanted very much to be among people, so very marked by sex, so that no one would have any doubt what I did, and why.”<sup>28</sup> The catalogue of her achievements is completed by marriage to an ideal man – mature, but boyish; wealthy, but not overworked; passionate, but a patient businessman who not only loves unconditionally, but also knows how to make a proper vegetable salad with a remarkable dressing. In contrast to Rodziewiczówna, who while restituting her heroine’s proper social status endowed onto her with a highly atypical family, Fox pays tribute to conventionality. Access to the middle class is marked by a great social event (marriage, baptism, and the child’s first birthday), but it is sealed earlier, when Magda and Elder Łukasz set out on their great pre-holiday shopping. The new family is re-aligned with the mainstream by a shopping cart overflowing with “everything.”

In Terakowska’s novel, Ewa’s achievements during pregnancy are not as impressive, though they include certain financial gains. The heroine leads a miserable life of an outcast, which she inherits from her mother and grandmother. Small-town aspirations, lack of education, a job behind a counter, an unfinished house (a remnant of the past generation’s aspirations), trashy television. A world filled with ugliness, humiliation, violence – a world linguistically and morally degraded. Finally, rape. Ewa will eventually free herself from all of these stigmas thanks to pregnancy, although it initially seems to be a confirmation of matrilineal fatalism. If she were not raped, she would still be waiting for some miraculous change of fortune. It is I T, the fruit of rape, that teaches its bearer a new way of life. Ewa begins to think, to notice the beauty in the world, she develops a taste for higher culture, educates herself, finds a nuanced language, and ends with falsehoods and irresponsibility (“You must become better than you are”<sup>29</sup>). I T, a cosmic sage, does not require some

<sup>26</sup> Fox, *Paulina.doc.*, 20.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

<sup>29</sup> Terakowska, *Ono*, 365.

formal advancement such as passing Matura exams. Simply relinquishing external symptoms of exclusion is enough – gone are ignorance, resentment, entanglement in affairs, and a propensity for unobtainable tokens of prestige. Ewa appreciates what she has, looks for the meaning of life, and works on her independence so that she can pass on this attitude onto her child, therefore breaking the intergenerational reproduction of humiliation. Differently than in the case of Fox, Terakowska does not wed her heroine, but she arranges an opportunity for Ewa to decline marriage (similar to Rodziewiczówna's heroine who steadfastly declines the grace of legalization). Marriage would be a sign of fear, and that is a trait of outcasts.

Róża Borejko claims that if she does not finish university because of pregnancy, then she will happily become a toilet cleaner: "Work performed with love brings satisfaction [...]. You can feel happiness and pride even mopping floors."<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, the novels of Fox, Terakowska, and Musierowicz herself are funded on a completely opposite thesis – what really counts is social and material status. Little Mila is given a brand new cart, even though there are several used ones in the family's possession, because "it's so nice to buy new things for the child."<sup>31</sup> The extramarital stage turns out to be temporary, and the newly-wed parents leave for England, where Fryderyk, as "a distinguished young astronomer," finds work at Oxford.<sup>32</sup> According to all three authors, shame is not the result of a premature, illegal pregnancy as such, but of (an incessantly denied) degradation that comes with it – weakness,<sup>33</sup> helplessness, dependency, limited opportunities, partial education, financial difficulties, bodily deformation, lack of physical and psychological hygiene; all of which will also burden the child. A shameful opposite of the heroines' success is the erroneous fulfillment of the most prestigious of feminine roles, which is determined by the now waning ideal of the Polish Mother and by the firm neoliberal ideal of a woman as manager of daily life.<sup>34</sup> A mother is one who

<sup>30</sup> Musierowicz, *Żaba*, 154.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 150.

<sup>32</sup> Małgorzata Musierowicz, *Wnuczka do orzechów* (Łódź: Akapit Press, 2014), 38.

<sup>33</sup> Fox's heroine fantasizes of powerlessness: "If someone were to see my tears. I think I would scorch in shame and bury myself underground. I won't give'em the satisfaction! [...] I don't need pity, compassion, and all that shit." Marta Fox, *Magda.doc* (Wrocław: Siedmioróg, 1999), 75.

<sup>34</sup> On the PRL and capitalist requisition of the Romantic ideal of Polish Mother see Agnieszka Mrozik, "Kobiety pod presją. Rekonstrukcja mitu kobiety w kulturze polskiej," in *Akuszerki transformacji. Kobiety, literatura i władza w Polsce po 1989 roku* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IBL PAN, 2012).

(finally without sacrifice and not for the benefit of the community) passes her time of tribulation because she is industrious, fearless, and ambitious.

She simply has money at her disposal, and does not need it at the same time – “she is not some seduced maid, straight out of *Moralność Pani Dulskiej* [*The Morality of Mrs. Dulska*]. [...] She is a courageous and proud woman who can take care of herself in any circumstance.”<sup>35</sup> Receiving aid is humiliating, although scenes in which it is fervently turned down are set beside scenes of its acceptance. When Fox’s heroine finds ten million zlotys left for her by Łukasz, she reflects upon the same negative model: “I felt terrible. As if I were Hanka from *Moralność Pani Dulskiej*.”<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, when the very same man suggests moving into his apartment without paying rent, she accepts the offer readily. It seems that material support can be accepted without discredit only from a person representing a particular set of values, especially from a family member, but not exclusively. For Magda, remaining dependent on her monstrous mother would be disgraceful. Terakowska’s heroine does not adhere to this rule only on the face of it, as she takes money from the rapists without regret and she even considers a disgraceful proposal of one of their mothers, who wants to bribe her and thus remove her from her son’s life. Nevertheless, this lack of boundaries, Ewa’s combative pronouncements (“And I took that money. And I will take more. I will take all they will give. Why shouldn’t I take it?”<sup>37</sup>) paradoxically only confirm the odium, even more so as there is a “pure” inheritance left by her grandmother to fall back on.

## 6.

This tale of a pregnant Cinderella<sup>38</sup> promptly became an object of a fierce literary polemic, which has, however, remained isolated. The narrator of Ewa Nowacka’s<sup>39</sup> novel *Małe kochanie, wielka miłość* [*Little Love, Great Romance*] reads *Magda.doc*, which was published in the previous year, but she loses patience: “I don’t like cuddly tear-jerkers, extraordinary coincidences, rewards gained

35 Musierowicz, *Żaba*, 150.

36 Fox, *Magda.doc*, 133.

37 Terakowska, *Ono*, 390.

38 “I feel like Cinderella in the fairytale, and there everything ends well, though its starts pretty badly.” (Fox, *Magda.doc*, 150).

39 The career of Ewa Nowacka as an author of popular (historical and social) literature for teenagers began at the onset of the 1960s. The pinnacle of her fame came with the superb *Małgosia contra Małgosia* from 1975 (adapted for television and radio).

by turns of fortune.” She introduces herself sarcastically as a “good fairy,”<sup>40</sup> a mother to a teenager, also named Magda, who has decided to keep her unplanned pregnancy without giving anything up at the same time. The second Magda, like the first, proudly displays her growing belly and her role of a young mother. She passes the Matura exams with distinctions, and goes off to work in England, where she continues her studies and marries an Englishman who is an academic. The price of the daughter’s upward mobility is paid by the mother, who assumes care over the child. The emotions, effort, time, and money that are not expended by the young women are borne by the older one. As the former progresses through her studies, the latter falls into intellectual regression; while the former flourishes, the latter sees in the mirror a prematurely aged reject; while the former finds a glamorous husband, the latter goes out with a Mr. Zygmunt, if she can get her friend to stay with the child that is. Magda is enthusiastic, her mother is anxious. The first takes pride in her assertiveness and independence, the second conceals before her acquaintances her atypical status of a single (grand) mother and her own sacrifice, as she knows that “work likes the foolish.”<sup>41</sup> In time, she finds out that her case is not isolated, but she decides not to reveal herself as an abused mother. Shame is therefore a debt noted in an iron ledger, and it must be settled by somebody.

The generous offer of state and church support for single mothers that is offered by the “proponents and defenders of conceived life,” and publicized by the media, turns out to be merely symbolic. There is a legal obligation of alimony, but Magda proudly ignores the legal path. She employs the discourse of independence, industriousness, and honor. The pragmatic mother represents a different system of ideas: “a money order once a month does nothing to diminish the feeling of independence.”<sup>42</sup> Nowacka depicts Magda’s pride as superficial and only partly justified – influenced by new cultural trends. The young mother seems appealing to herself and her friends in a role glorified by popular culture: “they treated Magda as if she were the hero of a television show because Magdas exactly like her are the stars of such shows, they make rebellious and perilous decisions, which upend the status quo. [...] they zestfully championed Magda, ready to defend her if the need arose.”<sup>43</sup> Nevertheless, such pride fades away quickly.

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40 Ewa Nowacka, *Małe kochanie, wielka miłość* (Wrocław: Oficyna Wydawnicza Foka, 2009), 115.

41 Nowacka, *Małe kochanie*, 30.

42 *Ibid.*, 73.

43 *Ibid.*, 59.



Only Nowacka suggests that the teenager's decision to have the child is partly forced, made under the influence of pop-cultural clichés. She also mentions, quite dismissively, the pressure of the pro-life discourse – “proponents and defenders of conceived life” communicate through the media, a priest “torments” a high school principal with “lectures on the sanctity of conceived life,” so that he allows a pregnant senior to continue her education. All in all, this is of little consequence. Magda, like all of the aforementioned heroines, gives birth because she wants to. She makes an individual, psychologically justified decision; she does not experience any real or symbolic pressure (of the law, Church, physician, economy, language, or morality). Therefore, the problem is stripped of its political and ideological dimensions. The strongest fear is associated with violence, which determines the choice. Its traces must be concealed, its influence must be denied. The novel omits the power of both the state and Church. The heroine of *Magda.doc* argues deceitfully that even though she is a believer, she will give birth not because someone, for example the Church, makes her do it. Priests are oftentimes even anti-heroes of the pro-life fairytale. In Fox's case a priest expresses his disapproval for the pregnant schoolgirl, he persuades her to confess, but she places the word “sin” in quotes, because she feels “at peace with God and Fate.”<sup>44</sup> In Kosmowska's novel, an embarrassed priest bars a future mother from attending religion classes.

There is no mention of the illegality and high cost of abortion. Everyone, in turn, points to it as the easiest solution. Therefore, it starts to seem as an antithesis of choice, an evasive move that is suggested by others, an act of irresponsibility. At the same time even the most impoverished heroine can afford it. Pro-life discourse is not being recognized as oppressive. A gynecologist who performs the procedure is one of its advocates, still he only asks mildly persuasive questions about considering other options (*Ono*). The discourse of abortion rights is the one that is depicted as violent – it sanctions acts of aggression and depersonalization. Terakowska's heroines repeat ad infinitum the vicious and demeaning terms, such as “coat hanger” and “scrubbing.” They were used previously in verbal attacks by the grandmother: “you're not a carrot, to scrub yourself each season.”<sup>45</sup> This expression is later embraced by the mother to express her anger and punish the daughter, and later on by the daughter herself to relieve her initial hostility towards the fetus. A rational language of choice in its neutral form is heard only in Nowacka's novel. Kosmowska's heroine resorts to it only when it comes to entrusting the child to the aunt. Also, here is where the single anti-abortion phantasm appears.

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44 Fox, *Magda.doc*, s. 179.

45 Terakowska, *Ono*, 132.

The authors mostly avoid illustration. Nevertheless, a visit in a gynecological practice and the examination on the gynecological chair, seem to serve as metonymy for the procedure of termination of pregnancy itself. Extreme discomfort, humiliation, shame, fear of invasive medical utensils, all suggest the immediate closeness of a strong cultural prohibition, which the heroines do not intend to violate.

## 7.

The comparison of the ways in which shame functions in PRL and contemporary novels for girls, exposes a fundamental differences between the two models – the latter novels are an element in the system of symbolic violence directed at women, while the former attempted to unmask and criticize that system. A didactic genre, determined by the epoch's dominant discourses, previously pointed to shame as a mechanism of power. If it was substituted with some other shame, then it was emancipatory. Its greatest achievement in this respect is undoubtedly the immoral language of the right to abortion (Snopkiewicz), its blind spot is (an embarrassed?) omission of the topic of birth control, which is inseparable from sexual freedom. Illegal pregnancy and abortion were framed as a social, economic, and political problem. Presently, they are mostly a question of morality, which practically restricts venturing beyond the oppressive logic of shame. The best method of perpetuating power is concealment of traces, hence the amplified compensation within literature, substituting shame with pride reframed in neoliberal and therapeutic terms. If previously novels for girls were a space of public debate, presently one can only rarely find in them anything besides symptoms of its absence.

*Translation: Rafał Pawluk*

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Agnieszka Dauksza

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## KwieKulik as an Unknown: A Neo-Avant-gardist Laboratory of Experience

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“The most fascinating couple in the history of Polish contemporary art” and “a legendary duo,” claims the author of a magazine column dedicated to the life and work of KwieKulik.<sup>1</sup> These sentiments are mostly correct. However, the problem is that Polish contemporary art history has never truly dealt with the “major event” that the duo’s work undoubtedly constituted. A contemporary examination of their ideas and contrasting them with the trends prevalent in Polish art of the 1970s and the 1980s demonstrates that the duo was more or less a revelation – their work was ahead of the predominant artistic practices by about twenty or even thirty years. The practices of KwieKulik far exceeded the average perceptual habits, and invalidated much of the aesthetic canon. Back then, critics had no instruments or adequate language that would allow them to properly describe the duo’s efforts, while contemporary artists often make inadvertent references to the former’s work.<sup>2</sup>

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1 Adriana Prodeus, “KwieKulik: Duet-legenda” [“KwieKulik: Legendary Duo”], *Newsweek*, February 28, 2015, <http://kultura.newsweek.pl/kwiekulik--duet-legenda,104269,1,1.html>, accessed March 1, 2015. If not otherwise specified all translations of referenced works are provided by the translator of the article.

2 Dr. Luiza Nader has been working tirelessly for years to further our understanding of the efforts undertaken by the KwieKulik

This essay will problematize a couple of ambiguities and potentialities inscribed into KwieKulik's body of work. Thus the formula for the title. I see the duo as an "unknown," which is a clear reference to one of their works, *Activities with the Unknown X*, wherein the artists suggested that the viewer imagine "all of the possible spatial relations of X" and "see that unknown as something real, something that can take place, takes place, or cannot take place."<sup>3</sup> In treating KwieKulik as an unknown, I am proposing that we look at their body of work all over again, suspending or reevaluating any prior interpretations, reexamining those "possible spatial relations" and potentialities, and probing for a language that would allow us to adequately analyze these practices.

Starting with the context of everyday life experiences in the Polish People's Republic, I will reflect on the laboratory-like conditions in which KwieKulik works were crafted. The problem here lies in a specific contradiction emerging in the confrontation of the duo's avant-garde rhetoric of with the character of their actual efforts. I am talking here about the essentially paradoxical – because ostensibly incompatible with their manifested presuppositions – mechanism of affective characterization (and, possibly, motivation) of (neo) avant-garde gestures, which, although not specific to KwieKulik, allows us to see their body of work from a different perspective when fully diagnosed and described. This ties into another problem I consider interesting, particularly the problem of power, domination, violence, or alternatively pressure, its influence exerted on a number levels: between the partners themselves (and their loved ones), between the political and communal system with the KwieKulik duo, and between the artists and their audience.

### 1. In the Laboratory of Experience

In conversation with Ryszard Ziarkiewicz, Kulik defines the work of the duo in the following way:

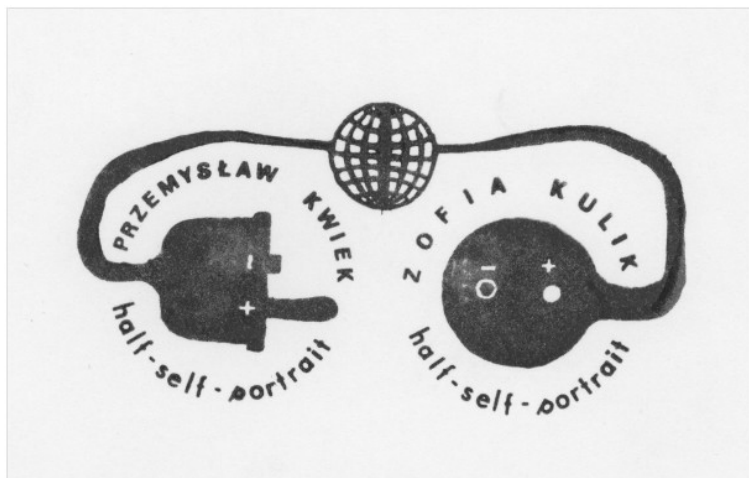
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duo and I have to thank her for the inspiration (first movement). I would also like to thank Mrs. Zofia Kulik for sharing her photographs, reading through this essay and providing relevant commentary that helped me "think" and "feel" the realities which KwieKulik worked in. My thanks also to Dr. Tomasz Załuski for sharing previously unpublished writing with me and for his help with obtaining much needed source material.

3 See a description of that project: *KwieKulik. Zofia Kulik & Przemysław Kwiek*, ed. Łukasz Ronduda and Georg Schöllhammer (Warszawa, Wrocław, Wiedeń: Museum of Modern Art, BWA Wrocław – Galleries of Contemporary Art, Awangarda Kontakt Gallery, The Art Collection of Erste Group and ERSTE Foundation, 2012), 188; Alicja Kępińska, *Nowa sztuka polska w latach 1945-1978 [New Polish Art 1945-1978]* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Artystyczne i Filmowe, 1981), 154.

There are many definitions of the avant-garde, but I mostly agree with what you're saying [i.e. Ziarkiewicz's definition of the prototypical avant-garde artist as a "dispassionate intellectual, leftist, and structuralist" – author's note]. Intellect – yes, theoretical background, principle before practice, anti-subjectivism, questioning of the status quo. [...] Of our art, we say that it is a "reaction to experiences, especially unpleasant ones." [...] on the one hand, we coerced ourselves to comply with the strict regimen of collaborative work, [...] while on the other we rebelled against such submission, and that rebellious streak grew.<sup>4</sup>

This nexus of ostensibly incompatible notions is highly interesting to me, not only because it is typical of Kulik's assertion quoted above, but because it essentially characterizes the practices of the duo. On the one hand, it acknowledges the (fairly stereotypical) avant-garde ideals, including the belief in the legitimacy of the scientific and theoretical foundations of artistic works, as well as their intellectualism and anti-subjectivism.



Il. 1. Author: KwieKulik. Courtesy of Zofia Kulik.

On the other hand, however, the artist subverts, at least to some extent, the model of autonomous art, defines the efforts of the KwieKulik duo as a reaction to certain experiences and admits to have drawn inspiration from that

4 Ryszard Ziarkiewicz, "Bądź tylko posłusznym instrumentem. Z Zofią Kulik rozmawiał Ryszard Ziarkiewicz" ["Be Nothing More Than a Obedient Instrument: A Conversation with Zofia Kulik"], *Magazyn Sztuki* 1 (1993): 12-21.

which is individual and rooted in experience, including the emotional tensions between the artists themselves. In another conversation, Kulik argues:

Psychology, obviously, was a concern, but in art, invoking some psychological ramifications or intentions or doubts, no, that was considered simply shameful, embarrassing, and everyone struggled to seem like a strong person, someone who could take it all and remain unruffled.<sup>5</sup>

We seem to come back to the question of the affectivity of (neo)avant-garde art which, as demonstrated by numerous examples, was not so much a direct “distillate” of emotions and affects, as it was a sphere of friction, complementation, or equivalence between what was considered rational and objective with the amalgamate, the affective, or the traumatic.<sup>6</sup> It was important, therefore, not to purge art of experience, but a more original processing thereof, for example, in the name of Kulik’s principle to “avoid being too much of yourself in art.”<sup>7</sup> In the case of KwieKulik, the dissonance between the slogans they preached and their actual practice is prominent already in the titles of their individual efforts, including *Art of Nerves*, *Killjoy Hardships*, *The Experiencing Monument*, *Make your Way rather than Puke your Way Through Life*, *Head Activities*, *Begging for Forgiveness*, *Let there be Mass Hunger* or *Alice in Fucking Wonderland*. Importantly, they indicate not only the complication of the relationship between spheres that are customarily perceived as oppositional, but also indirectly reveal the stakes of KwieKulik’s artistic game, as their artistic efforts were part of a “total,” all-encompassing project. The artistic duo wanted to erase the lines between art, science, and experience/existence, and simultaneously revolutionize the form of artistic expression. We need to emphasize, however, that talking about “art,” “artwork,” and “expression” is, to some extent, a distortion and simplification at the same time. The artists, assuming a processual character of their efforts, created their own, separate lexicon;<sup>8</sup> they called their own works “efforts,” “documentation of efforts,” “aesthetic time-effects,” etc.

5 Zofia Kulik, *KwieKulik*, dir. Joanna Turowicz and Anna Zakrzewska (2011; Warszawa: Centrala), 10 min. 50 sec. – 11 min. 25 sec. Courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw.

6 I am talking here about a certain principle that I have discussed more broadly in Agnieszka Dauksza, “Afektywny awangardyzm” [“The Affective Avant-garde”], *Teksty Drugie* 1 (2014).

7 Zofia Kulik, “Fragmenty teoretycznej pracy dyplomowej Z. Kulik. *Rzeźba filmem*” [“Fragments of Z. Kulik’s Senior Thesis. *Sculpting with Film*”] in *KwieKulik. Zofia Kulik & Przemysław Kwiek*, 420.

8 *KwieKulik. Zofia Kulik & Przemysław Kwiek*, 463–470.

The remarkableness of KwieKulik's practices stems also from their ability to reconcile the contradictions between traditional indicators of "dispassionate," "analytical," and "scientific" avant-garde with the personal and quotidian. This entailed transforming experience into the subject of experimentation. Back then, the duo operated according to a method I tend to call the artistic laboratory of experience. It involves the scientific examination of the dimensions of our surrounding reality, including the subjective, psychophysical, and affective, through the medium of art. The scientific character of these practices calls for further discussion.

When Kulik brings up art as a "reaction to experience, especially unpleasant ones," what she means is not only the difficult nature of her personal and professional relationship with Kwiek, but also the everyday reality of the Polish People's Republic. The latter served as one of the most important reference points in the duo's body of work, a fact especially evident in, for example, *Kolo KwieKulik* [*The KwieKulik Circle*] – a piece submitted to the 1977 edition of *documenta* in Kassel – which explored the differences between Eastern and Western European art. The piece is comprised of eight photographs with captions, portraying the artists' closest surroundings.<sup>9</sup> The pictures have been arranged in a circle; the depicted environs include the 80-meter-tall neon sign over the "Prażanka" off-license store above which the artists lived and worked, a dirty passageway, and even dirtier stairway which store customers treated as their latrine, and so on. According to numerous accounts, as a result of these rather unfriendly circumstances, the artists had to completely cover their windows with particle boards, while the apartment door, held together with string and always slightly ajar, did nothing to filter out the smells and sounds coming in from the stairway which contributed to Kulik's emotional distress.

Naturally, lodging difficulties were back then accompanied by widespread problems with procuring groceries, artistic supplies, securing passports, etc. Intent on making a living, the KwieKulik duo took commissions (only a handful, but still exhausting) from government-affiliated artistic and craftsmanship institutions. This, in turn, worsened their fatigue and further embittered the duo, which was increasingly evident in their work; Kulik called it "a phantom struggle against existing reality," rearing its head in times of "accumulating fear of and anger at being misunderstood."<sup>10</sup> These negative states of mind were further reinforced by tensions inside their social circles, the feeling of being unappreciated, as well as the political conflicts that the

9 KwieKulik. Zofia Kulik & Przemysław Kwiek, 235.

10 Dorota Jarecka, "Musiałam mieć ciało" ["I Needed to Have a Body"], [http://www.kulikzofia.pl/polski/ok3/ok3\\_jarecka.html](http://www.kulikzofia.pl/polski/ok3/ok3_jarecka.html), accessed February 28, 2015,

duo were entangled in and their repercussions (as a result of the publication of their *Gypsum Bird* and *Dick Man* in a Swedish catalog, the artists were banned from representing Poland internationally; they were also denied passports and stripped of prospects for paid artistic work).

The title *The KwieKulik Circle* has dual meaning – it denotes the shape in which the photographs are arranged, but also provides insight into their closest surroundings and the context of that period, implying that the artists were trapped in a “vicious circle.” By submitting their work to a lecture on the differences between Eastern and Western European Art, the KwieKulik duo did not want to emphasize the specific aesthetic, stylistic, or ideological character of art created in Poland as much as to spotlight the fundamental obstacles that the reality of the Polish People’s Republic placed before any artist interested in creative work.

Regardless of the shift in Kwiek’s or Kulik’s attitudes – ranging from ideological involvement driven by active criticism, through the good-faith belief in the necessity to improve a faulty system, up to disillusionment with communism and embracing a leftist outlook laced with a measure of distrust towards the authorities – the duo managed to devise a method which, in Kulik’s opinion, allowed them “to experience their own lives in art.” The artists assured that their project, “total in nature,” intended to integrate a number of different orders, thus allowing one to deal with one’s experiences through art and treat artistic activity as a life unto itself. To quote Kulik:

We essentially lived as if we were studying reality, conducting some sort of workshop study. And our life was also de facto such a study on its own. We studied our own selves under specific conditions and circumstances – in our writings we even pointed out that we saw ourselves as laboratory animals for our own inquiries. Living in this reality, we were continuously both inside it but also outside, as its detached analysts. Throughout this time, we were situated in this envelope – nowadays, we’d call it the privacy envelope or the studio envelope. It is possible that in our efforts, we’ve expanded the studio and allowed it to cross-over into reality, rather than tried to introduce reality into the studio.<sup>11</sup>

This led to the incessant and quite literal blurring of the lines separating existence and art. The duo spent whole days immersed in creative work, often transforming “both galleries and streets into artistic spaces, even their own apartment was turned into one such space, later christened the Action,

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<sup>11</sup> KwieKulik. Zofia Kulik & Przemysław Kwiek, 539.



Documentation, and Dissemination Workshop.”<sup>12</sup> They spent long hours engaged in fervent discussions which allowed them to conceptually work through their experiences. They used whatever was at hand: their own bodies, objects of everyday use, simple artistic supplies. Regardless of whether they were at home or outdoors, they always had a camera or video camera with them. They shot hundreds of photographs and diafilms. Capturing, or as the artists themselves called it, “documenting” their efforts was of crucial importance to their work. It was by no means casual – they were engaged in an essentially permanent process of documentation. A couple of years later, Kulik reappraised their work in that period:

it was drastic – exerting this influence on oneself, on one’s own life, I see it more clearly today. Back then it felt natural, maybe we were simply trying to vent, to deal this way with the reality outside our workshop, outside our apartment.<sup>13</sup>

Particularly drastic elements of their practices includes their scale, frequency, and considerable level of energetic emotional commitment. It would be a mistake to think that these practices were undertaken only to provide an emotional outlet and a documentation opportunity. It is not without reason that such an imperative to study and analyze in a scientific manner clearly emanates from the above-quoted passage from Kulik, seeing as the KwieKulik method was bent on experimentation. However, the experiments launched by the artists were methodical, avoiding improvisation – their efforts were meticulous, repetitive, and aimed at producing artistic effects. That is why I believe that lab work categories should be used to examine the efforts and practices of the said duo. As is known, working in a scientific lab necessitates precise, consistent, time-intensive, rarely impressive, multi-staged, and interdisciplinary research that is varied and repetitive; the ultimate innovativeness (if any) is earned through constant experimentation, simulation, and exploration of every possible aspect of a given object or phenomenon. The question of the limits of laboratory space is also important. In the quote above, Kulik ponders the actual situation of the duo: “Throughout this time, we were situated in this envelope [...]. It is possible that in our efforts, we’ve expanded the

12 Marianna Michałowska, “KwieKulik i Rzeczywistość” [“KwieKulik and Reality”], [http://www.kulikzofia.pl/polski/ok2/ok2\\_michalowska.html](http://www.kulikzofia.pl/polski/ok2/ok2_michalowska.html), accessed February 28, 2015.

13 Zofia Kulik, *Forma jest faktem społecznym. KwieKulik [Form Is Social Fact. KwieKulik]*, dir. Agnieszka Mazanek and Krzysztof Landsberg, (2009; Warszawa: Pop TV, TVP S.A., NInA), ca. 12 min. 25 sec. – 12 min. 40 sec., <http://ninatka.pl/flm/kwiekulik-forma-jest-faktem-spoecznym>, accessed February 28, 2015.

studio and allowed it to cross-over into reality, rather than trying to introduce reality into the studio." I believe that the "envelope" that Kulik is talking about is the laboratory space.

Bruno Latour, defining that space for his own purposes, argues with absolute certainty that "the very difference between the »inside« and the »outside«, and the difference of scale between »micro« and »macro« levels, is precisely what laboratories are built to destabilize or undo."<sup>14</sup> Obviously, in the rhetoric of the KwieKulik duo, the "studio" corresponds to the "inside," while "reality" to the "outside." Nevertheless, the efforts of the duo mostly entailed the erasure of the difference between these two domains, allowing one to cross-over into the other, both on the micro scale (of a given piece which could not exist as a complete artwork, but was only a fragment of a continuous process), and the macro scale (the understanding of the relationship between life and creative work and between the private and the political). Kulik asserted: "It wasn't the creation of pure art, ready, finished artworks. It was a whole web of relationships between art and life." Łukasz Ronduda, on the other hand, convincingly characterized that tension on the "macro" scale:

KwieKulik continuously problematized the line separating the public from the private imposed by the Communist state. They attempted to define the relationship between the two differently, basing their new definition not around a binary opposition, but rather around cross-permeation, creating a specific "mutuality."<sup>15</sup>

These relationships, permeations, and mutualities are the fundamental concepts behind the contemporary Latourian laboratory. As we transplant these concepts into the humanities, as attempted by Ryszard Nycz, Ewa Rewers,<sup>16</sup>

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14 Bruno Latour, "Give Me a Laboratory and I Will Raise the World," in *Science Observed: Perspectives on the Social Study of Science*, ed. Karin Knorr-Cetina and Michael Mulkay (London and Beverly Hills: Sage, 1983), 143.

15 Łukasz Ronduda, "Sztuka, miłość, polityka, nauka. Życie i twórczość Zofii Kulik i Przemysława Kwieka w latach 1970-1987" ["Art, Love, Politics, Science. The Life and Work of Zofia Kulik and Przemysław Kwiek, 1970-1987"] in *KwieKulik, Zofia Kulik & Przemysław Kwiek*, 12.

16 Ewa Rewers, "Praktyka jako badanie: nowe metodologie w humanistyce" ["Practice as Inquiry: New Methodologies in the Humanities"] in *Teoria – literatura – życie. Praktykowanie teorii w humanistyce współczesnej* [Theory – Literature – Life. The Practice of Theory in Contemporary Humanities], ed. Anna Legeżyńska and Ryszard Nycz (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IBL PAN, 2012).

or Arkadiusz Żychliński,<sup>17</sup> we may naturally treat them only as a metaphor for the cultural development of certain values. However, as suggested by Nycz,



Il. 2. Author: KwieKulik. Courtesy of Zofia Kulik.

every text of culture, as the foundation of an innovative humanities, actually is a laboratory; that is, it may be considered a “nexus of an open network of translational operations between what is natural, societal, and discursive, mediatizing and innovatively transforming relationships between mind, body, and environment.”<sup>18</sup> This means, therefore, that text understood laboratory-wise does not deposit specific meanings as much as create a web of relationships between what is represented, historic, and situated on the side of the reader and that which creates the reader’s specific context. As a result, these relationships “permeate and transform the historical, societal, and cultural

17 Arkadiusz Żychliński, *Laboratorium antropofikcji. Dociekania filologiczne* [*The Laboratory of Anthropofiction. Philological Inquiries*] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IBL PAN, 2014).

18 Ryszard Nycz, “W stronę humanistyki innowacyjnej. Tekst jako laboratorium” [“Towards Innovating Humanities. Text as Laboratory”], *Teksty Drugie* 1/2 (2013): 252.

environment."<sup>19</sup> The text is a laboratory-like field of the artist's experimental efforts; however, the interaction between text and readers also becomes a sphere of trial and experiment, a pretext for the reader/audience to practice innovativeness. Inasmuch as the suggestion to examine the literary text from this perspective requires a measure of scholarly openness that would allow the revision of prior models of literature, it seems that the specific nature of the KwieKulik project actually demands the assumption of such a perspective. Why?

Well, it may be difficult for the more traditional critical instruments to encompass the broad spectrum and simultaneously understand the stakes, style, and mechanism of KwieKulik efforts. When I mentioned the duo's proclivity for experimentation, what I meant was the actual subjection of oneself and one's own reality to trial. That is not all, however. I also meant infringing upon existing conventions, developing novel forms of expression, archiving art (their own and their contemporaries), and political commentary, as well as attempting to induce actual societal change. Efforts aimed at implementing these objectives were conducted in a very consistent manner. Over a dozen years, they expanded and confirmed their main, incredibly cohesive method. As accurately pointed out by Marianna Michałowska, KwieKulik activities were always driven by "the principles of logical reasoning, with every stage naturally arising from its predecessor," which "distinguished the KwieKulik method from the average artistic action or happening. There was no place there for improvisation or inadvertence. Every one of their efforts was preceded by a sort of script – a breakdown of sorts."<sup>20</sup> It was essential to them that they not only record individual activities, but also document their entire creative process.

And indeed, like any good research effort, all of their actions were preceded by extensive discussion, followed by the drafting of a meticulous breakdown of the particular artistic situation: identifying the spatial and temporal coordinates, describing the objects, their provenance, qualities, and purpose, capped off with outlining the artists' own motives. Their records resemble precise drugstore formulations. The status of artistic objects is also striking. Most often they were simple household objects contrasted with simple artistic supplies. Unlike Duchamp's famous urinal, however, these objects were never detached from their everyday use for artistic purposes. Zbigniew Libera sees this ability to use these objects in such a creative, innovative manner as one of the basic markers of KwieKulik's inimitable style:

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19 Nycz, "W stronę," 248.

20 Michałowska, "KwieKulik i Rzeczywistość."

They developed their own distinct style using all the means at their disposal: grey packing paper, black-and-white photographs, white-and-red blotting paper. They created notice boards that resembled genuine ones found in factory hallways, impeccably copied the visual shoddiness of that era. My favorite of their works, *The KwieKulik Circle*, is a shocking documentation of their own surroundings: shabby walls, courtyards, streets – with the pictures arranged in a circle. No exhibition would take that piece.<sup>21</sup>

The question of documenting everyday reality resurfaces here, examined from a different angle. The duo not only thematized their own confrontations with their surroundings, the artists made them the direct subject of their work. And they did so using widespread, elementary, banal or otherwise ostensibly “unartistic” means.

We may even risk stating that the most rudimentary yet most wearisome, painful, or disappointing manifestation of reality were their greatest inspiration. To quote Kwiek: “Contrary to most other artists, we value these small inconveniences, small troubles, very highly. We lie in wait, particularly for the bad ones, in order to participate in them.”<sup>22</sup> Experience itself thus becomes the “object” of laboratory and artistic study. This is one of the sources of many an artist’s proclivity, informed to some extent by Oskar Hansen’s theories, to “isolate individual elements of all chaotic, spontaneous, and biographic events, to divide, classify, examine sequences, model, analyze, and verify, etc. – and to introduce clear evaluation criteria.”<sup>23</sup>

In conversation with Kwiek and Tomasz Załuski, Kwiek justified the motivations for his inquiries in the following way:

What drove us to do those things, what drove our behavior? We wanted to go against the cultural mainstream of the 1970s in Poland [...] we believed it wholly unacceptable. By occupying our proud positions, we tucked ourselves away in our “laboratory.” We did not reject this culture simple because it was government-sanctioned. We spurned it because we did not believe it measured up to the standards and examples that we

21 As quoted in Jarecka, “Musiałam mieć ciało.”

22 Maryla Sitkowska, “Wywiad z Zofią Kulik i Przemysławem Kwiekiem. Warszawa 1986-1995 [“An Interview with Zofia Kulik and Przemysław Kwiek. Warsaw 1986-1995”], [http://www.kulikzofia.pl/polski/ok2/ok2\\_wywiad1.html](http://www.kulikzofia.pl/polski/ok2/ok2_wywiad1.html), accessed February 28, 2015,

23 Ibid.

were seeing in all the relevant sources available to us: books, magazines, scientific seminars.<sup>24</sup>

It is widely known that Kulik and Kwiek frequented seminars and lectures at the University of Warsaw and the Polish Academy of Sciences, held by pre-eminent Polish scholars, including Tadeusz Kotarbiński, Stanisław Piekarczyk, Helena Rasiowa, and Władysław Tatarkiewicz. They also read philosophical and praxeological treatises. Under their influence, as pointed out by Załuski, they “demonstrated increased interest in the question of formalizing artistic efforts and tried to utilize and expose in their course certain models and structural and generative algorithms.”<sup>25</sup> Eventually, they began creating visual representations of mathematical and logical operations (such as *Activities with the Unknown X* or *Activities with Dobromierz*). Łukasz Ronduda offers an interesting interpretation of that tendency:

Rejecting the belief in the existence of a pure essence of art and in the utility of essentialist platforms, KwieKulik undertook an original action with their embrace of mathematics as the only possible, objective, or even universal ontology. For KwieKulik, mathematics and logic became the only entities capable of salvaging a universal platform of human communication after the collapse of modernist utopias.<sup>26</sup>

Ultimately, although driven by scientific theories of activity, they failed to establish a platform of communication that would bring KwieKulik a broader audience, but they definitely contributed to their perception as innovators.

As argued numerous times by the artists themselves, the objective was to act against the autonomous avant-garde, as well as Socialist Realist art and ubiquitous shoddiness. Kulik and Kwiek argued, therefore, against officially sanctioned ideology and aesthetics. On one hand, they criticized the authorities and government institutions because, as committed leftists, they could not reconcile their beliefs with the “perversions” of the system. On the other hand, they also disparaged the anti-Communist opposition, claiming that “ideological identification exerts the maximum influence on us precisely

24 Tomasz Załuski, “Anatomia KwieKulik. Z Zofią Kulik i Przemysławem Kwiekiem rozmawia Tomasz Załuski” [*The Anatomy of KwieKulik. A Conversation with Zofia Kulik and Przemysław Kwiek*], *KwieKulik, Zofia Kulik & Przemysław Kwiek*, 539–540.

25 Tomasz Załuski, “Działajmy sprawniej! Sztuka i dyskursy nauki,” [“Let us Be More Effective in Action! Art and Scientific Discourses”] in *KwieKulik, Zofia Kulik & Przemysław Kwiek*, 533.

26 Ronduda, “Sztuka, miłość,” 12.

when we acknowledge the fact that we're not thoroughly identified with it."<sup>27</sup> Not without reason, the KwieKulik duo seemed to believe that radical hostility towards the policies of the Polish People's Republic did not make the opposition pure, innocent or detached and that this exact radical intensity of their opposition allowed the authorities – by appropriating the attention and the sensibilities of the antagonist – to achieve considerable psychological, social, and ideological success.

On the other hand, the artists experimented on a variety of levels, including the aesthetic, the rhetorically symbolic, and the material. They devised a veritable laboratory of forms. They wanted to instigate a shift in the understanding of the role of the artist, but also—as we have already pointed out – in the relationship between art and existence. Moreover, they negated prior artistic achievements, including the model of modernist art. They proposed their own, original formal approaches—over a dozen years, the forms developed by KwieKulik kept evolving. Here, the innovative practices of a formal laboratory blended with the activities of a laboratory of experience, and not only in a figurative sense. Their efforts were highly inventive – by documenting, archiving,<sup>28</sup> and commenting on the reality of the Polish People's Republic, they devised new ways and techniques of dealing with their own experiences and thus provoked a shift in people's attitudes towards their own realities; eventually (on the micro scale), this led to a partial modification in the status quo, although perceived differently by then.

## 2. Under Pressure or What Happened Between K. and K.

In 1979, KwieKulik were invited to an international event focused on creating “mail art,” organized by *Commonpress* magazine. Over sixty participants developed original self-portrait-stamp designs which were later crafted by a specially commissioned firm. In order to somehow deal with the need to symbolically separate in the course of creating their self-portrait, the duo

27 Ibid.

28 See discussions and analyses of the efforts undertaken by KwieKulik in the field of archiving, including Paweł Mościcki, “KwieKulik – archiwum działania” [“KwieKulik – Archives of Action”] in *KwieKulik, Zofia Kulik & Przemysław Kwiek*, 520-522; Luiza Nader, “PDDiU: Archiwum horyzontalne” [“ADaDW: a Horizontal Archive”] in *KwieKulik, Zofia Kulik & Przemysław Kwiek*, 523-524; Luiza Nader, “O czym zapominają archiwa? Pamięć i historie »Z archiwum KwieKulik«” [“What Do Archives Forget? Memory and Histories »From the KwieKulik Archives«”] accessed February 28, 2015, [http://www.kulikzofia.pl/polski/ok2/ok2\\_nader.html](http://www.kulikzofia.pl/polski/ok2/ok2_nader.html); Tomasz Załuski, “Zofia Kulik prezentuje KwieKulik. Dobromierz X. Katalog” [“Zofia Kulik Presents KwieKulik. Dobromierz X. Catalog”], accessed February 28, 2015, [http://www.kulikzofia.pl/polski/ok2/ok2\\_zaluski.html](http://www.kulikzofia.pl/polski/ok2/ok2_zaluski.html)

undertook to perform a highly symbolic split.<sup>29</sup> Kwiek, as the male potential, was represented by a power plug with a clearly marked prong. Kulik,



Il. 3. Author: KwieKulik. Courtesy of Zofia Kulik.

the female potential, was represented by an electrical outlet. The potential combination of both elements could “stimulate” or “illuminate” the globe, here replacing a lightbulb. However, the prong with the “+” symbol was aimed at the hole bearing the same “+” symbol. One could surmise,

<sup>29</sup> KwieKulik, Zofia Kulik & Przemysław Kwiek, 325.



therefore, that the electric potentials in both would simply end up repelling one another. A question arises: would the artists attempt to symbolically portray the misfortune of combining their potentials in such a public way, and if so, why? If we were to read the globe as a metaphor of their artistic practice, it would mean that the incompatibility of their potentials precludes the transmission of power, the system itself appears ineffective, and art is prevented from becoming a space or a medium for causal influence. We may naturally choose to see the artists' gesture as incidental or amusing, but it is difficult to shake the feeling that it actually says quite a lot about the mechanisms of their collaboration.

Were we to take a closer look at their practices, we would be struck by an accumulation of power, male domination, and even overt violence burdening the relationship. This was evident not only in their artistic efforts, but in their private and socio-political life as well – the latter being important due to the influence it exerted over their art. From this angle, the ostensibly trivial issue of food, often resurfacing in interviews, is particularly interesting:

Zofia Kulik: We lived in Warsaw back then, in the Praga district [...], while my mother lived in Mokotów [...]. The two are quite a ways apart from each other. Imagine that twice or thrice weekly I took public transport and went to my mother's and came back with two big baskets of food [...]. And that allowed us to survive. I got up before eight to walk the baby to daycare. On my way back I bought rolls, brought them home and he [P. Kwiek – author's note] always made a scene that they were stale.

Przemysław Kwiek: This was about the bread, not the rolls.

ZK: Rolls, too. He squeezed them to check whether they crackled just right. Besides, when he woke up so late for breakfast [around 1pm – author's note], I was already hungry after waking early, but he forbade me from eating. I was terribly skinny back then, skin and bones, nothing else. PK: That's correct, but pointless [...]. Nowadays they call it fitness. It was about something else, a sort of cohabitation statute, but enforcing it was a mistake. [...] the rule is you eat breakfast around 8 am and then don't snack between meals. I did the cooking back then and was afraid that if she munched on something before dinner, she wouldn't have eaten anything.

ZK: And dinner was around 6 pm. So I wasn't allowed to eat between morning and evening.<sup>30</sup>

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30 Załuski, "Działajmy sprawniej!", 537.

This passage clearly demonstrates to what degree their everyday life was subordinated to the principle of methodic creation. The problem seems to lie, however, in the fact that the style and character of their artistic efforts was not a resultant of their mutual decisions, and that sacrifice in the name of art was definitely one-sided. To put it bluntly: the figure of Kwiek seems to loom over the relationship like a tyrant intent on enforcing his laws in both the private sphere and the sphere of aesthetics, as Kulik's psychophysiological subordination definitely impacted the level of her artistic dependence.

Kulik started out as a sculptor, creating finished, closed forms. Under the influence of open form theories developed by Oskar Hansen and following Kwiek's imperative, she abandoned her earlier efforts in pursuit of constant experimentation, constant action, of ceaseless, unending process. Kulik only "betrayed" Kwiek a couple of times, creating (often while away without him) a handful of "closed" forms. Rumor has it, however, that it was evident that she missed working on a more sizeable "finished" form. It was no secret that their mutual friends often ambiguously hinted at her to break out on her own: "Kulcia, when are you finally going to do something on your own, without Kwiek?"<sup>31</sup> To some extent, she allowed herself to do just that a number of times in 1978, when she developed the performance *Asking for Forgiveness* after completing the joint performance *Killjoy Hardships* with Kwiek. For *Asking*, she borrowed a white dress with a long train and as she walked the stage, she repeatedly bowed and dropped to her knees before the audience. When asked later by Joanna Turowicz about her motivations, Kulik replied:

Working as a pair suffocated me: we were doing the same, saying the same. Bizarre emotions were welling up inside me [...]. I wanted to ask forgiveness of the audience, to beg at their knees [...]. But what was the audience supposed to forgive me? I do not know exactly. Maybe the fact that I am there, personally, even though it seems that I am. As one part of a two-figure hybrid which leaves me unaware of the role I have to play, what space do I occupy, what shape do I have [...]. I must have been quite pathetic like that. The humiliation I felt was total, all-encompassing. But I needed that situation so I put myself there.<sup>32</sup>

31 Karol Sienkiewicz, *Zatańczą ci co drżeli* [*And the Trembling Shall Dance*], (Kraków-Warszawa: Karakter, MSN w Warszawie, 2014), 38.

32 Joanna Turowicz, "Bunt neoawangardowej artystki. Z Zofią Kulik rozmawia Joanna Turowicz" ["The Neo-Avant-garde Artist Rebels. A Conversation with Zofia Kulik"], *Opcje. Kwartalnik Kulturalny* 3 (2004): 54-61.

The pictures from the event show a sad yet excited Kulik walking alone before the bewildered audience. With *Asking for Forgiveness*, Kulik not only revealed the cracks in what was believed to be a monolith, demanding her position in the duo be acknowledged, she also courageously committed herself to an act of emancipation through humiliation.<sup>33</sup> The ambiguous yet intensely expressive gesture fundamentally changed the relationship between the artist and audience and starkly contrasted the usually aggressive practice and rhetoric of the duo.

Kulik decided to break away only 10 years later. Curiously, the question of food and food-related anxieties resurface in conversations about her decision to return to solo work. As the artist confessed in one of the interviews, as she left Kwiek, she “began to worry about food, because all the cooking was always done by Przemek.” Her ex-partner confirmed: “I did the cooking, but I’d been making these hot, spicy soups that she didn’t like. A couple of years back she finally learned to cook and her meals were finally how she liked them: watered down.”<sup>34</sup> This somewhat spiteful remark reveals the fundamental conflict between the two, aesthetic rather than culinary.

An analysis of the records of the duo’s practices reveals the tensions that wracked their relationship. We should point out specific examples of their influence—one of them involves a project the duo developed for another edition of the *Commonpress* competition, this time focused on “nudity on stamps.” KwieKulik used their passport photographs and prepared a photomontage that could best be described using the term “sex stamps.” In Kulik’s face, a hole has been cut in the shape of male reproductive organs. In the hole, a photograph depicting Kulik’s face was pasted and then taped over with red, transparent cellophane. Next to the manipulated portrait is a cutout of her face, shaped like a vulva, with black lines radiating away from it. The collage could obviously be read as a metaphor of their symbiotic relationship.<sup>35</sup> It seems, however, that the photomontage is rather a visualization of symbolic appropriation. Insofar as Kwiek’s phallic visage is brutally inserted into the figure of a woman, completely “annexing” her,

33 Cf. inspiring feminist analyses of KwieKulik efforts as well as Kulik’s individual practice from the late 1980s and early 1990s, including Ewa Majewska, “Kłopot z płcią w pracach KwieKulik? Cherchez la femme” [“Trouble with Gender in KwieKulik Works? Cherchez la femme”] in *KwieKulik, Zofia Kulik & Przemysław Kwiek*, 518–519; Ewa Toniak, *Olbrzymki: Kobiety i socrealizm [Giantesses: Women and Socialist Realism]* (Kraków: Ha!art, 2008); Izabella Kowalczyk, “Kobieta, która patrzy” [“The Gazing Woman”], *Kresy. Kwartalnik Literacki* 1 (1999); Magdalena Ujma, “Tkane jako bunt. O twórczości Zofii Kulik” [“Weaving as Resistance. On the Work of Zofia Kulik”], *Dekada Literacka* 2 (2004).

34 Prodeus, “KwieKulik.”

35 *KwieKulik, Zofia Kulik & Przemysław Kwiek*, 319.

but simultaneously creating a highly consistent whole, both in terms of subjectivity and aesthetics (producing the appearance of “Kwiek with long hair”), the figure of Kulik is thoroughly dismembered and reduced to a “floating human-faced vagina,” always orbiting her partner.

One could find many more less obvious manifestations of the violent nature of the collaboration between Kulik and Kwiek. Undoubtedly, that character was not exclusively a result of their individual personal or characterological implications, but primarily a consequence of their laboratory-like work ethic, their attempt to treat the avant-garde imperative of keeping one’s emotions in check and purging all weakness quite literally. By taking her leave of the relationship, Kulik unambiguously distanced herself from these methods and associated ideologies, adding: “For 17 years, I’ve been part of a duo. Participated in the pursuit of common goals. After multiple attempts, however, I no longer believe that they can be achieved, nor do I believe in conflict-free teamwork [...] I no longer wish to be a lab animal.”<sup>36</sup>

### 3. “Violent Struggle” as Source of Innovation?

Multiple accounts suggest that when she was still with Kwiek, Kulik was withdrawn, shy, and unsure of her role and her position. But when it came to talking about their common efforts, she was restrained in arguing their artistic choices. Years later, in a conversation with Kwiek and Tomasz Załuski, she confessed that she yearned for her own space:

Zofia Kulik: I wanted us to introduce a division of labor in specific situations; then I could have done my work and he could have done his. We would have been more effective. But no, we were never apart for even a moment.

Przemysław Kwiek: No, we were a whole.

ZK: It was highly uneconomical. We were doing everything together, which deprived us of any work that we could have done on our own. Przemek said that in his opinion back then all our work should be highly systematic, clockwork-like. But it was his idea, he imposed it, by, for example, getting up only at 1pm, everyone else was left to conform to it [...]. Everything else had to be subject to his psychophysiological rhythm, dispassionately, like in a factory.<sup>37</sup>

36 Karol Sienkiewicz, “Zofia Kulik,” <http://culture.pl/pl/tworca/zofia-kulik>, accessed February 28, 2015.

37 Załuski, “Anatomia KwiekKulik,” 540.

It would seem that Kulik not only ate, but also worked on what she did not want to, and in a way that did not suit her by any means. All of this happened in the name of pursuing an alleged (artistic? scientific? societal?) duty, the fulfillment of the mythos of neo-avant-garde self-restraint, intellectualization, and emotional detachment. Kwiek's assertions reveal how significant the essentially modernist desire for wholeness and the vision of a monolithic nature of the duo were to him. The question arises—were the duo's efforts, founded upon such and such values due to Kwiek's express wishes, but ostensibly signed by both artists, dominated primarily by Kwiek's influence?

Well, not necessarily, especially if we treat the artistic practice of KwieKulik as a sphere of agon. It seems that their actions and documentation efforts were an incessant confrontation of ideas, reasons, affects, and needs. And although everything indicates that Kwiek was dominant in the relationship, Kulik's passivity, submissiveness, and sometimes active and intense resistance definitely influenced the character of their practices. It is therefore crucial to be aware of the everyday toil that developing a common aesthetic quality requires. But that is not all. It also seems that KwieKulik's efforts, defined here as a polemic dialogue between two artists, can be seen as quite an ambiguous example of internalizing, maybe even overcoming, the broader problem of modernist aesthetic dualism.

Kulik often emphasized the differences in the worldview and artistic perspectives between her and Kwiek. In a conversation with Ryszard Ziarkiewicz, she asserted:

we were together, creating this peculiar personal and artistic collage. From an external point of view, we seemed like a "monolith." [...] However, from the inside, it was apparent that our attitudes were essentially incompatible, and that's why they were locked in a violent struggle.<sup>38</sup>

The antagonism between the two was felt not only on the rhetorical level, but also in the different approaches to artistic work held by Kulik and Kwiek. Kulik's aforementioned performance, *Begging for Forgiveness*, is a highly illustrative example thereof, as well. Equally important were her "actions at large," including the one she performed while on scholarship in Milan, consisting of two separate efforts: 1. She affixed pieces of her love letters to Kwiek to the doors of the Duomo (e.g. "My dearest, I long to be with you," "I often think about our baby,") which "interacted" with depictions of Biblical scenes sculpted on the doors; 2. She sculpted formless clay figurines which she then arranged in a mock May Day Parade. The figures carried banners featuring

<sup>38</sup> Ziarkiewicz, "Bądź tylko," 12-21.

scraps of her letters to Kwiek (including “My love,” “Dream,” “you,” “be,” “My,” “Dearest,” “Miss you,” “so much”) and marched past the Palace of Culture and Science, constructed from one of the letters and stuck onto Kulik’s suitcase.

In the meantime, Kwiek was busy creating pieces such as *The Vernissage of Meat and Osęka*, which ridiculed Andrzej Osęka for his public critique of the neo-avant-garde. The piece consisted of the art critic’s photograph and a scrap of his essay stuck to a piece of raw meat all of it hanging from the ceiling on a string.

This arbitrary juxtaposition of the artists’ individual efforts and their collectively developed aesthetic is supposed to facilitate the discussion of the mechanism of confronting Kulik and Kwiek’s contrasting rationales and the practical aspects of their “violent struggle.” It is not hard to identify fundamental differences between in their approaches: Kulik strived to create sparse, finished forms, sought conceptually and formally original forms that would allow the expression of “logical feelings” (a quality described by Kulik in a conversation with Andrzej Turowski), discuss gender and corporeality, and offer concise commentary of her own feelings, experiences, and reactions (evident in, e.g., *Alice in Fucking Wonderland*). Kwiek’s practice, on the other hand, gravitated towards processual and violent influence, usually based on commentary-augmented critique of a given social/political phenomenon and the belief in the “missionary-like” character of the artists, whose “shock-and-awe” efforts are supposed to shape beliefs and customs of the audiences. This superficial contrast clearly reveals the placement of emphases that ultimately decided the shape of the KwieKulik method. I assert that the ceaseless confrontation between different values, the need to maintain the state of incessant “violent struggle” and to constantly push their often contradictory arguments ultimately contributed to the dynamics, the variety, and the lasting timeliness of the duo’s artistic efforts. To put it in simple terms, we could claim their jointly produced works were, at heart, a record of the internal tensions and conflicts wracking their relationship, conflicts which not only stemmed from their individual aesthetic preferences, but were also the resultant of their distinct sensibilities and experiences, both of which are gender-dependent.

Simultaneously, practices examined from this particular perspective may be seen as transcending traditional, dualist aesthetic divisions of modernism into intellectual and realistic, or empathetic art – that is, one usually affirming the feminine, the intimate, the emotional, the corporeal, and the irrational. The efforts of KwieKulik were a sort of third alternative, internalizing cracks and modernist divisions which, in turn, allowed use of and experimentation with means of “high culture” avant-garde and popular art. This new alternative allowed artists to problematize and blend different methods, styles, and subjects, such as political subjugation, ideological involvement, the conformism

of communities, occasionally traumatic experiences of everyday life, romantic and familial relationships, one's own experiences, fears, and disappointments. Read in such a way, I have come to call KwieKulik's efforts as the art of affective realism (a concept which I will expound on in another essay<sup>39</sup>).

#### 4. Head Activities to "Experiential Thinking"<sup>40</sup>

Here, I would like to briefly dissect one specific undertaking which not only combined an exploration of violence, interpersonal relationships, intimacy, and politics, but also accumulated the intense tensions that drove the dynamics of KwieKulik's efforts – *Head Activities in Three Scenes* presented at the Labirynt Gallery in Lublin in October of 1978. The effort was a "protest appearance," after the authorities denied issuing passports to the artists. The performance consisted of three sections:

Before entering the room, the attendees were asked to stick small red flags behind their ears [...] As they entered, they were seeing Kwiek and Kulik with heads stuck in the seats of two chairs. In the second section, Kulik sat on the floor with her head sticking out from the bottom of a washbowl. After pouring water into the bowl, Kwiek washed his face, pulled off his shirt, washed his armpits, and then took off his shoes, socks, and washed his feet. Kwiek then poured more water into the bowl, putting the water level slightly above Kulik's mouth but below her nose, so that she could breathe but couldn't speak. Then he put the tip of a knife against the back of her head and started to yell: "Go on, say something, you whore... You can't, can you...?!" In the third and final part, the attendees saw Kwiek and Kulik with trash can stuck on their heads (with holes cut in the bottoms). Then, two other artists [...] began to circle the duo, throwing trash previously taken out of a bin in the gallery corridor into the buckets.<sup>41</sup>

The performance described above has to be one of the most oppressive in the entire history of KwieKulik. It blends at least a couple themes, problems, and techniques that the duo believed important. It definitely explores

39 Due to the space limitations, this issue will be explored in depth in a separate essay, *KwieKulik jako zmęczeni terroryści. Sztuka realizmu afektywnego* [KwieKulik as Tired Terrorists: *The Art of Affective Realism*] (to be released in print).

40 To quote a very apt term coined by Katarzyna Bojarska, cf. Katarzyna Bojarska, "Poczuć myślenie: afektywne procedury historii i krytyki (dziś)" ["Experiential Thinking: Affective Procedures in History and Criticism (Today)"], *Teksty Drugie* 6 (2013).

41 *KwieKulik, Zofia Kulik & Przemysław Kwiek*, 294.

the combination of the spheres of art, politics, privacy, and eroticism, here driven to the point of degeneration and vulgarity. Kwiek's brutal treatment of Kulik can be read as an expression of domination and contempt for her as a woman, partner, and artist who fails to strive for a stronger position in the duo; yelling "Go on, say something, you whore... You can't, can you...?!" could in such a situation be considered a harsh call on Kulik herself to assert her own artistic position.

The red flags (and other red objects) were artefacts of the New Red Art that the duo postulated; they also reference symbols and colors affiliated with the communist party. In this context, Kwiek's humiliating and intimidating behavior towards Kulik are a highly reflective of the mechanisms employed by the authorities and their methods of influencing the citizenry – allowing them to live, "breathe," but stripping them of any capability to speak (mouth below the water line) and restricting their mobility (knife pressed against the back of the head). From this angle, the title not only implies literal interaction with the head as body part, but also ideological manipulation and exerting political pressure.

I am especially interested in the question of violence and humiliation. Although Kulik was definitely the chief "victim" in the middle portion of *Head Activities*, in the final part the role of Kwiek shifted – once an aggressor, he was now another victim of oppression. But were the artists the only ones to be intensely experienced? Not necessarily. If we were to study the mechanisms driving many of the duo's efforts, we would definitely notice that we are dealing here with something that, like in the paintings of Francis Bacon, decides the final impression and the overall striking effect. Commenting on his own painting of Pope Innocent X, Bacon asserted the he "wanted to paint the scream more than the horror." In his analysis, Gilles Deleuze argued that:

As soon as there is horror, a story is reintroduced, and the scream is botched. In the end, the maximum violence will be found in the seated or crouching Figures, which are subjected to neither torture nor brutality, to which nothing visible happens, and yet which manifest the power of the paint all the more. This is because violence has two very different meanings [...]. The violence of sensation is opposed to the violence of the represented (the sensational, the cliché). The former is inseparable from its direct action on the nervous system, the levels through which it passes, the domains it traverses [...]. It is the same with Artaud: cruelty is not what one believes it to be, and depends less and less on what is represented.<sup>42</sup>

42 Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation* (London: Continuum, 2003), 38-39.



The audience, an important part in the performance of *Head Activities*, definitely had difficulty restraining their emotional reactions to the sight of Kwiek threatening Kulik with a knife. In that moment, the roles were defined very clearly: Kwiek was the oppressor, Kulik the victim, while the audience played witness. I assert, however, that the situation shifted radically in the third and final portion of the performance, when both artists, with trash cans on their shoulders with the heads inside, were inundated with waste from a bin in the gallery hallway. The thing was that the trash was picked out just before the performance, so the waste could have been discarded by anyone in the audience. This, in turn, made every member in the audience somewhat responsible for the humiliation suffered by the artists. The method was supposed to make people in the audience – flags stuck behind their ears – realize that the division into the oppressors and the oppressed, the involved and the passive, the manipulators and the manipulated is more or less illusory. Simultaneously, the audience was subject to what Katarzyna Bojarska penetratingly called “the takeover of power,” that is “using the instruments of power which then allow artists, critics, and scholars to forcefully push their way into the sphere of public discourse.”<sup>43</sup>

Thanks to their highly ambiguous attitude towards the authorities, KwieKulik managed to avoid both cynicism and utopian anti-politicization. Additionally, thanks to their efforts there were finally “reasons to fear art.”<sup>44</sup> And indeed, the audiences of Kulik and Kwiek were exposed to both psycho-affective and physical pressure (for example *The Experiencing Monument*). The question arises: why did the artists provoke their audiences and what did they need such potent tensions for?

Paradoxically, despite the pain and distress they subjected their bodies to, Kwiek and Kulik saved the most intense experiences for their audiences. In the case of *Head Activities*, the violence perpetrated between the partners and the violence they were subject to when their heads were inundated with waste was the violence of the represented, predictable and trivialized by Deleuze. It was only the tension emerging between the audience, the artists, and an undefined yet hinted at political entity that turned out to be genuine violence of sensation, and as such the true stakes of KwieKulik’s practices.

43 Cf. Bojarska’s arguments in “Miłość do emancypacji. O warsztacie i zaangażowaniu badacza-humanisty z Piotrem Piotrowskim rozmawiają Luiza Nader, Katarzyna Bojarska i Adam Mazur” [“Love of Emancipation. Luiza Nader, Katarzyna Bojarska, and Adam Mazur Discuss Techniques and Involvement of Scholars of Humanities with Piotr Piotrowski”], <http://widok.ibl.waw.pl/index.php/one/article/view/87/115>, accessed February 28, 2015.

44 Maciej Gdula, “KwieKulik – przeciw cynizmowi, przeciw antypolityce” [“KwieKulik – Against Cynicism, Against Anti-Politics”] in *KwieKulik, Zofia Kulik & Przemysław Kwiek*, 514.

The laboratory of experience and the laboratory of form allowed the artists to generate new experiences, meanings, and techniques. Their art was a continuous process, the perfect embodiment of what could be considered as cultural “verbness,”<sup>45</sup> which Kulik once labeled as “functionality.” In practice, it turned out that the artists not only sought new forms of verbalizing and dealing with experiences, but also propounded new formulas of experiencing reality. Their everyday efforts turned out to be not just a creative practice, but also a conscious and involved method of unharnessing oneself between experienced reality and its official representations (state, propagandist, Socialist Realist, etc.). Additionally, it also seems that the laboratory established by the duet and its inherent functionality, “processuality,” or “verbness” were, by design, destined for the “long run.” The clarity of expression of KwieKulik efforts is probably supposed to inspire the more contemporary audience to retroactively trigger new meanings in the course of the act of analysis, to re-experience and intellectualize them, and, as a result, to maybe even “imagine communism.”<sup>46</sup>

*Translation: Jan Szelągiewicz*

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45 Nycz, “W stronę,” 246.

46 The title of the spectacle *Imagine-Communism* was originally suggested by Zygmunt Piotrowski. My thanks to Mrs. Zofia Kulik for clearing that up.

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Elżbieta Konończuk

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## Black Women in Biographical Narratives

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The book opens with two scenes. In the first, which takes place in a Paris salon at the start of the nineteenth century, a full-figured black woman with particularly well-defined buttocks dances wildly and passionately before the representatives of Europe's upper class. In the second scene, which takes place in the twentieth century, a black woman, beautiful and self-assured, walks down a catwalk. With these two scenes Anna Wiczorkiewicz begins her book entitled *Czarna kobieta na białym tle. Dyptryk biograficzny* [*Black Woman on a White Background: A Dual Biography*], whose heroes are Saartjie Baartman and Waris Dirie. Both born and raised in Africa, they achieved fame in Europe, though the exact nature of that fame was determined by the culture and the times they lived in.

The researcher retells the story of black women whose life stories have been told many times before and are firmly established in the collective imagination through popular culture. Therefore, the author's goal is not to provide just another iteration of the biographies of these two women, but rather to give a self-conscious reappraisal of the methods of constructing biographical narratives and the role of the implied author within these narratives.

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The first part of the book is devoted to methodological considerations of biography defined as a “construct created, transmitted, and functioning in accordance with cultural norms,”<sup>1</sup> therefore having multiple variants that are a source of knowledge about those who tell them and their world. A biography – of a historical figure, for example, that has been the subject of numerous works written in different periods – becomes a particular type of anthropological narrative as subsequent authors face the task of understanding not only the figure they attempt to describe, but also the biographers preceding them, whose methods of research and expression were determined by the times and the prevailing discourses. The author of this dual biography – in light of today’s dominant feminist and postcolonial discourses which lend themselves to both Saartjie Baartman and Waris Dirie – proposes a story that is focused on both the body and biography, as she is particularly interested in the mechanism which allows discourses to take individuals into their possession, and as Wiczorkiewicz writes:

shape their bodies and biographies, and then take control over them and use them for their own purposes – scientific, social, political, economic, artistic, leisurely...<sup>2</sup>

The biography of Saartjie – the Black Venus, as she was called – is built as a conjunction of two kinds of narrative. The first constructs the bodily identity of its hero and the second her onstage identity. The topic of corporeality arises from the discourses of natural history, anthropology, and medicine, all of which attempt to observe, describe, and classify phenomena. William Burchell, a naturalist and painter, at the beginning of the second decade of the nineteenth century in his travel notes and sketches lays the groundwork for European presuppositions relating to the image of the African world – the natural habitat of the Khoikhoi Venus. The accounts of naturalists who travelled through Africa at that time, which became an integral part of natural history, fall somewhere between an innocent appreciation of the natural environment and a narrative of conquest that attempts to submit the world to European authority. From the accounts of expeditions to the south of Africa – provided by Peters Kolb, Anders Sparrman (one of the Apostles of Linnaeus), and William Peterson – the figure of a Hottentot emerged and Saartjie became its embodiment, serving as a specimen in the research of Hottentot

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1 Anna Wiczorkiewicz, *Czarna kobieta na białym tle. Dyptyk biograficzny* (Kraków: Universitas, 2013), 8.

2 *Ibid.*, 10.

attributes. Georges Cuvier, a naturalist and zoologist, played a prominent part in the construction of the image of Black Venus, and subjected her to anatomical examination and introduced her into the field of scientific inquiry as a creature with ape-like movements and lips pronounced like an orangutan. Henri de Blainville also left a detailed report describing Saartjie's body, incorporating it, as an object of a certain kind, into the evolutionary order of nature. Both zoologists view the subject of their research with utmost precision, they study each anatomical detail and determine the exact color of each body part. Their interest and excitement is aroused by wide hips, pronounced buttocks, but most of all by the so-called hottentot apron, that is the overly elongated labia minora. Another naturalist and traveler, François Le Vaillant, as an expert on the anatomy of the women from the Cape, enriches contemporary knowledge of that intimate anatomical detail by popularizing it through drawings brought back from trips to Africa. Sketches of fauna and flora made by travelers broadened the knowledge of faraway lands and supplementing such a collection with the depiction of a hottentot woman not only completed the picture of the natural order, but was also a gesture of asserting possession of that exotic world.

Saartjie's biography is a conjunction of two types of narrative: one focused mainly on its heroine's corporeality and the other relating to the ways of presenting her body. The nineteenth century, fascinated by exoticism and the curiosities lining the walls of studies, found a representative of the last subspecies, which was made up of natural monstrosities, namely the *Homo monstrosus*, as the Linnaean order of nature classified the Hottentots. A human on display – to recall the author's remark that *monstrare* means to show – became the subject of various curatorial, exhibitory, and museum practices. Anna Wiczorkiewicz considers these practices as constitutive of that systematic biography of Black Venus which she defines as her onstage identity. She appeared on the stage of the European world whose ideas of the exotic countries and their inhabitants were formed by drawings of travelers which revealed the oddities of the Black Continent. The European scene prepared numerous settings for her. The Liverpool Museum arranged a habitat scenery in which a faraway African landscape served as a backdrop for Saartjie emerging from a hut. Parisian shows, on the other hand, proposed different attractions for different audiences: on fairground stages, the Hottentot Venus appears with a collar on her neck and was led on a leash for the amusement of the crowd; in the salons she danced and played on African instruments; she also performed for academics, broadening their knowledge of the exotic world.

Saartjie's posthumous biography was constructed by scholars within exhibition venues. Black Venus, musealized, therefore became an exhibit,

a kind of reference specimen. Her body, illegally transferred to the National Museum of Natural History in Paris after her death, was dissected according to the anatomical principles, and the parts which were preserved, researched, and meticulously catalogued then served as a model for a plaster cast. The intimate body part, the hottentot apron, preserved in alcohol, was also preserved in an exceptionally naturalistic description made by Cuvier. That is how museum life began for Saartjie whose skeleton, together with a plaster cast of her body, was donated in 1937 as part of an anthropological collection to the newly opened Museum of Man in Paris. The museum career of Black Venus was still to have a few noteworthy turns. In the 1980s, Stephen Gould, a paleontologist and evolutionary biologist, based his impressions of a visit to the Museum of Man on the observation that alongside the preserved sexual organs of the Hottentot Venus was paradoxically displayed the preserved brain of Pierre Paul Broca – an anthropologist and discoverer of the center of articulate speech in the brain. This fact became the basis for reflecting upon the awareness of nineteenth-century scientists who laid out the foundations of racist ideology. Gould points out that he has not found either a female brain or male genitals in the collection. In 1994, the cast of Saartjie's body was lent to an exhibition of nineteenth-century ethnographic sculpture organized at the Musée d'Orsay, where it attested to the ways of depicting and experiencing Others, before being returned to storage.

A new chapter in the posthumous biography of Saartjie was opened by Nelson Mandela who in 1994, during Francois Mitterrand's visit to South Africa, requested the return of her remains. In 2002, after several years of negotiations – complicated by the fact that the body of Black Venus, as a museum holding, had the status of national heritage – they were finally transported to Cape Town with the consent of the French National Assembly. The burial ceremony was held on August 9th, the National Women's Day in South Africa, and it was an important event for the community. The President's speech summing up Saartjie's life voyage recast her biography as that of a national hero and, from that point onward, her life became a constructive element of narratives of identity, post colonialism, and resentment that unmask the western barbarity towards otherness.

An important article that led to a discussion of the interpretation of Saartjie's biography was a text by Saner L. Gilmann from 1985, titled *Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth-Century Art, Medicine, and Literature*, in which the author suggestively inscribes Saartjie into the context of artistic representations (images, erotic photography) of a black, sexualized woman. He constructs his argument on the thesis which claims that at the center of the colonial mindset lay the perception of "indigenous populations" as requiring control. Women were also viewed from

this perspective – and especially black women, who were associated with primitive and savage sexuality, resulting from a lack of self-control. Gilman's article, due to the controversial thesis presented within it, started a discussion on the biography of the Hottentot Venus, who once more became a heroine of narratives, this time within the discursive space of the modern humanities. These narratives are focused – as the author of the reviewed volume points out – on the figure of the mute black women, on the one hand, and on the agency of her voice, on the other. A representative of the feminist approach, Anne Fausto-Sterling – by giving up illustrational material, including the caricatures exaggerating the anatomical features considered deviant and monstrous – relinquishes the rhetoric inherited from the colonial discourse and proposes a search for a new language that would enable the description of similar phenomena. She offers a reading of the history of Black Venus – whose body was turned into an object of interpretation by Europeans who, therefore, deprived her of any vital power – as an illustration of the mechanisms of producing racist ideology. The object of interest for contemporary narratives has, consequently, shifted to the agency of the heroine who has previously been depicted as mute and docile. Her identity, defined by actions, thoughts, and emotions, is actualized in artistic representations. In a poem published in 1989 by an African-American poet, Elizabeth Alexander, the Hottentot Venus speaks in her own voice about her degradation and about her dreams, advocating for the self-determination of black women. In 1996 Suzan-Lori Parks staged her controversial play at The Public Theater in New York. The play, by alluding to fairground show practices, unmasks the mechanism of the entertainment business and of presenting oneself for show. The viewer is faced with questions of the consumption of culture and his own complicity in putting the Other on show.

Anna Wiczorkiewicz – by introducing herself into her narrative as a researcher neutral to the story being told – decides to listen to the voices of those who for more than two centuries told the story of Saartjie Baartman, in order to apprehend the strategies of constructing meanings attributed to their heroine, which feature in their narratives. The researcher navigates numerous discourses and, with the precision of an archeologist, reveals subsequent layers of meaning accrued around Black Venus, which have built up in a palimpsestic fashion, turning her biography into an elaborate text of culture. The author's research strategy can be likened to the approach of a historian who, immersed in the archives, attempts to reach the truth not through interpretation, but rather through the richness of sources presented to the reader who themselves must create a narrative upon their basis. Of course, we have to be mindful of the fact that the choice of sources and their structuring also bear the mark of interpretation.

The second of the pair of biographies is that of Waris Dirie, a Somali-born black model, who went on to make a spectacular career on the runways of Milan, London, New York, and Paris. The story of Waris becomes entangled in the contexts of Josephine Baker's history, who, by exposing her physicality through ferocious dancing, has reinforced the assumption of the eroticism of black women. A reference to Baker's biography helps to comprehend Europe's historically turbulent infatuation with Africa, on the one hand, and the mechanisms of commodification of black women's biographical narratives, on the other.

Two centuries separate the lives of Waris Dirie and Saartjie Baartman, and the Somali model – in contrast to her silent predecessor – has the opportunity to influence her public image, which she does as the author of autobiographies: *Desert Flower*, *Desert Dawn*, *Desert Children*, *Letter to My Mother*, and *Schwarze Frau, weißes Land*. Anna Wiczorkiewicz shows the way in which Waris proceeds with her self-presentation, utilizing narrative patterns solidly grounded in culture. The author of the *Letter to My Mother* proposes, for example, the mode of a fairytale narrative to present the Western world, to where a little girl journeys, as distant and dangerous, though decent people whom she encounters help her achieve happiness. The autobiographical stories of Waris bear the sign of identity narratives, focused on self-knowledge and therapy, which belong to an “exhibitionist culture” that stems from the demand for intimate confessions made in public. Confessions addressed to the mother – that are at the same time an accusation of complicity in the suffering and humiliation of the daughter – are a form of therapeutic self-narrative, where the question of the author's identity resurfaces time and again.

In her previous books – *Muzeum ludzkich ciał. Anatomia spojrzenia* [*Museum of Human Bodies: The Anatomy of Looking*],<sup>3</sup> *Apetyt turysty. O doświadczeniu świata w podróży* [*A Tourist's Appetite: Experiencing the World Through Travel*],<sup>4</sup> *Monstruarium*<sup>5</sup> – Anna Wiczorkiewicz proposes various anthropological narratives, always exemplifying the process of enquiry into the researched phenomenon and its reception. Considering narrative to be an analytical instrument, she generally constructs it upon an epistemological metaphor that visualizes the analytical process. It is principally a metaphor of the museum, gallery, or a cabinet of curiosities, which introduce the reader into a space of astonishing

3 Anna Wiczorkiewicz, *Muzeum ludzkich ciał. Anatomia spojrzenia* (Gdańsk: słowo/obraz terytoria, 2000).

4 Anna Wiczorkiewicz, *Apetyt turysty: o doświadczeniu świata w podróży* (Kraków: Universitas, 2008).

5 Anna Wiczorkiewicz, *Monstruarium* (Gdańsk: słowo/obraz terytoria, 2009).



occurrences, giving them the impression of direct experience. The author's scholarly imagination is not only associated with the experience of the museum but also with the experience of travel, and therefore the metaphor of voyage also gives structure to the narrative order of her works.

*Czarna kobieta na białym tle* pursues the question researched in previous works – that of corporality as a historically and culturally mediated phenomenon. In this case the matter at hand puts particular demands on the researcher as the bodies of black women – the subject of her inquiry – are in fact displayed, made available to the public, which means that their study might easily skew towards interest in curiosity or deformation. The author in this book also asserts a self-referential stance, revealing the interpretative difficulties associated with the nature of scrutinized documents. Therefore, she leaves traces of her presence in the text, regularly underscoring her impartiality towards the presented subject and at the same time problematizing her own actions, utilizing narrative and compositional patterns for this end, which allows one to consider this book as representative of narrative anthropology.

*Translation: Rafał Pawluk*

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 Krystyna Kłosińska
 

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## The Secret of the Dulskis' Establishment

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The choice of *The Morality of Mrs. Dulska* can seem surprising in the context of discussing the problem of “masculinity.” As Felician is – very meaningfully if truth be told – silent and only once do we hear his voice: “The devil take the lot of you!!!”<sup>1</sup> Dulski’s silence places him in a stereotypically feminine position. In a vacant space within the text (society) – a space of suppression. And it can be expected that this placing will affect the way Dulski’s gender identity will be shaped. Nevertheless, the author provides us with certain information: some characteristic is provided in the production notes, which register Felician’s body language. He usually shrugs off his wife’s naggings, which are supposed to provoke him to make up his mind. Each day he is sent by Dulska, who is convinced that she cares for his health, on a fictitious stroll – fictitious, as the road leading up to the Great Castle is replaced by walking in circles around the room – in an “automatic” motion “he closes his eyes and moves like

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*krytyka literacka* [Feminist Literary Criticism] (2010; shortlisted for the Jan Długosz Award in 2010). She lectures in Gender Studies at the Institute of Literary Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences.

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1 Gabriela Zapolska, *The Morality of Mrs. Dulska*, trans. Teresa Murjas (Bristol: Intellect, 2007), 70. All subsequent quotations from this edition are marked in the text with the letter M and a page number.

a marionette.” At the same time, Zapolska adds, he paces “like an animal in a cage,” (M, 39) under Aniela’s vigilant and controlling eye. The restricted basic drives find release through automatism, as if Dulski existed and functioned between two worlds: the mechanical world and the organic world. The former refers to his status of a middle-level functionary, who is just a cog in a machine; the latter to the status of an animal in a zoo. This animalism is underscored by the peculiar noises that Dulski makes (“mutters” M, 41). Both these ways of being are actualized within the domestic space.

Dulski’s silence, among other things, obliges me to undertake some interpretative decisions. “Masculinity” cannot be reconstructed in disregard of “femininity,” because gender traits, positions, the roles of Dulski and Dulska result from the interrelations of these two predicates. And the fact that these are relative terms is an important one. Having in mind the established tradition of reading this drama,<sup>2</sup> I choose an interpretative path that will take into account some of the dominant propositions. Among them the one which leads to questions of morality. I do not refrain from them, as Bożena Karwowska did,<sup>3</sup> because I consider the gender perspective to require the activation of different than previously explored aspects of the text, such as those related to the body. And although I do not contest her argument that “moral questions” are “associated with the intellectual sphere, and therefore symbolically masculine,”<sup>4</sup> I nevertheless hope to hear them resound in a novel way, in juxtaposition with questions that go beyond gender. The broad question that will be at the center of my enquiry relates to the processes of producing

2 Today, Dulska’s personality does not seem to hold any secrets before us. And, as we can imagine, numerous interpreters – with more or less disdain – refer to displays of Dulska’s boorishness and to her hypocrisy in particular. A break with this interpretative line comes rather early with the words of Karol Irzykowski, who in a substantial study “Problem obłudy – Początek (Tartuffe świadkiem przeciw Boyowi),” in *Pisma (Walka o treść, Beniaminek)*, ed. Andrzej Lam (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1976), paradoxically defends a certain kind of hypocrisy and, therefore, revises the very notion itself. See also Julian Krzyżanowski, *Neoromantyzm polski 1890-1918* (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1963); Tomasz Weiss, introduction to *Moralność pani Dulskiej*, by Gabriela Zapolska (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1966); Stefan Lichański, *Cienie i profile* (Warszawa: PIW, 1967); Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński, “Moralność pani Dulskiej,” in *Pisma*, vol. 19 (Warszawa: PIW, 1963); Roman Taborski, introduction to *Moralność pani Dulskiej*, by Gabriela Zapolska (Warszawa: WSiP, 1975); Włodzimierz Maciąg, “Za co panią Dulską szanować winniśmy...” *Życie Literackie* 438 (1960); Józef Rurawski, *Gabriela Zapolska* (Warszawa: Wiedza Powszechna, 1987).

3 Bożena Karwowska, *Ciało i śmiech w Moralności Pani Dulskiej Gabrieli Zapolskiej*; [http://www.wuj.pl/UserFiles/File/Wieloglos%2010%202011/13\\_Karwowska%20Bozena%20-%20Cialo%20i%20smiech.pdf](http://www.wuj.pl/UserFiles/File/Wieloglos%2010%202011/13_Karwowska%20Bozena%20-%20Cialo%20i%20smiech.pdf), accessed March 14, 2015.

4 *Ibid.*, 4.

Dulska's and Dulski's genders and, therefore, what role determinants of class, economy, and socio-cultural norms play in this process – in what way do they shape the inner (and also moral) life of these *dramatis personae*?<sup>5</sup>

The fundamental shift from the previous interpretations will come as a consequence of recalling an unknown – or even if known to scholars then previously unpursued – interpretative context. I am referring to Zapolska's outline for a novel *Śmierć Felicjana Dulskiego* [*The Death of Felicjan Dulski*], which was written approximately at the time of *The Morality of Mrs. Dulska*. This context will allow me to unmask some stereotypes that have entangled the figure of Dulska: those relating to her asexuality, irreproachable maternal love, frugality – both precautious and responsible; but will also give me a chance to investigate Dulska's relations with her son, daughters, fellow men, and, most of all, the relationship with her husband. It will grant insight into the secret behind Dulski's silence. In this new context hypocrisy will gain new companion in the form of stupidity and cruelty. The alliance of cruelty and stupidity will in turn rearrange the accents in the discourse: instead of focusing on the second predicate of the subtitle: “-farce,” I will concentrate on the leading “tragic-.”<sup>6</sup> What is more, Zapolska's own correspondence invites this kind of reading. In her letter to Feldman, she attempts to persuade him of the play's merits by underscoring its tragic aspect. She writes:

I wanted to give in this boorish tragic-farce a picture of bourgeois villainess. When that girl [Mela – K.K.] calls at the end: “they have killed someone here” – that is exactly what happened. The human soul was murdered there. Pray, consider this. You will feel it! You will understand it!<sup>7</sup>

In her correspondence with Lorentowicz Zapolska reiterates:

Look at her closely, not through the laughter of people, who are amused by a series of jokes. The very ending is laden with meaning – Mela's scream

5 Georg Simmel, to whom I will often refer, pointed out an important interdependence of economy and spirituality. He perceived an economic basis in the forms of spirituality of a certain period, and conversely – e.g., in fiscal policy – he found the expression of a spiritual project, even if the extreme worship of money, observed in his time, automatically diminished the metaphysical or religious needs of individuals. Georg Simmel, *Philosophy of Money* (London: Routledge, 2011). All quotations from this edition are henceforth given in the text with the letters GS with page number.

6 I choose a different way of looking than Karwowska, who focused on Zapolska's strategy of constructing the farcical aspect of the play.

7 Gabriela Zapolska, *Listy*, ed. Stefania Linowska, vol. 2 (Warszawa: PIW, 1970), 235.

of horror when she calls: “they have killed someone here...” Pay attention to how seamlessly monstrosities occur in that world.<sup>8</sup>

### 1. Class and Economy

Dulska represents the bourgeoisie, or rather the petite bourgeoisie. And this social setting constitutes a vital determinant in her practice of everyday life. In a classic dissertation *Moralność mieszczańska* [*Bourgeois Morality*] Maria Ossowska characterizes the late nineteenth-century bourgeoisie as “a group which constitutes in the cities the so-called society, and which does not belong to the aristocracy. This group is labile – one can enter into it and fall out of it just as easily – and membership is based on a certain level of education and the way of life.”<sup>9</sup> This group is also characterized by its inner stratification. In *The Death of Felicjan Dulski* Zapolska meticulously notes the scale of humiliation that is experienced by Dulska in conflicts with her daughter-in-law, née Brajbur, who comes from the elite of Lviv bourgeoisie – the Matura exam at-tests to her education, her family is elevated by kinship with the Rector. The Brajburs – owners of a townhouse and long-standing members of the city council – have clearly aristocratic ambitions:

Often they were the Masters [Król kurkowy – translator’s note] of the Marksmen’s Guild and you should see how a Brajbur, having won for himself the crown [at the shooting range], led a procession of townfolk with a silver cock hanging at his bosom.<sup>10</sup>

Meanwhile, Dulska answering the provocative questions of the Brajbur girl, who looks for connections “of Dulskis’ bourgeois family branch” with “good, old aristocracy,” must, “choking,” resort to lies to defend the family’s reputation. The social status of bourgeois Brajburs is safe due to their assets; that of petit bourgeois Dulskis is uncertain. Hence Dulska’s horror of losing social status and the pauperization that would follow. This fear is masked by outward gestures, which – by giving the outward appearance of prosperity – hide the undergoing struggle for every penny. As the owner of a townhouse Dulska takes care of its façade, the appearance of the staircase, and she does all of

8 Zapolska, *Listy*, 242–243.

9 Maria Ossowska, *Moralność mieszczańska* (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1985), 16.

10 Gabriela Zapolska, “Śmierć Felicjana Dulskiego,” in *Dzieła wybrane*, vol. 10 *Szkice powieściowe* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1958), 283. All quotations from this edition are marked in the text with the letter D.

it because her privacy, which is held on public display, is supposed to attest to the Dulskis' financial capacity, and therefore to their social status.

In *The Death of Felicjan Dulski* Zapolska adds a new element to the interrelation of economic and social status. She describes the "saucepan epopee" of Dulska, whose "kitchen was her pride and joy":

No one in the neighborhood had as much tin and copper as she did. The tenants were also graded by Dulska by the number of saucepots they possessed. If they were copper saucepots then you knew that this was someone "swell." Other dependable people had also an assortment of enamel saucepots. Below them were those of whose honesty, integrity, and morality as such Mrs. Dulska would rather not speak about. She only grimaced slightly. (D, 317)

When the saucepot inventory was becoming depleted, the lady of the house revitalized it by lowering the maid's wages. Dulska treats objects as signs of status and means of self-presentation. It is through them that her bourgeois virtues manifest themselves: forethought, thrift, diligence – these constitute the bedrock of bourgeois standards and principles and are universally "approved and consecrated." Dulska's inventiveness is, in turn, expressed in her logic – constructing a direct causal link between the order of things (their quantity and quality) and the order of values, between the moral and the spiritual order; as the quantity and quality of possessed objects can elevate people to the stature of "honest" and "dependable." The position occupied in the socio-economic hierarchy therefore determines – as a matter of simple symmetry – the place within the spiritual hierarchy. This logic also reveals the nature of Dulska's quest for an ideal 'I'; and entangles the fulfillment of this desire with possession – of things, people, goods, and money. The ideal moral 'I' to express itself – to become – must have. This credo of Dulska, and her whole social stratum to a certain extent, in some sense legitimizes her household microeconomics.

Dulska's "virtue" of thriftiness endows the world of objects with a special value. They play a role that is not as much aesthetic or utilitarian as Dulska equips them with the supreme trait that fills them with meaning in the broader structure of the world of values – durability. A divine perpetuity. She brilliantly recognizes that in themselves things are devoid of value. They only acquire it when introduced into the realm of exchange, with the conversion of their economic value into a monetary equivalent. Money wasted due to mismanagement of things shatters Dulska's well-being, distancing her from her desired self-image. Dulska counts and notes: the number of wooden sticks for tinder, naphtha used in lamps, the durability of Hesia's gumboots, broomsticks, the

number of raisins in the dough which should equal the number of those brought from the store. Money should not only be valued, it must also be multiplied. Therefore, not to pay for the ticket, Dulska makes Hesia crouch in the tram, that is also why she overlooks the practices of a “coquette” – she uses the tidy sum from her rent to pay the taxes. The balance of gains and losses is the source of her obsessive antipathy towards physicians, which is depicted in *The Death*. They are characterized in economic terms as “bloodsuckers,” “abusers,” cunning “conmen,” “poisoners,” “impostors,” and “animal doctors,” whose only goal is profit. This animosity is expressed in a vane and narcissistic statement of utter stupidity: “I heal myself, and you, and father. Household remedies are more reliable and... they cost less” (D, 275). The final part of that sentence, exhaled rather than spoken, is key. Dulska’s virtue of thriftiness takes on the shape of horror, which is endured for several months by Felicjan whose broken leg is diagnosed by Dulska as a “bruising” and treated, accordingly, with lots of rest, what in the end leads not to recovery but death.

Dulska embodies, in a hyperbolic way, the tendencies of her own age. They were laid out with precision by Georg Simmel in *The Philosophy of Money*, which investigates the sociological and psychological effects of monetarization of economy. Money as a tool of exchange, defined as “abstract economic value” (GS, 127), ruined the system of relationship, solidarity, and interpersonal dependencies. It is “responsible for impersonal relations between people” (GS, 321). The relations an individual establishes with others are of the same kind as his relations with things, and are mediated by money. “Money is – Simmel writes – the ideal representative of such a condition since it makes possible relationships between people but leaves them personally undisturbed; it is the exact measure of material achievements, but is very inadequate for the particular and personal.” (GS, 305). Excerpts from Simmel give a clearer understanding of Dulska’s status; he is devoid of his individuality and personhood, and amounts to nothing more than a mere thing. If the value of things is objectified in monetary exchange, then – bound to his bed – Dulska loses value. He does not work, and therefore represents no perceptible gain for his wife. That is why she avoids making any investments in him. That the value of a person/thing has its monetary equivalent is attested to by the scene in which Dulska prolongs Felicjan’s life. One must remember that even the value of life is relative in the realm of money. Dulska knows that after her husband’s death she will receive a pension that will secure her future. Nevertheless, she is disenchanted by “a piece of paper” that makes her realize that Felicjan is still only “an eight [rank] superintendent.” That is the reason Dulska modifies her initial wishes: “Oh, the hell with you! The hell with you, you nincompoop!...” (D, 322). Dulska’s hope that Felicjan will be promoted and the pension will become more substantial, extends his life:

Not now... not now... let him be promoted to the sixth rank, or the seventh, at least.  
 She glanced at the Holy Mary.  
 Blessed Virgin... Health of the Sick, Tower of Ivory, Ark of the Covenant...  
 support him... and that sixth rank... (D,322)

Dulska perverts the bourgeois virtue of frugality, turning it into an irrational miserliness, into predatory gain-seeking and preying on easy victims. This rapaciousness finds expression in Felicjan's remarks, when he confronts Anieli's ways with a nostalgic recollection of a prostitute:

Because the other seemed to expect something more from him than money and sexual pleasures.  
 This one, in turn, awaited nothing at all.  
 Because she did not want him to bring her anything on his own.  
 She simply took it all from him by force. (D, 307)

By introducing Dulski's viewpoint Zapolska, in a meaningful way, contradicts the common, though not unique, perception of the nature of relationships that are produced by prostitution. This is most certainly a manifestation of the writer's conviction that contemporary marriage is a thinly veiled form of prostitution. Returning to Simmel once again – as he was shortly summarized by Anne-Emmanuelle Berger – we should say that prostitution is “both a model and form of the most extreme interpersonal relationship «bound» by money and the objectification of the traded good.”<sup>11</sup> It is also a reduction of a human person to a mere means. Therefore, if Dulska deposes Felicjan – husband to the role of means, then she degrades his value as a person. Dulski frames his relationship with the prostitute very differently. Although he does not overlook the monetary aspect inherently associated with prostitution – purchasing of “sexual pleasures” – he nevertheless goes beyond the value as equated with the monetary equivalent, referencing in fact the historically preceding form of gift, as described by Marcel Mauss.<sup>12</sup> He therefore individualizes the reciprocity of the relationship (the prostitute has a name), and neutral-

11 Anne-Emmanuelle Berger, *Le grand théâtre du genre. Identités, Sexualités et Féminisme en "Amérique"* (Paris: Belin, 2013), 219.

12 “In economic theory, the gift is among the anomalies that are hard to explain with existing models. At the same time, the concept of the gift (which we cannot repay) is the basic principle of the Christian salvation.” A. Sedláček, *Economics of Good and Evil: The Quest for Economic Meaning from Gilgamesh to Wall Street* (Oxford: OUP, 2011), 135.



izes the degrading reification of people entering this kind of relationship. The other expected from him – as a person – a “voluntary” gift. Dulska, in turn, took everything from him by force. The other expected an exchange of spiritual values, and these are valuable for Dulska because they escape monetary exchangeability. This is proved by Helusia’s fondness of the – symbolic – color red, that he reminisces.

According to Georg Simmel, “the peculiarity of money lies in its being acquired by dealing successfully with other objects” (GS, 307). Dulska proves her abilities in this respect while negotiating with Hanka – who is depersonalized in this encounter – when she tries to settle on a monetary equivalent, though she does not recognize the girl’s debasement and “injury.” She is well-aware that she must preclude the threat of *mésalliance*, which would compromise her desired social status. Even if a son’s or a husband’s romance with a housemaid was tolerated – having a place among behaviors accounted for in the bourgeois moral code – still a *mésalliance* or a substantial disparity of the dowry were neither sanctioned nor accepted by society.<sup>13</sup> This bourgeois moral code explains, to a certain extent, the scorn and sarcasm with which Dulska refers to the motives of suicide attempted by the Tenant, summing it up with the commonality of experience: “all the business with that girl... that is one thing...” (M, 21). Dulska’s sensitivity to the “eye of the beholder,” her fear of scandal, is caused not as much by her regard for the meticulous self-image projected onto the external world. It is not the aim. It is merely a means of achieving another aim – accumulating profits; in the present time from her tenement building, or otherwise the tenants will leave, and in the future when the respected family name will gain material representation through her son’s and daughters’ marital trade. The “Coquette” is well concealed while the Tenant has compromised Dulska’s interests – she has exposed her family to public ridicule and gossip. Accusations against her are possible through the reification of a person. An act of desperation is classified by Dulska as a poorly played “comedy”: “only death is always something...” “second-rate poison... If you’d at least died... well then...!” (M, 21). Dulska personifies the exact kind of belief in fiction that is noted by Simmel: “The extraordinary simplification and uniformity of the legal system which this reduction to money interest implies has, in association with its actual domination, led to the fiction of the autocratic rule of money – a fiction that also corresponds to the peculiar practical indifference towards those values that cannot be expressed in money terms, even though they are theoretically recognized to be the highest values” (GS, 399).

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<sup>13</sup> See Ossowska, *Moralność mieszczańska*.

## 2. Men on the Marital Marketplace

Dulska's household economy reduces things – accumulated capital, as well as her family – to the role of goods that belong to her only. It would seem that a model for this kind of economy is represented by the market with its circulation of commodities. Nevertheless, Dulska's practice rather points toward an economy that conceptualizes commodities in the common-sense way – that is as material objects. According to Dulska the value of goods does not depend upon their competitiveness – on the quantity of desirous glances of customers – only upon the subjective appraisal of the quality of labor invested into its production. And the labor invested should be reimbursed. Therefore the capital invested into her son, Zbyszko, “all the expenses raising and educating him entailed,” should one day return to her. She was filled with a “hagglers” distress that “what he settled for was far too low” (D, 287). Zbyszko, in turn, more sober in his accounts but also sensitive to values that cannot be conveyed by money, is ready to accede that his disenchanting wife is right in thinking that: “she was the one who paid, and who has been given a worn out low-quality item” (D, 293). Dulska herself has once exchanged her “virtue,” her dowry in the form of virginity, for “a husband's salary.” That is why, defending the budget from being misspent on an ever more “parchment-like,” bedbound, and therefore useless, Felicjan, she repeats the mantra: he ought to pay her “handsomely” for “being his wife all those years” (D, 321). Even more so, as with his prolonged sickness Dulska develops an obsession of material ruin and beggary in her final years.

Underscoring the pecuniary motive, which forms the basis of both marriages, Zapolska tellingly changes – in fact reverses – the cultural convention: a man is now the object of marital trade, and the transaction is carried out by a woman. One could imagine that Aniela also ascribed to herself an active role when she entered the marital contract with Dulski, and that it was her who dictated the terms of that contract. There is one substantial difference, though. If – as Simmel would have it – “where a relationship based on money interest exists in which superiority and advantage rest from the outset on one side, these tendencies may grow further” (GS, 414), then the advantage of the Brajbur girl would be a logical consequence of her financial standing. In turn Dulska's dominance, despite her lack of dowry, is rationalized by her subjective evaluation of gains and losses, which grants her added value as a wife. Meanwhile, in the monetary economy the division of chores in marriage – the man makes money and the woman manages his assets in the household – means that the dowry was considered compensation for the man, who was tasked with providing for his unproductive wife, while for the woman the dowry was supposed to guarantee safety and independence in the new household. Despite all this, Dulska did not require a dowry

to gain all the privileges for herself. This was so because, according to her, her own productivity far surpassed that of her “nincompoo” husband. She expresses her worth when she says: he ought to pay her “handsomely” for “being his wife all those years.”

In contrast with Zbyszko, who is aware that the trade degrades him, Dulaska is free of such feelings; she is confident that, just like things, people only gain in value when one has to pay for them – she makes sure that the transaction is profitable for her.

### 3. Zbyszko's Priggishness

In the drama Zbyszko is tasked with unmasking his “mommy's” morality. He exposes her mentality with irony and sarcasm; mercilessly pierces through her convoluted excuses. One could say he reveals her masquerade, her inner mystifications – “the wardrobe of the soul,” as Irzykowski would say – disclosing the true motives of her actions. He attacks and disarms her “economy of thought,” expressed in doxa and the use of “palliatives.” He exposes the state of intellectual indolence, which she unwittingly characterized herself: “I don't have any time to think” (M, 14). When Dulaska, referring to the maternal sacrifice that ennobles her, attempts to make her son repent by exposing his thanklessness and the reprehensibility of his ways, which subject the household to gossip: “Zbyszko! Did I nourish you with my own milk so that you could drag our decent and respected family name through various cafés and dens of iniquity?” she receives an answer: “You should have reared me on Nestlé's milk – it is, apparently, most excellent” (M, 13). He disdainfully calls his mother's house “an establishment,” “a cemetery” for “expansive, independent thought” (M, 14). He explains to Juliasiewiczowa the etiology of his priggishness.

Because, my angel I was born a prig! Because even in my mother's womb, I was a dyed-in-the-wool philistine! Because even if I tore the flesh from my bones, somewhere down there, inside my soul, is a big, thick layer of ignorance, immune to eradication! There's something else down there too – not sure where it came from – putting up something of a fight, eager to break loose. But I know it's only a matter of time before the big family prig overwhelms my mind, and then I shall be... Felicjan... I shall be... well... quite frankly... Dulski... great-Dulski, über-Dulski, I shall sire Dulskis, whole legions of them... celebrate my silver anniversary and have a decent gravestone, far away from all those dreadful suicides. And I won't be green, only puffed up with fat and puffed up with theories and I shall talk a great deal about God. (M, 32–33)

When Juliasiewiczowa contradicts his fatalism by saying: “one can break the bonds of priggishness,” Zbyszko replies: “Not true! You think you’re free, because you have a little surface polish. But you’re made of mahogany, that’s all, just like your fin-de-siècle furniture and your dyed hair. That’s the mark, madam counsellor – the true mark!” (M, 33).

This “lecture” belongs to the phase of Zbyszko’s suppressed revolt, which, though superficial, spasmodic, and lacking stronger grounding in an existential project, nevertheless allows him to recognize his own entanglement in the priggish mentality and to view himself through the eyes of another – the inhabitant of a modernist café, a bohemian, an artist. Zbyszko views the stigmatizing “mark” from the point of view of those who embody for him a free world of intellect and mores; a world of spiritual values. The “mark” is experienced simultaneously with growing self-knowledge and the recognition of his own “shadow.”<sup>14</sup>

#### 4. Producing Dulskis

This “lecture” also resounds as a kind of prophecy, when it is set side by side with the history of the father and son described in *The Death of Felicjan Dulski*. Zapolska recounts the process through which Zbyszko becomes Dulski that must be similar to the process Felicjan underwent in the past. It is perpetuated not through genes but by laws of economy and the peculiarities of the new female and male gender formation. Zbyszko “tormented by lack of funds, by payday loans, Jewish debt – therefore bound to his family” (D, 276), finds recourse in a solid, “priggish” marriage. The Brajbur girl with her social standing, dowry, education, and manners fulfills all preconditions of an advantageous matrimonial contract.

#### 5. Sexual Politics of the Dulski Women

Financial dependence and the resulting dominance in marriage seems to be transient for both Zbyszko and Dulska. Zbyszko is convinced that, according to the traditional script of sexual relations, “the influence of the senses will allow him to rule over the household” (D, 291), and Milunia “with her pious and modest upbringing” will be easy to “tame and prey-upon” (D, 279). Nevertheless it is not his “sexual politics” that is victorious but that of Milunia.

<sup>14</sup> As understood by Jung. This means that he confronted the reality of dark aspects of his personality that were repressed in his unconscious, which was home to both the individual and collective shadow. Carl Gustav Jung, *Archetypy i symbole. Pisma wybrane*, trans. J. Prokopiuk (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1981).

“Milunia in this most important aspect, in which most young brides fail, has proved herself most adept, even masterful” (D, 292). Her vitality and creative invention with “small, household orgies,” put her in a “leadership position.” “She reigned in her marriage” (D, 291), concludes Zapolska, pointing out the libidinal aspect of control (“reigns”) and the hierarchical nature of marital relationships. And as Dulski, after a failed attempt at resistance, acceded to the “system of tending to his health,” “yielding to fate with all the apathy of a man tired with life and abuse” (D, 291), so did Zbyszko, who “at first bewildered, objected and defended his leadership, soon surrendered, finding his supporting role [in the bedroom] more pleasant, and much more suitable to his character” (D, 292). “Zbyszko did barely notice when he took on the part of Felicjan” (D, 292). By analogy we can recreate a corresponding sexual prowess of Milunia’s mother-in-law. A volcano of energy, an indefatigable vitality, likened by the family to the power of elements: gale and hurricane, finally a howl. If in *The Morality of Mrs. Dulaska* Zapolska merely hints at “Dulaska’s temperament,” then in *The Death* she explicitly lays out the details and does not leave room for speculations about Dulska’s asexuality: “Like the spirit of Banco she roamed the night, searching for someone on whom she could release her temper of an unsatisfied lady of critical age” (D, 278). The conduct of this “lady of critical age” reveals that she did not lose her sexual appetite: “she pounced on Felicjan, deep asleep in his cozy flannel nightgown” (D, 278). Zbyszko “surrendered” leadership in the bedroom to his wife, Felicjan, in turn, “shrugged Dulska off, resigned, as if he was trying to avoid a fly.” What is striking in the case of both son and father is the dispersed, exhausted vital and sexual energy. If the male gender represents the decline of power, decline of energy, its overuse; then the female gender represents its accumulation, capitalization, its disproportionate overabundance. And Zapolska, in accordance with the positivist, mechanical–energetic model,<sup>15</sup> persuades that this asymmetry of energy and will is caused by the lifestyle of both men: Zbyszko’s apathy can be traced back to sensual/libidinal abuses, while Felicjan’s lethargy and inertia are caused by the boredom of a small-time clerk trapped within the limited confines of the office, household, and café, allowed only a fictitious walk to the Castle, from time to time. This insight is undoubtedly valuable as it suggests two distinct levels, on which women and men function, that determine their cultural gender in distinct ways. The public space of men has been greatly reduced. Because they do not partake in all aspects of public life (diminished opportunities to engage with the public institutions of a country that does not, in fact, exist), they begin to resemble the women of their social class who are

15 I described this model in “Teorie neurozy,” in *Powieści o “wieku nerwowym”* (Katowice: Śląsk, 1988).

locked away in the household prisons of everyday life. And these domesticated men function in public space, waging small-time – but no less exhausting – battles for their livelihood; battles that do not lead to sublimation, but to the dissociation of desires. They are affected with the same frustration that is experienced by the women of their social class. Zapolska has reversed the situation. The household space is traditionally ruled by women, who do not share their power with men. Dulaska breaches the boundary separating the private from the public when she assumes a traditionally masculine role, anticipating contemporary businesswomen, while at the same time her husband is isolated even from the family budget. Control over it is exerted exclusively by Dulaska. The patriarchal “head of the family,” has withdrawn and the vacant place was taken by a female “head.”

Another kind of role reversal is depicted through Milunia’s sexual politics. It can be said that her sexual scenario has liberated sexuality from the power of the phallus, from under the “overweening importance of male sexual experience” – to recall the words of Anthony Giddens.<sup>16</sup> Zbyszko’s wife could personify the avant-garde of this new project of sexual relations, if it were not for the inherent traditional inequality, which only substituted female dominance for male dominance. While Pierre Bourdieu said that “the sexual act itself is seen by men as a form of domination, appropriation, «possession»,”<sup>17</sup> Zapolska ascribes this same outlook to a woman. Sexual relations not only describe the private sphere but are also a reflection of social relationships between the sexes: while Milunia dominates the marital bedroom, Dulaska goes even further extending this dominance onto both the household and the public sphere. The basic balance is disturbed: passivity describes that which is masculine, and activity that which is feminine.

## 6. Dulskification or the Ruin of Men

It seems proper to take under consideration one more element that was highly stressed by Zapolska herself. The “Dulskification” of father and son has a single source and a similar finale. Zbyszko and Felicjan, subjected to the laws of economy, are left among the ruins of their dreams. The former has bid farewell to the undefined but significant longings that are personified by his “true soul” or “better part” (“have I accomplished anything? Was I ever an artist or at least a talented dilettante?” D, 293) – the source of rebellion and self-knowledge.

16 Anthony Giddens, *The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love and Eroticism in Modern Societies* (Stanford: SUP, 1992), 2.

17 Pierre Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, trans. Richard Nice (Stanford: SUP, 2001), 20.

The latter has discarded memories, experiences of an ideal, amorous communication. Both, forced by the circumstances, have suppressed and inhibited the remnants of their inner lives, blocked access to spiritual values, to their metaphysical dimension. They have also dismissed fantasizing, which we know – from reading Freud – to be a special and invaluable form of being, distinct from the material reality. Withdrawn, in a state of anomie, living but as if they were already dead, dispossessed of their selves, from visions of the future, bereft of dreams. Dormant, though not dreaming, in an atmosphere of superficial, maternal tenderness and economic precaution of their wives. Silent Dulski prefigures the silence of his son. Dulski with his eroded subjectivity limits himself to body language, to nonverbal gestures. He did not refrain from taking part in household affairs because this was more convenient for him<sup>18</sup> or – this is one of Zapolska's invaluable insights – because he was deprived of another, even more important than the real (according to Freud) reality of inner life. We get a glimpse of that reality in *The Death of Felician Dulski*, when the bedridden protagonist loses control of his chain of thought. Malignant and feverish this “errant, small-town Don Quixote,” who seemed like “a doll cut out of limp paper,” and who “emanated a lifetime misery” (D, 296) gains access to an extraordinary world that was previously inaccessible to him. Reified by Dulski, who terrorized and humiliated him, he begins in his hallucinations “an alternative, fulfilling and accomplished life.” Within that world resurfaces a tender memory of a girl “with long, silky hair.” This regained, positive memory of a prostitute violates the order of petit bourgeois morality and of the regime to which he surrendered, overturning his previous hierarchy of values: “And suddenly... all that, material and moral, was no longer «his» – was not that which was «his». But rather this – tranquil, unfulfilled, elusive” (D, 307). That which is on the horizon of desires: wants, dreams, hallucinations. Under his eyelids there remained an image of a girl on a red catafalque, because Helunia liked the color red. One of the fundamental reasons for Dulski's silence is the suppression of the moment of this last goodbye: “But he remained still in front of this red catafalque in a dark corner of the Dominican church.” “He remained and hardened” (D, 307), Zapolska will add.

And once more a reversal in the order of things becomes apparent, this time a reversal of gender attributes. Dulski becomes overwhelmed by emotional tendencies, conventionally associated with femininity: sensitivity, subtlety, focus on relations with others, empathy. A rejection of dominance in relations with another. And Dulski? If masculinity is constituted by power, then undoubtedly Dulski is masculine and therefore powerful. And she enters this masculine position and role unflinching.

<sup>18</sup> This interpretation was suggested by Karwowska in *Ciało i śmiech*, 6.

The story of the extinction of passion and the emptiness of existence filled with Dulaska's economy, juxtaposes two gains. Aniela's economy and pragmatism reveal their twofaced nature: the more Dulski recedes from the real world and gives in to the world of fantasy, the greater his reimbursement, his gain, which is not expressed in monetary equivalents; a gain in possessing finally "something of my own," that he receives from this "alternative, fulfilling and accomplished life."

### 7. Idiocy and Cruelty

Dulaska's intellectual indolence manifests in her recourse to "palliatives" – "empty and elusive expressions [...] awkward excuses not free of flippancy,"<sup>19</sup> banalities such as: "The apple didn't fall too far from the apple tree" (M, 5), "No need to fret, it'll heal in time for your wedding day!" (M, 4). She exhibits thoughtless carelessness in constantly mistaking the meaning of words: she uses the name "sztrudel" when she means "szprudel", she says "szkandalistka" when in fact it is pronounced "skandalistka," she mistakes "illusion" for "allusion." That is how Dulaska ends each conversation. Palliatives "do not leave any space for doubt, they are deaf to the other,"<sup>20</sup> in turn they facilitate aggression and violence towards them. Doxa functions in a similar manner, it is predominantly expressed in social conventions that are a means of controlling others. Dulaska's "I don't have any time to think," perfectly describes the automatism of her quips and behavior.

The study of Dulaska's stupidity gains new meaning when juxtaposed with the study of her cruelty.

Disregarding the difficulties with the clarity of this term – troublesome not only for psychoanalysts – I would like to point to several of its components that do not contradict each other. Cruelty understood as an act requires interrelations, an object. Nevertheless, this very relation must be severed for the act to actualize. The intentionality of the act becomes crucial – cruelty precludes "identification with the object through mercy and compassion."<sup>21</sup> Therefore, the status of this object must be external and unfamiliar to the perpetrator's "self." The object of cruelty must be ignored as a person – its "contours" and its "individuality" must become unclear. To be cruel means to negate the being of another, annihilate him in his identity and difference, "to disembowel his in-

19 Matthijs van Boxsel, *Encyklopedia głupoty* (Warszawa: W.A.B., 2004), 113.

20 Ibid., 113.

21 Sophie de Mijolla-Mellor, *La cruauté au féminin* (Paris: Presses Universitaire de France, 2004), 30.



ner self."<sup>22</sup> Aggression directed at an object is associated with its destruction, with "appropriation" (*emprise*) that reaches his interior. From the point of view of microsociology, represented by Claude Javeau,<sup>23</sup> cruelty is considered to be a certain kind of interaction, whose necessary condition is a clear "intention of one side to cause the other side to lose face" – a loss that cannot be undone.

Dulska's cruelty is most severe towards those who are situated, for various reasons, on the lower end of the family hierarchy. Directed at Hanka it stigmatizes and excludes her because of her social origins, reducing her to a nameless "drudge," "a bumpkin." The financial compensation for the harm Zbyszko inflicted upon her, with his mother's acquiescence no less, does not have any rectifying power.

Mela, one of Dulska's daughters, is the subject of constant aggression and permanent destruction of personality. A sensitive, sickly girl, burdened by a physical mark: a hunchback. She personifies "fear that fills a being scared of life," terrorized by her mother's screaming but also by her deliberate amplification of terror, perpetuated once Dulska realizes "the effect" she has on her daughter. For her difference and strangeness in the world of the Dulskis, for her empathy, Mela is subjected to punishment. Her silent resistance to the absurd treatment Dulska administers to Felicjan, her request to get a doctor, give rise to Dulska's rage, as she feels her daughter is challenging her authority and omnipotence. Repressions culminate in two events.

The first is when in answer to Mela's suggestion to pay for the doctor out of her dowry, Dulska takes off her mask and reveals the true purpose of her compulsive accumulation of wealth, of her prudence and integrity, a purpose that has veiled her in the universally accepted and desired aura of motherhood. The purpose that was the rationale behind the household regime and which legitimized the subjection of the whole family:

– Your dowry? What dowry? – she yelled. [...] Nothing, you'll have nothing, neither you, nor Hesia, nor Zbyszko. I will give it all away to monasteries, I will erect a church, fund a chapel on Łyczakowska with an everlasting light and a tablet. That's what I'll do, and nothing to you lot! (D, 323)

<sup>22</sup> Mijolla-Mellor, *La cruauté*, 31.

<sup>23</sup> Claude Javeau, "La cruauté: un point de vue microsociologique," *Cahiers de Psychologie Clinique* 22 (2004): 13–26, <https://doi.org/10.3917/cpc.022.0013>, accessed September 3, 2015.

Mela's tears intensified by Dulska's new lie: "Either way, I have nothing left," are a visible sign of her sudden entry into adulthood, which strips away illusions leaving only trauma.

In the next moment, accompanied by the sound of Felicjan's "crepitations," Dulska forces Mela's silence through a symbolic and literal assault: "the powerful fist of an agitated hysteric fell upon the girls humped back. She falls silent, then whimpers quietly with a spasmodic cry, standing by the wall" (D, 349). And she will remain silent – a lone depository of the secret of crimes perpetrated by "mommy" upon the souls and bodies of her fellow men.

Felicjan plays the star part in the theater of cruelty run by Dulska. This "parchment-like man," bedbound and reified, doomed to the medical horror of Dulska's experiments that cause physical pain and loss of consciousness, the object of abuse when the treatments fail, ineffective in his task of filling the family coffer, despised more and more, humiliated as a "cripple" and "halfwit"; he falls back on a defensive strategy from the start. Hearing Dulska's shuffling, he hides his head beneath the sheets. "They became his shield, barrier, border wall, something completely his and only his" (D, 303–304). And because the sheets are his gateway to the world of dreams and memories – to this other reclaimed self – as his sickness progresses he hides beneath them more and more. Eventually, the boundary between his world beneath the sheets and the other world disappears. On the one hand, the sheets, a keyword of the final paragraphs of *The Death of Felicjan Dulski*, take on a therapeutic role – allowing his fantasy to roam free – but, on the other hand, they facilitate Dulska's acts of cruelty. For if – as Levinas sees it – "the face is that which signifies: Do not kill me," then Dulska by choosing an existence without a face exposes himself to the risk of murder. He becomes blurry to the Other, the Other ceases to see him or "sees in him something that is no longer a face." Nevertheless, for Dulska he has long since lost his outlines, his identity – he existed as an object of her hallucinations induced by malice. Likewise, Dulska also lost her face: she became merely an abject body, a spreading mass. Felicjan death occurs in solitude, with the kitchen noise of a tenderizer and the counting of raisins in the background, accompanied by Mela's distant "howling."

### 8. The Nature of Money – The Nature of God

I would like to linger for a moment on the interpretation of a previously quoted passage:

– Your dowry? What dowry? – she yelled. [...] Nothing, you'll have nothing, neither you, nor Hesia, nor Zbyszko. I will give it all away to monasteries, I will erect a church, fund a chapel on Łyczakowska with

an everlasting light and a tablet. That's what I'll do, and nothing to you lot! (D, 323)

Dulska, by appropriating family capital, reveals her true face. Dispossessing her children, she destroys the fundamentals of the family's existence. That is if in a market economy a family – by losing integrity and unity – becomes just a form of “organized succession” (D, 382). It is as if this particular final goal did not satisfy her wishes, because it would deprive her of the power over accumulated capital which she would, in this case, share with her relatives. Frustrated, she “anxiously chews on her fictitious resentment” – as we learn from *The Death of Felicjan Dulski* (D, 273) – seeing herself as the family victim, who has worked her hands to the bone for them. She dreadfully anticipates the fate of the accumulated capital after her death: “they will squander her hard work,” they will succumb to the pleasures of consumption: use the services of medicine men, go to ballets, and buy automobiles.

Therefore Dulska disburses the acquired capital on an indisputably ultimate goal, one which allows her to satiate her true yearning that goes beyond the boundaries of family territory. And it is a vanity project: to immortalize herself, inscribe her name on a “tablet.” This project, stereotypically associated with the purpose of masculine existence, seems to be a compensation for the sacrifices she made as a wife and mother.

From beyond this yearning – to immortalize her name here on earth – peers another one. To elucidate its merit, I must refer to a psychological mechanism, described by Simmel, of the intertwining of two notions – God and money. I pursue this line of enquiry inspired by the nature of Dulska's donation: monasteries, a church, and a tablet. These are spaces and forms wherein religiousness is expressed, where God is praised, where one transcends oneself. It is as if the accumulation of money as an absolute means enabled her to reach the ultimate goal – religious absolute. As if the path of material gain was the same as the path leading to the ultimate values represented by God. A path to eternity. As if eternity purchased on this earth guaranteed her eternity in heaven. Such a link is plausible if we agree with Simmel on the reasons for which money, as an absolute means, “in its psychological form [...] possesses a significant relationship to the notion of God” (GS, 254). In the idea of God “all diversities and contradictions” achieve “unity” and from that unity “arises the peace, the security, the all-embracing wealth of feeling.” According to Simmel, money excites similar feelings. It has the ability to become a center “in which the most opposed, the most estranged and the most distant things” come into contact. “Thus, money actually provides an elevated position above the particular and a confidence in its omnipotence, just as we have

confidence in the omnipotence of a highest principle to grant us the particular and the baser at any moment and to be able to transform itself into them" (GS, 255).

It is easy to notice a certain pattern: whenever Dulska turns her prayers, or her gaze, towards the Almighty, together with the plea for God's mercy and compassion the assumption of her own elevation through money manifests itself. The commensurability, exchangeability of these two orders, two ideas, illuminates the meticulous cleansing of the world, over which Dulska exerts her absolute power, of spirituality. The closing scene of Felicjan's death is outright blasphemous. And again Dulska shield her self-image from the inconvenient truth that Felicjan died without confession and sacraments. She conceals this fact by simulating a conversation with the deceased and creating a fiction in which he reveals his last will to her. The Dulski frame of mind triumphs again, with its pragmatism and mundane automatism – a soulless rite of vegetation. When the cook asks: "what about the dinner?" Dulska answers: "We must wait with the meatballs. The master will be dressed first, before he cools and stiffens. Then we will eat" (D, 355). The cook sighs because the dinner will go cold.

### 9. Further Remarks on Gender Identity

In the preceding sections I explored those situations that could shed light on the reversal of traditional gender roles and on the new hierarchy of the two genders. A crisis of identity, and the anxiety it arises, was usually expressed through a narrative of role reversal. Zapolska exhibited an interest in gender hybrids from the start of her literary career, as evidenced by her debut novel. Nevertheless, the literature and culture of the nineteenth century had a strong proclivity for a binary opposition between the masculine and the feminine, equating social gender with biological sex on the premise of their uniformity. Therefore, Zapolska left an empty space between the masculine and feminine in her writing.<sup>24</sup> A disruption of social order could only occur through the transposition of the genders and the reversal, or a new ordering, of gender roles. This motif of "a world *à rebours*" perseveres in literature but it always ends in a restoration of "normalcy," in a return to the conventional, patriarchal

24 Even if the first of Zapolska's novels features a goat-man and a monstrous woman, paraded in front of the public for their enjoyment, still I would like to place these curiosities: midgets, bearded women, Siamese twins – the object of fascination for 19th-century writers – not in the sphere of normative femininity and masculinity but rather beyond that which is masculine and feminine. Although a goat-man is introduced by Zapolska as an allegory of dominant masculinity.

ordering of the sexes from before the revolt. Usually the wife's power-hunger is, in the end, suppressed and punished.<sup>25</sup>

Dulska triumphs in the finale of both of Zapolska's works. Dulski, in turn, shares the fate of numerous silent, invisible women who, as if by the sheer fact of their existence, were a threat to male aspirations<sup>26</sup> – he is banished from the literary (social) scene. And Zapolska delays his death, just as the death of heroines was retarded through operatic devices.<sup>27</sup>

Bożena Karwowska is of the opinion that:

At first glance the gender identities in *The Morality of Mrs. Dulska* seem to be of no great importance. The main protagonist, Mrs. Dulska is not supposed to represent women, but to be an embodiment of "sexless" bourgeois (or more precisely – petit bourgeois) hypocrisy.<sup>28</sup>

On the grounds of my previous analyses I am inclined to pursue a line of argument contrary to the one presented by Karwowska. The fact that Dulska represent the female sex is not without significance to Zapolska's narrative. All of Dulska's attributes and actions are adjusted and – at the same time – caricatured in light of her gender, which is shaped by the network of socio-economic and cultural determinants. The ruthless regime of household economy has its rationale: as a woman occupying the household space, barred from the possibility of earning wages but, being a woman of her times – worshipping money – she can either put aside the surpluses from a low-rank clerk's wages, or penny-pinch the tenants of her townhouse. Hypocrisy, priggishness, the very fact of being a Dulski, are therefore constructed in a gendered way. The constraints of social mores, cultural requirements and prohibitions do not constrain men to the same degree as women. There is still asymmetry in this respect. The superego of patriarchal culture internalized by Dulska, assisted by bourgeois morality, confronted with a money based economy that unleashes an insatiable hunger of goods or their equivalent in coin, must in effect lead to hypocrisy. It provokes the concealment of economic motivation, of earthly goals, behind motives of a higher order. This is because a mask of virtuousness and piety is well-suited for achieving "elevation" – of communion with

25 Cf. Karwowska, *Ciało i śmiech*, 5.

26 The conventional finale that disposes of the heroine in "male" 19th-century American narratives is analyzed by Judith Fetterley, *The Resisting Reader. A Feminist Approach to American Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978).

27 See Catherine Clément *L'opéra ou la défaite des femmes* (Paris: Grasset, 1979).

28 Karwowska, *Ciało i śmiech*, 4.

divine money. Dulska's fictional adherence to religious norms, which she in fact fails to follow, is for her also a source of "elation," of achieving an ideal self. At the junction of utilitarian and Christian ethics there could emerge a force that would counterbalance the negative effects of utilitarian culture but only if certain aspects of Christian values would shape social interaction, as is the case in Protestantism, according to Max Weber, and in Catholicism, according to Georg Simmel. Traditionally, in our culture, not men but domesticated women – also those from the petite bourgeoisie – were tasked with the transmission of religious virtue. Dulska's idiolect is embellished with religious ornaments, therefore her religious virtues remain atrophied. In nineteenth-century Polish novel the home space was the domain of the "Polish Mother." Her unchallenged position was legitimized by her attributes. The persona of Dulska breaks this continuum. The only figure she can personify is that of a ruined myth/stereotype/phandasm of Polish culture – the figure of "Polish Mother" whose traditional roles were eviscerated. The new roles, which were created by monetary economy, are caricatured in Dulska.

The person of Dulska could be understood as a pamphlet on a woman, who joins the struggle for livelihood, gaining in the process attributes of masculinity. This is exactly what Ruskin had in mind when he portrayed the catastrophic consequences, for household and social life, that would result from the venturing of women beyond the household space, which is the space where mystical, psychological womanhood manifests itself.<sup>29</sup>

For the above reasons it is impossible to dissociate the quality of being a Dulska from gender. For even if Zbyszko "considered himself an adherent and successor of the values represented by his mother"<sup>30</sup> – as Karwowska points out, when she discusses the universal quality of the Dulska phenomenon – he is nevertheless conscious, unlike his mother, of his inheritance, which he considers to be an oppressive "blemish." Moreover, Felicjan, just like Zbyszko, is not, in contrast with Dulska, a worshipper of money. Both retreat from the struggle of everyday, from the space where capital is accumulated; both are artificially stiffened by their white collars, locked in their clerical suits and offices, each month they collect for their work an arbitrarily assigned monetary equivalent, which in turn is collected from them by their wives – meticulous in their accountancy. Maybe this is the reason for their spiritual proclivities. Zapolska even endows them with a sensitivity and hopes normally attributed

29 Zapolska was familiar with Ruskin's concepts, she refers to them in her opinion piece "Piękno w życiu kobiety," where the beauty of the house-interior becomes a metaphor of a woman's soul. See Gabriela Zapolska, *Publicystyka*, ed. Jadwiga Czachowska (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1962).

30 Karwowska, *Ciało i śmiech*, 4.

to women. This might explain why they find connection with the Imaginary realm, while women decisively prefer contact with the Symbolic order. Dulska knows how to adapt to it and, at the same time, subvert it (this is her hypocrisy) according to her whim.

Dulska's way of being overturns not only Ruskin's projections of womanhood, but also the figures of dependent women and listless boudoir-ladies. Zapolska unhinges the stereotype of feminine gender. Petite bourgeoisie requires active women – lively, energetic, and victorious in the struggle for livelihood. So it produces Dulska. As a combatant in this war Dulska annexes a section of the public sphere that was previously reserved for men. She administers not only her household and its inhabitants but also, as a property owner, she exerts control over the tenants of her townhouse. Her command over money goes beyond the household budget. Dulska develops expertise confronting the socio-economic realities and sheds stereotypical female attributes; meanwhile, both Dulski men do the opposite – their domesticated masculinity retains merely the privilege of unaccompanied escapades to the café and the prerogative of smoking cigars. The burden of physical and metaphorical “incapacity,” hitherto associated with womanhood, is being transferred onto men. What is more, now men are cast in female roles, as those who are characterized by psychological and intellectual indolence. That is why Dulska fulfills her pedagogical–custodial obligations towards Felicjan, as if he were a being incapable of autonomous existence. This is the reason why “this halfwit” Dulski is treated like a child:

Juliasiewiczowa: I have the children in mind.

Dulska: Hesja, Mela, please leave! Felicjan, off you go as well, man...

(M, 63)

The dispersed, used up energy of the “parchment-like” man renders him invisible. Felicjan assumed the responsibilities dictated by patriarchal “masculinity,” as he provides for his family, but he conceded the privileges that this entails. The dominance of women is expressed metaphorically through the appropriation of space by their bodies – the more Dulski shrinks physically, the more Dulska's body expands. Karwowska writes: “Felicjan's attitude towards life (and family) is not a consequence of an unmanly timidity and weakness, but of convenience, as he simply hides behind the back of his wife, who elbows her way through life and therefore clears the path for her husband as well.”<sup>31</sup> *The Death of Felicjan Dulski*, reveals the hidden life of a “suppressed masculinity,” by focusing on the trauma of “petrification” before Helusia's

31 Karwowska, *Ciało i śmiech*, 6.

catafalque, it indicates that his unwillingness to participate – out of “convenience” – should be rather regarded in categories related to feminine coping mechanisms. In one aspect, as a way of fulfilling the demands of the symbolic order (work, family), and in another, as a survival strategy, a way of remaining in the Imaginary order – accommodating the past and the memory of the deceased.

“At whom and what are we laughing? At Felicjan Dulski, of course – Karwowska adds. [...] The humorous aspect of this persona is obviously gendered in character, we would not laugh if he were a woman.”<sup>32</sup> Therefore, our laughter is the consequence of a reversal of gender norms, of the transposition of gender roles and of the reshaping of the gendered space of drama. It is most certainly so. Still, one cannot fail to ask about the essence and value of this laughter. Is it cathartic? Who is it that is laughing? Zapolska herself provides us with a fairly clear indication:

Dulska rarely attends the theatre. Very, very rarely. She saw *The Merry Widow*, she saw *The Wedding* (she left confused and decided that this was something straight out of the nuthouse) and on her own morality – she laughed her head off. She found herself wise and very proper. She was even content that people praise and applaud her morality so much.”<sup>33</sup>

*Translation: Rafał Pawluk*

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<sup>32</sup> Karwowska *Ciało i śmiech*, 6.

<sup>33</sup> Gabriela Zapolska, “Lekki chleb,” in *Publicystyka*, 372.



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Sławomir Buryła

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## Manly Fascism

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Yes! Yes! Yes! Humanitarian war exists only in anaemic minds. Here, Eva, in our magical hideout, in the Berghof, everything seems beautiful, pleasant, as if enchanted. And I seem different: a calm, ordinary person. But it is an illusion: I have never been, and never will be such a person, much as I would like to be...<sup>1</sup>

Could one not find a better portrait of the torturer in the history of Polish literature than this one, from a novel by a (justly) forgotten author? Without doubt. More than one. I choose Andrzej Rodan's *Ostatnie dni Sodomy* [*The Last Days of Sodom*], however, to point to popular literature as a significant cognitive context. During the communist era, members of the SS and Gestapo or Wehrmacht soldiers often appeared in typical genres of popular culture, a trend that has only increased following the economic and political transformation. This is a topic for a separate study. For now, it suffices to mention that in contemporary media-civilisation, and as a result also in the public consciousness, we encounter at least two vibrant models

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1 Andrzej Rodan, *Ostatnie dni Sodomy* (Warszawa: Polwar, 1988), 148. If not otherwise specified all translations of referenced works are provided by the translator of the article.

of manliness: the gangster and the Nazi. The former is mostly constituted by the cinema (from the classic examples of the 1940s, '50s and '60s to the latest works), while the latter is constructed by works of literature and films as well as the earlier clichés and widespread social ideas; these are based on stereotypes of German neatness and resourcefulness, upon which is built a vision of a handsome, elegant man – an art lover and at the same time a ruthless murderer.

Pop culture particularly absorbed one element of the image of the Nazi – the SS officer as a symbol of masculine sexual potency. Much of the pornographic production in the 1970s and '80s was made under the banner of fascism. Here we must mention the genre of “Nazi exploitation,” which was especially popular at the time. The action in such films usually took place in concentration camps, Gestapo prisons and brothels for German soldiers. The tormenters they depicted were often women. Ilse Koch, the wife of the Buchenwald commandant, carved out a remarkable career. The film version of her became a symbol of the hidden desires of the twentieth-century consumer of pop culture – the dreams of emancipated sexuality.<sup>2</sup> These go hand in hand with pan-sexualism and postmodernity's well-known attention to sexual matters. The Nazi style (black uniforms, whips, swastikas, leather boots and belts) inevitably seems to connote erotic subtexts. Atrocities and masculine allure, exhibited and embodied in the accessories of violence and rape, come together here. In her essay *Fascinating Fascism*, Susan Sontag writes:

[...] boots, leather, chains, Iron Crosses on gleaming torsos, swastikas, have become, along with meat hooks and heavy motorcycles, the secret and most lucrative paraphernalia of eroticism.<sup>3</sup>

A further interesting cultural phenomenon is that of “stalags” – slim comics drawn and written by Israelis. These emerged in the newly formed Israeli state in the 1960s, shortly after the trial of Adolf Eichmann. Stylised to resemble the memoirs of survivors, at the time they were one of few sources of information on the Nazi camps. Yet it was not knowledge about the camps located in the territory of Poland, Germany and Central Europe that accounted for the high levels of sales of “stalags,” but rather the abundance of erotic scenes. Shock at

2 See Marek Kaźmierczak, *Auschwitz w Internecie. Przedstawienia Holokaustu w kulturze popularnej* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UMK, 2012), 100.

3 Susan Sontag, “Fascinating Fascism,” *The New York Review of Books*, February 6, 1975, <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/1975/02/06/fascinating-fascism/>, accessed December 20, 2017.

the violence and pornographisation of the Holocaust led the Israeli government to ban the distribution of “stalags.”<sup>4</sup>

Among the manifold accessories of fascism, it was especially the uniform and swastika that evoked erotic associations, often crossing boundaries.<sup>5</sup> Even more strongly than the images of the male slaughterers, it is the figures of female executioners who depict this transgressive nature of Nazism. Koch became the heroine of several dozen pornographic films (the best-known being *Ilsa – She Wolf of the SS*). Incidentally, from the point of view of the needs of the Nazi exploitation genre, a better candidate than Koch would be Irma Grese. Along with her youth – she was just 22 years old when she died – the Auschwitz guard combined beauty, brutality, and sexual insatiability.<sup>6</sup> She therefore satisfied the essential conditions for inflaming male dreams and desires.

In the Nazi world, organised according to a patriarchal model, an erotic, exciting interplay of oppositions takes place, including male–female and sadistic–masochistic.<sup>7</sup> The combination of sex and cultural taboo, which has accompanied the figure of the executioner for centuries,<sup>8</sup> is extremely enticing for the “popular imagination.” It was in this area of sexuality – apart from the social and political realms – that the domination of men in the Third Reich was manifested. It was shaped by “manly behaviours, making reference to potency and reproductive power.”<sup>9</sup> In special institutions where “the children of the Führer” were to be born, women were fertilised by SS members. The

4 Joanna Czopowicz, *Obrazy przemocy. Współczesne przedstawienia “ikon zagłady,”* <http://issuu.com/planetar/docs/obrazyprzemocy>, 138, accessed March 30, 2015.

5 On the sexualisation of fascism in film see, for example, Grzegorz Ojcewicz, “Seksualność faszyzmu,” in *Skazani na trwanie. Odmierńcy XX wieku w esejach Jarosława Mogutina* (Olsztyn: Stowarzyszenie Artystyczno-Kulturalne “Portret,” 2007). Piotr Krupiński offers an interesting discussion of this subject, taking into account the drama and prose of Marian Pankowski, in his essay “Eros i Auschwitz w twórczości Mariana Pankowskiego,” in *Ciało, historia, kultura. Pisarstwo Mariana Pankowskiego i Leo Lipskiego wobec tabu*, ed. Piotr Krupiński (Szczecin: Wydawnictwo Naukowe US, 2011).

6 See Daniel Patrick Brown’s monograph *The Beautiful Beast: The Life & Crimes of SS-Aufseherin Irma Grese* (San Marino, CA: Golden West, 2004); as well as A. Vázquez-Figueroa, *La Bella Bestia* (Barcelona: Martinez Roca, 2012).

7 Krupiński, *Ciało, historia, kultura*, 106.

8 See Roger Caillios, “The Sociology of the Executioner,” in *The College of Sociology (1937–39)*, ed. Georges Bataille (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988).

9 Dorothee Schmitz-Köstner, *W imię rasy. Dzieci dla Führera – mity i rzeczywistość*, trans. R. Wojnakowski (Warszawa: Trio, 2000), 187. Original version: *Deutsche Mutter, bist du bereit. Alltag im Lebensborn* (Berlin: Aufbau Taschenbuch, 2010).

secret of the future progeny was hidden in the male sperm, deriving from the best representatives of the Aryan race. Candidates for fatherhood were previously selected in terms of race. The man seemed to be the more important element in the process of forming the future life, for he provided not only the genetic material, but also the spirit of the Germanic hero. And this was seen as something much more significant than the offspring's outward bodily appearance. It also corresponds to the well-known distinction according to which masculinity is linked to logos, and femininity to corporeality. Summarising the ideas of Simone de Beauvoir, Judith Butler argues that:

[...] the universal person and the masculine gender are conflated, thereby defining women in terms of their sex and extolling men as the bearers of a body-transcendent universal personhood.<sup>10</sup>

The vocation of SS members was to beget male children. In the future, it was they who were to strengthen the ranks of the army. In terms of their fundamental missions, the *Lebensborn* once again legitimised the domination of men over women. These institutions, established by Heinrich Himmler, were places where masculinity could reveal itself in all its beauty, achieving a remarkable level of self-admiration. Here, the sense of power given by service in the army, the police or any military or paramilitary units, was bolstered by state-approved extramarital sex. The number of conquests of women (as well as the number of children left behind) ennobled the men not only in their own eyes, but also in those of others. This did not happen without the participation of women. It was their gaze that was supposed to confirm to the SS warrior the importance of the power that Nazism attributed to the soldier's and policeman's uniform. The women from the Third Reich were laid – often with their consent – on the altar of German nationalism and militarism. A necessary supplement to these two ideologies was sexism.

Reflection on fascism reveals the process of the erotisation of reality in Hitler's totalitarian empire. Racial purity was celebrated, to be exhibited by nudity, athletic masculinity, and physical fitness. The characteristics that were thus cultivated in the public consciousness were therefore those attributed to men – biological strength, in which the advantage of the male over the female is expressed in wartime.

Fascism frequently manifested its ambivalent approach to human sexuality. Out for a stroll in 1930s Berlin, Antoni Sobański sees hordes of pushy prostitutes. He cannot reconcile this fact with the moral puritanism espoused

<sup>10</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 13.

by the regime, which sometimes takes the guise of official prudery. But soon he reaches the simplest of possible conclusions – the regime seamlessly melds ideology with pragmatism. Perhaps this is even its primary characteristic, although one not discerned by the citizens of the totalitarian state. Yet the interlocutors that Sobański meets have no problem with calling a spade a spade. As they argue:

Although reproducing, and so marriage, is the ideal of National Socialism, sexual intercourse as an extremely masculine act [author's emphasis] can be tolerated, as long as the man shows a woman who does not intend to become a mother the requisite contempt and brutality.<sup>11</sup>

The Third Reich always performed a balancing act between ideologically motivated nudity and sensuality with sexual subtexts.<sup>12</sup> As Lech M. Nijakowski writes, “Pornography, prostitution and all kinds of ‘deviation’ were combated, with homosexuality at the forefront, while a model of culture that for many embodied sexuality and perversity was advocated.”<sup>13</sup> The interplay here was between authentic and innocent nudity on the one hand, and the perverse, “degenerate” variety visible especially in film and photography. The Security Service and SS were appalled “by educational films, claiming that such pictures »arouse a proclivity for sexual sensations much more than giving the objective information desirable from the point of view of the national-biological ideas of National Socialism.«.”<sup>14</sup>

### 1. Masculinity as a Task

The passage from Rodan's *Last Days of Sodom* quoted above portrays masculinity as a task or challenge. The dialogue of the lovers (Adolf and Eva) finishes with Hitler's words: “I'll soon take upon my shoulders a load exceeding the strength of a normal person!!”<sup>15</sup> In Nazism, masculinity is elaborated, forged, but also hardened. In the work of Franco La Cecla, brusqueness is one of the

11 Antoni Sobański, *Cywil w Berlinie*, ed. Tomasz Szarota (Warszawa: Sic!, 2006), 36.

12 See the entry on “Nudism” in Rose Sala Rosa, *Diccionario crítico de mitos y símbolos del nazismo* [A Critical Dictionary of Nazi Myths and Symbols] (Barcelona: El Acantilado, 2003).

13 Lech M. Nijakowski, *Pornografia. Historia, znaczenie, gatunki* (Warszawa: Iskry, 2010), 212.

14 Stefan Maiwald, Gerd Mischler, *Seksualność w cieniu swastyki*, trans. Ryszard Wojnakowski (Warszawa: Trio, 2003), 82. Original version *Sexualität unter dem Hakenkreuz* (Hamburg: Europa Verlag, 1999).

15 Rodan, *Ostatnie dni Sodomy*, 148.

forms in which masculinity is disclosed and manifested, and masculinity itself is presented as a certain ideal state which can, but need not, be realised.<sup>16</sup> Since this is the case, this means that it can be deformed, distorted. This is a genuine fear that never left the fascist eminences and ideologists responsible for the “health of the nation.” From the outset, appropriate spiritual formation of the citizens of the Third Reich was the object of concern of the new educational system. Obedience and discipline were the foundations on which the young generation grew up. The severity of the Protestant and bourgeois upbringing came into contact with nationalist elements, and both areas were appropriated by technocratic procedures in the educational field. Their crowning glory was the Hitler Youth organisation. Hitlerjugend was created in the spirit of a devout relationship with sport, physical fitness and leadership, perceived against a background of biological and social Darwinism. These were supplemented by nationalism and the nationalistic songs intoned at Hitler Youth rallies.

Apart from their union of political objectives, German and Japanese fascism were also connected by an ideological kinship. One may look at both regimes from the perspective proposed by Ruth Benedict, who says of the primary characteristics of Japanese culture:

Japan [...] put her hopes of victory on a different basis from that prevalent in the United States. She would win, she cried, a victory of spirit over matter [author's emphasis].<sup>17</sup>

This primacy of spirit over matter finds justification in both German and Japanese culture. In both too (and extremely strongly in the latter), the spirit is associated with the male.

In nineteenth-century Romantic-era Germany, divided into duchies of various sizes, the cult of one Germanic spirit matured and grew anew, to be embodied in the unification policy of Otto von Bismarck. Yet it found its fullest expression in the Nazi conception of the leader, who became the personification of the will of the people with all its members. At least this was how Goebbels's propaganda saw it, with the chant of “Ein Volk, Ein Reich, Ein Führer.” In his book *The Germans*, Norbert Elias finds the characteristics of German behaviour that cast aside any leniency for human weakness and saw signs of fragility in tolerating shortcomings. According to Elias, this

16 Franco La Cecla, *Modi Bruschi, antropologia del maschio* (Milano: Elèuthera, 2010).

17 Ruth Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2005), 22.

rigorousness was a clear distinction between the Germans and the English, who “left room for deviations from the norm as well as for individual eccentricities.”<sup>18</sup>

In fascism, “the ideology of »the spirit« was an eclectic conglomerate of Old German myths, medieval mysticism and their own mysteries of the cult of race and Nordic blood.”<sup>19</sup> Nazism’s relationship with religion (including Christianity) is a complex topic. Yet it is beyond doubt that its leaders – especially Himmler – tried to dress up the ideas of the *Herrenvolk* in religious-mystic robes. The head of the SS also often compared his organisation to medieval knightly orders. Among others, it was the Jesuits, with their loyalty to the pope, strict rules shaping and honing the interiors of the members of the order, that inspired Himmler and his endeavours to found an SS Order of Knights based in their own Germanic castle.<sup>20</sup> This was Wewelsburg, the venue of secret meetings of a tight circle of the Reichsführer’s colleagues. At the castle, he was embodied in the figure of a grand master of the new order, which was also to include women – SS members’ wives to be precise. A rarely mentioned fact is that the sweethearts of SS men were obliged to present their genealogical lineage from 1750 to prove that there had been no contamination of Nordic blood since that time. Himmler scrupulously tested the “pedigree of girls who were said to be pregnant by SS men before he would grant them the necessary permit to marry.”<sup>21</sup>

## 2. The Test of Masculinity

Masculinity is hardened when put to the test. Fascism knew several ways of testing the body and spirit of the new power elite. Yet, from the Nazi perspective, all verifications of masculinity pale in comparison to the fundamental test of the “community of atrocities.” In his monumental treatise, Raul Hilberg writes of the “blood kit”<sup>22</sup> – one founded on murder. The American historian refers to the words of Hans Frank, uttered in 1942 to representatives of Hitler’s police:

18 Norbert Elias, “The Breakdown of Civilization,” in *The Germans*, trans. Eric Dunning and Stephen Mennell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 324.

19 Karol Grünberg, *SS – czarna gwardia Hitlera* (Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza, 1975), 115.

20 Roger Manvell and Heinrich Fraenkel, *Heinrich Himmler: The Sinister Life of the Head of the SS and Gestapo* (New York: Skyhorse, 2007), 48-49.

21 *Ibid.*, 90.

22 Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, Volume III (New Haven–London: Yale University Press, 2003), 1080.

We want to remember that we are, all of us assembled here, on Mr. Roosevelt's war criminals list. I have the honor of occupying first place on that list. We are therefore, so to speak, accomplices in a world-historical sense.<sup>23</sup>

This "community of blood" is revealed even better by Himmler's speech to high-ranking SS officers and police given in Poznań in 1943. In it, the SS Reichsführer highlighted the category of being a chosen one in atrocities. This is clear proof that he was profoundly aware of what he was doing, and of exactly how much of a "tough task" awaited his subordinates. He knew that only "the best" could meet this challenge. The fact that this was the mission of men was as obvious an assumption as the fact that they had to come from SS ranks. Committing heinous crimes was something that separated the "masculine" from the "feminine." The man was a warrior, the torch of civilisation, lighting the way to contemporary and future generations. Murder also differentiated boyhood and maturity, which – as in mafia structures – was reached when one made a kill. It stratified the masculine and the unmasculine, that is feminine. Committing atrocities in Nazism was reserved for men not because women were psychologically incapable of it, but because their vocation was something low, less meaningful, superficial. After all, genocide was the road to a better world, to be paved by the most illustrious men, "martyrs for the cause."

Using various means to make murder a part of everyday experience, and thus psychologically familiar, fascism took care to preserve its "masculine" aspect. Hitler's 1939 order concerning *Aktion T4*, a prelude to the actual process of extermination of the Jews, left it up to doctors to put mentally ill patients to death.<sup>24</sup> The Nazi doctors did this on the ramp and at the camp hospital. The "angels of death" were therefore almost always men. The crime demanded obstinacy, "courage," resistance to the victims' crying and wailing – predispositions usually attributed to men. And yet, in the minds of some SS men, murder of the civilian population must have seemed to be something unmanly, "worse" than fighting on the front. Without diminishing the power of Himmler's propaganda, it is hard to believe that it always succeeded in overruling the cultural message which precluded thinking about killing women and children in terms of heroism. This dissonance must have been easier to discern in Wehrmacht units, which did not undergo thorough Nazi indoctrination. Some concentration camp officers understood this. As they were

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Kathrin Kompisch, *Sprawczyni*, trans. Sławomir Kupisz, Natalia Badiyan-Siekierzycka (Warszawa: Prószyński Media, 2012), 199. Original version: *Täterinnen: Frauen im Nationalsozialismus* (Köln: Böhlau Verlag), 2008.



unable to demonstrate their courage and leadership skills on the battlefield, they used various means to maintain their authority among lower-ranking soldiers. The Prussian discipline of the drill and immaculate attire were meant to replace the authority, obedience and respect that in other conditions would be assured by the front.<sup>25</sup>

Yet the camps and extermination centres were not entirely excluded from the “field of glory.” Apart from a sense of mission (strengthened in the SS crew), something existed that was not only a substitute for an officer’s authority, but even exceeded it. The camp made its executioners almost unlimited lords of life and death, contemporary embodiments of medieval monarchs. Ernst Klee’s description of Josef Mengele, that “to the end of his life he remained a biologist and a racist,”<sup>26</sup> is no doubt true. But this is only part of the truth about Nazi doctors. Auschwitz, Buchenwald, Ravensbrück, and Majdanek gave an ersatz sense of divinity, aroused by the awareness of the total dependence of others on their decisions.

The monstrosities of the Nazi era beg the question of whether there exist a “masculine” and a “feminine” style of crime. Can we justly speak of cruelty typical of women or men? What might distinguish each of these variants? I do not know of any scientific works that examine this issue closely. Two questions are beyond dispute: women and violence denote the need to break cultural stereotypes. Femininity is not easily associated with brutality and the realm of death. Rather, it is linked to life and procreation, not only in mythology and art, but in the popular consciousness as well.

In many situations – the camp being the paradigmatic example – women tried to imitate male cruelty and to match men in this respect. Documents and memoirs show that female wardens at Auschwitz and Majdanek, initially uncertain in their new roles, gradually took the initiative, modelling themselves on the behaviours of SS men and guards. At times, some of them – such as Irma Grese, Ilse Koch, Alice Orlowski, Maria Mandl, and Herta Oberheuser – eclipsed even male SS members with their barbarity.

In spite of their enthusiasm and fervour, nowadays overlooked, the female members of the camp staff or Wehrmacht auxiliary workers were not treated as full-fledged soldiers.<sup>27</sup> In the army and camp hierarchy, they were

25 *Życie prywatne esesmanów w Auschwitz, ed. Piotr Setkiewicz, (Oświęcim: Państwowe Muzeum Auschwitz-Birkenau, 2012), 7.*

26 Ernst Klee, *Auschwitz. Medycyna III Rzeszy i jej ofiary*, trans. Elżbieta Kalinowska-Styczeń (Kraków: Universitas, 2009), 442. Original version: *Auschwitz, die NS-Medizin und ihre Opfer* (Frankfurt: Fischer Taschenbuch, 2001).

27 This was the case even though they swore the same oath of fealty to Hitler, and were bound by the same penal code (Kompisch, *Sprawczyni*, 321).

relegated to a lower level. Women served mainly as clerical assistants and nurses. They never fought on the front, and did not participate in military actions. The decision to train women in the use of firearms was made very late in the Third Reich, in 1945, but even then, female battalions were not formed for fighting against enemy divisions. They therefore did “typical women’s jobs” in the Wehrmacht. For some, service was tied to the hope of raising their social status and earning respect among male civilians, as well as having a chance to act upon their patriotic feelings.

Notwithstanding its unequivocally patriarchal approach to the world, Nazism created good conditions for the development of young, ambitious girls, especially those who were members of the NSDAP and SS. Hitler’s ideology sometimes even manifested an emancipatory aspect in regard to women. Advocates of the modernity of Nazism could find arguments here. The model wives of SS men were supposed to have not only a suitable pedigree, but also similarly appropriate skills. According to Himmler’s ideas, the right girl for an SS man ought to have a good knowledge of history, “know foreign languages and be able to ride a horse, swim, drive a car, shoot a pistol.”<sup>28</sup> These were rather progressive expectations, often far from the ideas of the time (even if we remember that the future wives of Himmler’s elite were also expected to cook well and to know how to keep a household). Yet this does not change the fact that women were treated in an objective, patronising fashion, from a position of power. They were usually perceived in relation – in a subordinate, obliging relationship – to men. According to Himmler’s designs, it was up to the SS and NSDAP’s management to enable the men’s separation from their wives if the latter did not live up to the ideal. He and Hitler planned to legalise bigamy, thus increasing the number of births. Bigamy was also meant to release internal competition, meaning that “every wife would become a stimulus for the other – all would try to be their husband’s dream woman.”<sup>29</sup> Not for the first time in German fascism did modernity come into contact with conservatism.

### 3. The Göttingen Architect

In 1974 in his Spandau prison, commenting on a note made by Albert Speer, Joachim Fest writes that:

He says that he will never solve the mystery of his life. It’s true that he was guilty, was branded a criminal, sentenced and so on. But what was

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<sup>28</sup> Grünberg, *SS – czarna gwardia Hitlera*, 107

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 108, footnote 6.

the alternative in terms of his life as a whole? Should he have preferred to spend the autumn of his life as a town planning advisor in Göttingen, looking back as an architect at the buildings of the municipal savings bank or the local swimming pool?<sup>30</sup>

If we are to look at Nazism from the perspective of revolutionary social transformation – as has often been done – it proves to be attractive also for reasons of ambition, the promise of prestige, the chance for changing one's professional status.<sup>31</sup> Speer would have remained nothing more than a humble town planning advisor in Göttingen if Hitler had not noticed him and made him his chief architect.

In 1930s Germany, the man was the head of a family, and upon him lay the responsibility for its financial upkeep. For the representatives of the lower social classes who staffed the ranks of the various police units (including the Gestapo), as well as SS and NSDAP members employed in civil administration, working for the regime guaranteed rapid promotion. Watching their colleagues – often life's losers or people of average intelligence and low resourcefulness – gradually climb the ladder of power and recognition, their peers no doubt felt an irresistible need to join them. Were they worse? Pragmatism and mercantilism not only made them feel no worse, but allowed them to shed their fears that they were maladjusted people, not understanding the winds of history. In his reportages from Nazi Germany published in the mid-1930s in *Wiadomości Literackie*, Antoni Sobański reaches the same conclusions, describing the lower social reaches and citing the irresistible desire for power – so close to human nature, regardless of social status:

So it is hardly surprising that the nervously and physically emaciated unemployed man, who until recently was perhaps even begging, and today suddenly has the chance to give orders, and to be feared by every civilian, is unable to resist the temptation.<sup>32</sup>

30 Joachim Fest, *Albert Speer: Conversations with Hitler's Architect*, trans. Patrick Camiller (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), 165.

31 Speer's biographer writes the following about him: "Those who knew him well all pointed to the burning ambition beneath his restrained exterior; they thought that his matter-of-factness was just a mask concealing his boundless and rarely challenged egotism." Joachim Fest, *Speer: The Final Verdict*, trans. Ewald Osers and Alexandra Dring (New York: Harcourt, 2001), 42.

32 Sobański, "Cywile, Reichstag i książki," in *Cywil w Berlinie*, 54.

Joining the ranks supporting Hitler's civilizational revolution satisfied the bourgeois need to be useful.<sup>33</sup> An SA or SS member was no longer standing on the sidelines; he was engaged and involved. His belief in his own worth and the correctness of his decisions must also have been affirmed by the awareness that he was working on behalf of the people. As if this were not enough, he sensed the enthusiasm that gripped Germany under the Führer's rule.

Leaving aside – but not ignoring – financial concerns, Nazism promised something equally alluring for the male section of society – adventure. This was a particularly attractive promise for eighteen-, nineteen- and twenty-year-olds, if only because it offered an excellent fulfilment of their youthful pursuit of the unknown, represented a test of independence, and an initiation into adult life. In many of these biographies, it is hard to ignore the context of the conservative environment of family homes. From the perspective of the tight-fitting chains of bourgeois morality, Nazism appeared as a visible sign of freedom for them, a substitute for another world, in which boyish and youthful bravura had the chance to be fulfilled. Those belonging to this age group happily jeopardize their lives, but are also prone to make ultimate declarative judgements; this was a perfect match for the revolutionary spirit of fascism. Speer's assertion therefore comes as no surprise: that in youth one cannot choose between what is known and ordered and what is different and mysterious, even if it is at the same time uncertain. It is only an apparent choice whose result is known from the start. Especially for people, like Speer, whose "early years followed the pattern of a regulated and uneventful youth in the provinces."<sup>34</sup>

#### 4. The Domination of Men

Himmler regarded the domination of men in the National Socialist state as self-evident and natural. As Pierre Bourdieu writes, in a patriarchal order, "the androcentric vision imposes itself as neutral and has no need to spell itself out in discourses aimed at legitimating it."<sup>35</sup> It explains the central position of the warrior as conqueror and at the same time defender of borders. This was

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33 I use the word "revolution" here in the sense proposed by Hermann Rauschnig, *The Revolution of Nihilism: Warning to the West*, trans. E. W. Dicks (Whitefish MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2005).

34 Fest, *Speer*, 11.

35 Pierre Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, trans. Richard Nice (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 9.

what entitled him to occupy a unique position in the gender hierarchy, which also imitated the social hierarchy.

The privileged position of men in the Third Reich is manifest in the approach to extramarital relations. Engaging in such relations by soldiers on the front or units stationed in occupied territories was accepted in the belief that it was a boon to their vigour and battle fitness. Infidelity among wives in the Third Reich was condemned, on the other hand. In the eyes of Nazi ideologues, such behaviour on the part of women was a blow to the family. Sexual activity (particularly among married women) not serving procreation was viewed as unacceptable, as it threatened the National Socialist idea of the purity and modesty of the Aryan woman.<sup>36</sup> Leaving aside the “concern” for the morals of German young ladies and mothers, the different treatment of the two sexes in Nazism resulted from a number of intertwined stereotypical ideas on the sexuality of women and men. The former should be passive, while to the latter was attributed activeness, freedom, and the associated licentiousness. By its very nature, male sexuality was viewed as the negation of the fidelity, obligation, and family stabilisation that characterised the female sex.

The Third Reich is an excellent example on which to analyse the structure of a system making symbolic violence a pillar of the state. Biological difference translates into the division of social roles. The woman’s body and man’s body become state property, answering to different rules and laws. The authorities usurp the right to control female (and male) sexuality. They define sexual partners (“Aryans”), but also the purpose of sexual activity (“procreation”). Himmler treated this supervision extremely seriously, his foresight in this respect reaching inquisitorial fervour:

In April 1942 Himmler signed an order exhorting his men not to seduce girls out of frivolity and so deprive the nation of potentially fruitful mothers.<sup>37</sup>

The wives of SS men who gave birth to seven or more children received the Mother’s Cross of Honour.

Members of the SS had a unique role to play as the nation’s racial and spiritual elite. Their leader took every opportunity to underline the organisation’s privileged place in the structure of the new society (the *Herrenvolk*). Fascinated with Teutonic mythology, he searched within it for justifications for his ideas.

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<sup>36</sup> See Kompisch, *Sprawczynie*, 70-71.

<sup>37</sup> Manvell, Fraenkel, *Heinrich Himmler*, 89.

He also found them reading the texts of Guido von List, follower of Wotanism and devotee of the religions of the forefathers.<sup>38</sup>

Following the model of the great Germanic heroes, the fascist does not die like an ordinary soldier, but “falls on the battlefield, gives his life, gives himself, offers himself as a sacrifice to ideals.”<sup>39</sup> In this way, his body, as Jonathan Littell writes in *Le sec et l’humide*, is never tainted or desecrated, as it was elevated by a monumental idea. This is what protects from bodily and spiritual defilement. In *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson notes that: “The idea of the ultimate sacrifice comes only with an idea of purity [...]”<sup>40</sup>

The ultimate idea required the ultimate sacrifice. And this could be attested only by death – heroic death. In Nazism, this acquired the form and significance of a founding myth. Under Goebbels’s watchful eye, Nazi cinematography – apart from its anti-Semitic features – also had distinct heroic motifs. Dying soldiers and brothers in arms (like “Saint” Horst Wessel of the SA) affirmed the conviction of men as the chosen ones in courage, thus legitimising the political slogans of Nazism. The propaganda of the 1930s was saturated in a religious, pious, quasi-mystic atmosphere. Young SA and SS men as well as members and sympathisers of the NSDAP were viewed as a contemporary embodiment of medieval saints, and the plots of films from the time took the form of hagiographic stories. As in the Middle Ages, it was not the individual, but the supra-individual dimension that counted in the death of a distinguished person (a hero). The deaths of warrior-martyrs found meaning in the victorious march towards control, and finally when the fascists came to power.<sup>41</sup> The blood of martyrs consolidated society, strengthening it, and confirming the path chosen.

The pathos of Goebbels’s cinematography leant inexorably towards kitsch – the caricatured masculinity known from macho culture. The film chronicles highlighted the athletic figures of young men, carrying the potential for aesthetic gaudiness generally favoured by all kinds of exaggerations and

38 See Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *The Occult Roots of Nazism: The Ariosophists of Austria and Germany, 1890-1935* (Wellingborough: Aquarian Press, 1985).

39 Jonathan Littell, *Suche i wilgotne. Krótka wyprawa na terytorium faszysty*, trans. Magdalena Kamińska-Maurugeon (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2009), 55. Original version: *Le sec et l’humide: Une brève incursion en territoire fasciste* (Paris: Gallimard, 2008).

40 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London–New York: Verso, 2006), 148.

41 See Piotr Zwierzchowski, “Śmierć założycielska. Pamięć, tożsamość, propaganda,” in *Spektakl i ideologia. Szkice o filmowych wyobrażeniach śmierci heroicznej* (Kraków: Rabid, 2006), 95-134.

monumentalisations. The personification of machismo came in the form of the Führer. Hitler, who was far removed from the ideal of the Aryan man, was portrayed as a capturer of women's hearts: rather on account of his rhetorical and technocratic abilities than his physique and external appearance. What German women, but German men too, loved in him was the notion of the strong leader, a man capable of drawing crowds. For women, he was the emanation of the characteristics that they looked for in the objects of their affection; for men, he was the embodiment of the conqueror that they wished to see in themselves. Like any love, this one too was realised in unlimited devotion to the object of desire. At least two manifestations of this devout veneration smack of cheap sentimentalism. First, there were the letters from German women which swamped the Führer, in which wives and maidens professed their love and readiness to bear children for the best son of the nation. Hitler sustained this erotic game. He remained a bachelor, speaking of his marriage to the Reich. He kept his romance with Eva Braun a secret. After all, the object of the dreams of so many could not be attached to one woman.

Also infused with kitsch are the stories about Hitler's uniquely magnetic gaze. It is impossible to mention or list all the accounts which feature the motif of the Führer's hypnotic look. Women and men were equally susceptible. Their reactions call to mind the experiences of the readers of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century romances – close to swooning and entirely defenceless against the ideal lover. In his novella *Puste oczy* (*Empty Eyes*), Jerzy Putrament shows the actual meaning of this gaze, behind which lurked death and destruction.<sup>42</sup> For some experts on fascism, however, what for Putrament constitutes proof of the error made by "ordinary Germans" is not so obvious. These researchers, citing the traditions of German Romanticism, argue that Hitler was putting into practice the German desire to lose oneself and the almost erotic fascination with death.

The hypnotic trope has been the subject of numerous historical and psychological interpretations, whose authors grappled with the question of the "fatal attraction" of an entire nation. Unfortunately, for some citizens of the Third Reich, this way of explaining the support enjoyed by Hitler and his henchmen was used as a self-justification: beguiled and deceived by the Führer, we were unable to do anything. The world of the twentieth-century triumph of science and technology was thereby derailed from the tracks of rationality and progress, embarking on a path previously marked by the tracks of divine veneration afforded to great tribal leaders.

Fascism sanctified male aggression. First, it extracted it from the mundane. In this sense, the often cited comparison of Nazism to a criminal organisation

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42 Jerzy Putrament, "Puste oczy," in *Wybór opowiadań* (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1975).

(gang) is misplaced – however true it is in the ethical sense or in appraising the ways in which the two institutions have operated. Atrocity in Nazism served the national cause, and even a universal human mission. It was not “ordinary killing” or torture, but the emancipation of the will of the Führer, and thus of the whole of society. The paroxysm of evil also referred to the realm of myth that the Third Reich cited with relish. Therefore, SS men grew to the status of Germanic heroes, ready to sacrifice their life for the Fatherland and without pity for their enemies.

Analogies with the Teutonic forebears were revised with allusions to their austere customs and ascetic way of life. These were meant to express their supremacy and the specialness of the Germanic spirit – that from a thousand years before and during Hitler’s own times. Jürgen Stroop refers to the unique cult in which he grew up, which in his homeland venerated Hermann (Arminius), the great chieftain of the Cherusci tribe.<sup>43</sup>

At this point, we need to deal with the stereotype of “women’s nature.” Feminist circles often repeat the idea that violence is a male attribute. They are guided by certain findings of contemporary biology, especially from the field of so-called behavioural biology, which highlights that almost throughout nature, and particularly among anthropoid apes and in the *Homo sapiens* species, the quintessence of male specimens is manifested in violence.<sup>44</sup> In *Täterinnen* (“Perpetrators”), Kathrin Kompisch takes issue with the position of contemporary feminists. Their tacit acceptance of the assumption of women’s passive role in Nazism came with an equally consistent post-war silence around the crimes committed in concentration camps by female SS members. Only a small percentage of them were sentenced for these crimes. In 1950s and ‘60s Germany, a debate took place over the atrocities and guilt of men. Notably, the opposition movement that culminated in the 1968 student revolt did not ask where “our mothers” were in the Third Reich era, but only “our fathers.”<sup>45</sup> No doubt one of the reasons for this was the culturally entrenched conviction about the mild nature of women. At various levels, though, women were involved in supporting the regime. There is no evidence for the widespread view that “in 1933-1945 women mostly occupied the roles

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43 Kazimierz Moczarski, *Conversations with an Executioner* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1981), 17. Arminius was a Germanic chieftain and hero of the Battle of the Teutoburg Forest, at which Germanic tribes destroyed Roman legions and ultimately halted their march onto Germanic territory.

44 See Richard Wrangham and Dale Peterson, *Demonic Males: Apes and the Origins of Human Violence* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1996).

45 Kompisch, *Sprawczyni*, 358.



of housewives.”<sup>46</sup> They worked at many levels of the Nazi terror machine: as secretaries in SS and Gestapo stations and posts, office workers preparing reports on mass executions, staff on the euthanasia programme, doctors conducting experiments on humans, and concentration camp wardens. Kompisch analyses various forms of women’s participation in the functioning of the machinery of crime, opposing the widespread idea that they were merely passive victims.<sup>47</sup>

The perpetratrices also included the wives of SS men. [...] as supporters at the sides of their husbands, they reinvigorated their spirits and consolidated the criminal industry that they conducted in concentration camps and groupings. They took care of the family atmosphere at home, provided respite and diverted their husbands’ attention from their everyday tasks, managed the household, endeavoured to make sure that the day passed without undue concerns and frictions, while raising the children in the spirit of National Socialism – in short, they took everyday hardships on their shoulders, taking the burden away from their husbands.<sup>48</sup>

Apart from those direct “perpetratrices,” who humiliated, beat, and murdered, we also encounter those whose perpetration entailed ideological support and justification (camouflage) of the murders of the Third Reich.<sup>49</sup> These were the majority.

## 5. The Humiliated Man

This image is a common one in the works of various authors. It is presented in poetry and prose as well as memoirs. Let us reconstruct it in the words of Nechama Tec, a young Jewish girl for whom the failure of Hitler’s Reich meant winning life:

If it had not been for those raised hands and his uniform, I would never have guessed that he was a German. His shoulders were stooped, his head was as low as his position allowed it to be, and he walked carefully, as if

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<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>47</sup> See *ibid.*, 350: “Women committed less criminal acts than men, because they were not engaged to commit crimes on such a scale, and not because they opposed or resisted the Nazi state.”

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 303.

<sup>49</sup> See *ibid.*, 9-26.

shaking with fear. Until then all the Nazis walked stiffly erect, with a sure gait and an arrogant expression on their faces, as if the whole world belonged to them. But this first Nazi I saw surrender looked like a broken man, devoid of all energy and spirit, an image of total submission.<sup>50</sup>

The recent victor – humiliated in his own eyes and in those of the ultimate victors – is a common sight, well known from the history of wars. In Tec's description, however, it is more than the vision of an indomitable army that lay in ruins. This semantic surplus is illustrated well by the phrase "like a broken man." The complement to German nationalism, extended to the limits of possibility, came in the form of the aggressive racist ideology of the *Herrenvolk*. The fascist warrior, beaten by the Soviet mercenary and the Allied Yankee, bowed to both systems, which proclaimed the idea of equality (leaving aside for the moment the practical and actual nature of Stalinist communism). In the mind of the German soldier, both symbolised a world of hostile values, and questioned the principle of "natural," biological inequality between people as the foundations of future society. This aspect of the Third Reich – the old dispute between those who cite the modernist attachment of Hitler's state and the opponents of this idea – clearly brings anti-modernist themes to the surface.

We can only truly comprehend the scale of the fall and size of the failure experienced by the German conqueror if we appreciate the place on the ladder of being from which he was toppled. Among the numerous explanations given by the sociologist and psychoanalyst Stephan Marks in response to the titular question of his book, "Why did they follow Hitler?," is the narcissistic dimension of fascism. The Third Reich is an excellent example of "collective narcissistic collusion," in which the devotion to the leader (the *Führer*) assumed and fulfilled the need to be admired.<sup>51</sup> The Nazis, but also the ordinary citizens of the Third Reich, felt (especially in the times of military triumph on the Western Front) unity with their leader and his politics. After all, military and political successes lay behind it, and above all, pride that was once lost returned, buoyed by the ideas of being the chosen race and people.

Although Polish literature is seldom willing to embrace this topic, the invaders sometimes aroused admiration, and even delight. The marvelously armed and stylishly dressed German officers no doubt embarrassed

50 Nechama Tec, *Dry Tears: The Story of a Lost Childhood* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 211-212.

51 See Stephan Marks, *Warum folgten sie Hitler? – Die Psychologie des Nationalsozialismus* (Düsseldorf: Patmos Verlag, 2014), 107.

certain Polish military men, as well as the civilian population. Bitterness was mixed with jealousy, and anger with a suspicion of their own civilisational backwardness. In the accounts of peasants, one could often hear acclaim for the bearing of the German soldiers moving with the front, and even for the military police patrolling Polish villages. Against this background, a common mantra was the sight of Russian soldiers – badly equipped, terribly uniformed, more reminiscent of a band of criminals than a regular army.

The German officers – with cash to spend, well dressed, elegant, but also inspiring obedience – must have impressed some Polish women. This is a difficult subject, usually regarded as concerning women of easy virtue or the irresponsible flirts whose heads were shaved by the independence underground as punishment for sexual contacts with the enemy. And yet such relationships took place. In how many of them was the nimbus of the a significant factor? It is hard to determine this today – and no research has been done in this area. Perhaps detailed archive research combined with analysis of memoirs and fiction would give us a better indication. We can find something of the fascination with the invader in Ignacy Karpowicz's *Sońka*.

## 6. Nazism and Homosexuality

I am borrowing the title of this section from the writings of Stefania Zahorska. Reading her essays – and with the time when they were written in mind – one is struck by the insight and originality of Zahorska's observations. In her reportages (*Listy z Niemiec [Letters from Germany]*), published, like Sobański's texts, in the mid-1930s, she tries to probe the masculinity of fascism. She finds a strong connection with homosexuality, referring to the relatively common sexual relationships between men in SA circles.<sup>52</sup> Zahorska notes that this is part of the culture of warriors in which – let us add – the strong emotional bond between soldiers, incited by the bond of blood spilled in battle as well as group solidarity fuelled by the existence of a common enemy, lead to acceptance of homosexuality as a unique – perhaps the ultimate – form of closeness between men. This results in a phenomenon discussed by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick – the “homosocial bond.”<sup>53</sup> The sexual aspect here is secondary to emotional ties. In this way, groups of SA men expressed their contempt for the

52 Stefania Zahorska, “Listy z Niemiec. W szkole kadetów i panów,” in *Wybór pism. Reportaże, publicystyka, eseje*, ed. Anna Nasiłowska (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IBL PAN, 2010), 56.

53 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, “Homosocial Desire,” “Sexual Politics and Sexual Meaning,” in *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 1-10.

old world. This was how Rauschning's "revolution of nihilism"<sup>54</sup> was played out, in which "promiscuity" did not serve its own ends, but demonstrated the need to create a new morality; the old, ossified bourgeois ethics were to yield to the laws established by the cult of male strength. Ten years later, in 1944 on the pages of *Dziennik Polski*, Zahorska's comments on Peter Nathan's book *The Psychology of Fascism*<sup>55</sup> referred to the movement as absolutising and deifying masculinity. National Socialism came from:

[The] overestimation, idealisation of masculinity. [...] For this ideal of masculinity, unfettered in its force, brutality, savagery, calling upon everything and all to fight even without fear – is only a hypercompensation of the male, uncertain of his masculinity, profoundly fearful of his lack of strength. [...] From this fear emerges an aversion to women that assumes the form of contempt for her. Fear of one's weakness is projected outwardly as contempt for all weakness, as a cult of heroism.<sup>56</sup>

This view of Nazism means searching for its sources in reaction to the emancipation of women, to their increasingly marked presence in Western culture. Of course, these are issues that go beyond the history of European fascism. Following the interpretation proposed by Nathan and Zahorska, one would need to see not only all military organisations, but also war itself, as peculiar enclaves of masculinity closed to women. The fact that war is a domain of gender, and not of human sexuality, can be best seen with the example of the roles played by German women on the front. As was also the case in the Allied armies, they were not permitted to engage in armed combat, but sent into support services (usually as nurses).

In the Third Reich – that which ensued after the murder of Ernst Röhm and part of the SA upper command – homosexuality was punishable, and homosexuals ended up in camps and prisons. But it was not breaking of moral imperatives (secularly motivated and religious-based) that aroused this reaction from the Nazis. Much worse than infringing "the laws of nature" in the case of homosexuality was the refusal to participate in the "community of masculinity." After all, people with different sexual orientation did not participate in the holy act of conception. Possessing progeny and the ability to perform defloration are a marker of masculinity, inextricably linked to manliness "in its ethical aspect: [...] the point of honour [...] the principle of the conservation

54 Rauschning, *The Revolution of Nihilism*.

55 Peter Nathan, *The Psychology of Fascism* (London: Faber and Faber, 1943).

56 Zahorska, "Psychologia faszyzmu," in *Wybór pism*, 255.

and increase of honour.”<sup>57</sup> As Bourdieu shows, there is an association of “phallic erection with the vital dynamic of swelling which is immanent in the whole process of natural reproduction (germination, gestation, etc.).”<sup>58</sup> The ability to sire children denotes an extension of male power, the emphatic expression of creation and construction of the world on androcentric principles. As Bernard Nuss writes:

The Germans were fascinated by Hitler, someone with a mediocre personality, but equipped with a remarkable desire for power and energy that could be regarded as absolute. The myth of strength plays an important role in German mentality.<sup>59</sup>

Strength as an attribute of masculinity seemed to correspond with, and to convey superbly, the desires and qualities of the entire nation. We observed the politically desirable apotheosis of everything habitually associated with the sphere of masculinity, and, equally habitually, treated as a negation of femininity.

Homosexuals were insinuated to be “soft,” a weakness supposedly proven by their effeminacies. The fact that many homosexuals (including the leader) participated in brutal SA actions changes nothing. Homosexuals were relegated to being non-men, that is women and children. They were associated with decadence, debauchery, everything that in Western civilisation is at odds with vital energy.

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In researching on Holocaust (and, more broadly, war) literature, there remains an area that still requires in-depth reflection. This is examining the Shoah from the perspective of the body – still ignored because of the idea of the subject without gender. As Paweł Wolski rightly asks,

how is it possible that a witness of the Holocaust is both a person endowed with a body and a bodily perspective, and all the while an unbiased, and thus bodiless, observer describing “bare facts”?<sup>60</sup>

<sup>57</sup> Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, 12.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>59</sup> Bernard Nuss, *Syndrom Fausta. Próba opisania mentalności Niemców*, trans. J. Karbowska (Warszawa: PIW, 1995), 69. Original version: *Das Faust-Syndrom* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1993).

<sup>60</sup> Paweł Wolski, *Tadeusz Borowski – Primo Levi. Prze-pisywanie literatury Holocaustu* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IBL PAN, 2013), 278.

The obscured corporeality of the witness is an important field of consideration on the Holocaust.<sup>61</sup> In fact, texts concerning the concentration camp experiences seem especially inspired by the reflective perspective on corporeality.<sup>62</sup> But whereas gender studies is gradually also embracing the Holocaust and war,<sup>63</sup> in the Polish-language literature on the subject, it is men's studies that barely exists.<sup>64</sup>

*Translation: Benjamin Koschalka*

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61 This has for some time been part of Paweł Wolski's academic research. See Wolski, "Boks w Auschwitz. Opór ciała," in *Adlojada. Biografia i świadectwo*, ed. Jaromir Brejda, Dariusz Kacprzak, Jerzy Madejski, Beata Małgorzata Wolska (Warszawa: Muzeum Narodowe w Szczecinie, 2014).

62 Bożena Karwowska, *Ciało, seksualność, obozy zagłady* (Kraków: Universitas, 2009).

63 Aleksandra Ubertowska, "»Niewidzialne świadectwa«. Perspektywa feministyczna w badaniach nad literaturą Holocaustu," *Teksty Drugie* 4 (2009); Ubertowska, "Pisałam sercem i krwią. Poetyka kobiecych świadectw holokaustowych," *Ruch Literacki* 6 (2008); Joanna Stöcker-Sobelman, *Kobiety Holocaustu. Feministyczna perspektywa w badaniach nad Shoah. Kазus KL Auschwitz-Birkenau* (Warszawa: Trio, 2012); Weronika Grzebalska, *Płeć powstania warszawskiego* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IBL PAN, 2013).

64 An exception is Tomasz Tomasiak's *Wojna – męskość – literatura* (Słupsk: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Akademii Pomorskiej, 2013).

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Jakub Rawski

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## Sexy Fascism: Exemplifying the Relationship between Sex and Power

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The hungry Greeks... rummage underneath the rails.  
One of them finds some pieces of mildewed bread,  
another a few half-rotten sardines. They eat.  
*Schweindreck*, spits a young tall guard with corn-  
coloured hair and dreamy blue eyes.<sup>1</sup>

Tadeusz Borowski

Those, who will be beautiful, will also be wise – the  
beautiful, wise and powerful will embody the ideal of  
perfection. Evil, ugliness and stupidity will disappear  
off the face of the earth.

Will this not entail suffering and the most elabo-  
rate cruelty? Does the end justify the means? But of  
course, of course.<sup>2</sup>

Stanisław Grochowiak

### 1.

The aim of this article is to present the alliance of sex and power by looking at the phenomenon of “sexy Fascism.” The notion was derived from Susan Sontag’s “Fascinating Fascism.” In her essay, the American philosopher and

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1 Tadeusz Borowski, *This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen*, trans. Barbara Vedder (New York: Penguin Books, 1976), 34.

2 Stanisław Grochowiak, *Trismus, Prozy*, ed. Jacek Łukasiewicz (Warszawa: Atena, 1996), 190-191. If not otherwise specified all translations of referenced works are provided by the translator of the article.

cultural theorist analyzes Leni Riefenstahl's<sup>3</sup> World War II propaganda films and writes that "fascist aesthetics... flow from (and justify) a preoccupation with situations of control,"<sup>4</sup> in other words, power exercised over the individual and the masses. Sontag points also to the ideal of beauty promoted by Fascism: "Fascist art displays a utopian aesthetics – that of physical perfection. Painters and sculptors under the Nazis often depicted the nude... hav[ing] the perfection of a fantasy."<sup>5</sup> The Nazi ideal of beauty was related to the erotic sphere: "Nazi art is both prurient and idealizing. A utopian aesthetics (identity as a biological given) implies an ideal eroticism."<sup>6</sup> The Third Reich drew from ancient Greco-Roman standards of beauty and the remains of classical sculptures determined its directions.<sup>7</sup> There is a notable dichotomy in the approach to the corporeal in Nazi Germany: on the one hand, art and propaganda was teeming with sexual tension,<sup>8</sup> which still colors contemporary popular culture,<sup>9</sup> but on the other, there is a conviction that sexuality should

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3 Leni Riefenstahl, artist most faithful to Nazi regime, can be seen as the creator of the clearly masculine and homosocial Nazi myth of beauty. The 20th- and 21st-century popular culture refers, mostly unconsciously, to the image of a perfect, Aryan body visualized by the director of *Triumph of the Will* (1935) captures the Fascist corporeality, where "in that celebration transforming technique to myth, the camera's icy gaze reveals an obscene female fascination, tongues gliding loathsome lips, disgusting military masculinity of Hitlerjugend youths patting their naked torsos," Chiara Magris, *Ciocia Leni [Aunt Leni]* here based on the Polish translation by Joanna Ugniewska, *Zeszyty Literackie* 4 (2010): 71.

4 Susan Sontag, "Fascinating Fascism," *Under the Sign of Saturn* (New York: Vintage Books, 1981), 91.

5 *Ibid.*, 92.

6 *Ibid.*, 93.

7 See Johann Chapoutot, *Fascisme, nazisme et régimes autoritaires en Europe (1918-1945) [Fascism, Nazism and the Authoritarian Regimes in Western Europe (1919-1945)]*, here based on the Polish translation by Andrzej Purchla, *Wiek dyktatur. Faszyzm reżymy autorytarne w Europie Zachodniej (1919-1945)* (Warszawa: Oficyna Naukowa, 2012), 187.

8 Apart from Leni Riefenstahl's films, one could also mention several sculptures by Arno Breker promoting the image of a perfect male Aryan body, like *The Victor* (1939). Works of Nazi art were and still are subject to perceptual erotization (see Sontag), even though "the National Socialist ideal of beauty in the service of »racial hygiene« meant to make the audience adopt an ideological and not aesthetic perspective." Stefan Maiwald, Gerd Mischler, *Seksualność w cieniu swastyki. Świat intymny człowieka w polityce Trzeciej Rzeszy [Sexualität unter dem Hakenkreuz: Manipulation und Vernichtung der Intimsphäre im NS-Staat]*, trans. Ryszard Wojnakowski (Warszawa: Trio, 2003), 78.

9 Foucault asks: "How is it that Nazism, whose representatives were pitiful, pathetic, puritanical figures, Victorian spinsters with (at best) secret vices, how is it that it can have



not be a source of pleasure, but serve reproductive, pragmatic, and political functions<sup>10</sup> (e.g. the *Lebensborn* policy).

It may be worthwhile to juxtapose Sontag's hypotheses with Michel Foucault's argument about power: the French philosopher took note of the crisis of beauty (the latter usually connected to the erotic and the sphere of subjective or objective ideals). According to Foucault, beauty expresses valorization, it is one man's tool of refinement used to dominate over another. Sex is in a fundamental way linked to power and it is a negative relation.<sup>11</sup> Power lays down the rule and dictates its law to sex.<sup>12</sup> This is illustrated by the figure of the "beautiful SS-man," found in cultural texts and historical sources.

## 2.

Jerzy Kosiński's well-known novel, *The Painted Bird* (1965), is narrated by a young Jewish boy in hiding as World War II rages across Europe. As the events of the narrative unfold, he encounters an SS officer. This is how the narrator tells the story of the encounter.

The instant I saw him I could not tear my gaze from him. His entire person seemed to have something utterly superhuman about it. Against the background of bland colors he projected an unfadable blackness. In a world of men with harrowed faces, with smashed eyes, bloody, bruised and disfigured limbs, among the fetid, broken human bodies, he seemed an example of neat perfection that could not be sullied: the smooth, polished skin of his face, the bright golden hair showing under his peaked cap, his pure metal eyes. Every movement of his body seemed propelled by some tremendous internal force. The granite sound of his language was ideally suited to order the death of inferior, forlorn creatures.<sup>13</sup>

The polarization noted by the protagonist is clear. Against the background of broken, bloodied bodies of the murdered, the beautiful Aryan SS-man is

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become... in all pornographic literature the world over, the absolute reference of eroticism?" Michael Foucault, "Anti-rétro" *Cahiers du Cinéma* 5-17 (1974): 10.

10 Foucault, "Anti-rétro," 7.

11 See Michael Foucault, *Historia seksualności*, Vol I: *Wola wiedzy* [*The History of Sexuality Volume 1, The Will to Knowledge*], trans. Bogdan Banasiak, Krzysztof Matuszewski (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1995), 76.

12 Foucault, *Historia seksualności*, 76.

13 Jerzy Kosiński, *The Painted Bird* (New York: Grove Press, 1976), Kindle edition.

visualized as an angel descending on the hell of annihilation. The narrator is completely oblivious to the fact that the officer represents and is symbolically responsible for the world of those who repel him, the victims of the Nazi system. In the completely ruined world, physical beauty wins against the ugliness of the everyday. It is much easier to consume and experience beauty, sanctioned by human perception, and more readily accepted.

The boy's growing fascination and admiration for the officer's look are accompanied by desire. All of this takes place within a structure of power positioning those who wield it and those who submit to it. The narrator comments: "In the presence of his resplendent being, armed in all the symbols of might and majesty, I was genuinely ashamed of my appearance."<sup>14</sup> He then adds: "I had nothing against his killing me. I gazed at the ornate clasp of his officer's belt that was exactly at the level of my eyes, and awaited his decision."<sup>15</sup> His gaze directed at the crotch and the thought of death echo Sontag's remarks: "sexuality remains one of the demonic forces in human consciousness – pushing us at intervals close to taboo and dangerous desires, which range from the impulse to commit sudden arbitrary violence upon another person to the voluptuous yearning for extinction of one's consciousness, for death itself."<sup>16</sup> The narrator continues: "I knew my fate was being decided in some manner, but it was a matter of indifference to me. I placed infinite confidence in the decision of the man facing me. I knew that he possessed powers unattainable by ordinary people."<sup>17</sup> The protagonist's idealization of the SS-man also implies trust. Maria Janion states clearly: "in *The Painted Bird*, the child falls in love with the beautiful blonde beast, the fair angel in the uniform of a high-ranking SS officer."<sup>18</sup>

To sum up, the relation between the oppressor and the victim described by Jerzy Kosiński is a good example of how fascination with the physicality of the former evokes subsequent emotions and experiences, such as the already mentioned trust or a death wish of erotic nature.

The eponymous protagonist of Ignacy Karpowicz's *Sońka* similarly succumbs to the irresistible, radiating beauty of the Nazi persecutor. Written five decades after *The Painted Bird*, the novel presents a similar, although more complexly narrated, honest and naive fascination with the SS oppressor.

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Susan Sontag, "Pornographic Imagination," in *Styles of Radical Will* (London: Penguin Modern Classics, 2009), 57.

<sup>17</sup> Kosiński, *Painted Bird*.

<sup>18</sup> Maria Janion, *Płacz generała. Eseje o wojnie* (Warszawa: Sic!, 2007), 217.

It is World War II and the Nazis enter a small Podlachian village; the female narrator describes them as fascinating creatures: “with beautiful, chiseled faces, rosy-golden skin and hair like frames for icons... athletic bodies. They looked beautiful, dangerous and noble,”<sup>19</sup> and among them is SS officer Joachim Castorp with a “sickeningly” telling name (S, 119) and “the bluest, most piercing and merriest eyes, large and bright” (S, 32) whom Sońka falls for. He wears, of course, the emblematic black uniform (S, 46) with “two steel SS bolts,” and Sońka compares sex with him with “a ball of lightning exploding in her brain.” (S, 46)

Sonia’s attitude eludes clear moral categories, resulting from an impossible, forbidden love and we know that “whatever is done from love always occurs beyond good and evil.”<sup>20</sup> Her state means that Sońka’s perception of the war (symbolized by Joachim), is entirely different from everyone else’s. Ryszard Koziółek notes: “Karpowicz... tells their tale against history.”<sup>21</sup> The protagonist confesses: “I prayed fervently... for the Germans to win and stay here forever” (S, 47). Recalling the occupation years later, she exclaims: “How I miss the war! Why did it have to end?” (S, 67)

When the Germans start killing the villagers, Sonia never stops to idealize Joachim, quite on the contrary: “My poor, fair Joachim, his beautiful body, suddenly delineated by the twisted silhouettes of corpses.” (S, 61) Although she is aware of the murderous acts of her beloved, the protagonist still retains feelings for him, committing a serious transgression, sentencing herself to banishment – social exclusion: “They saved the harshest punishment for Sonia... turn[ing] their eyes away from her.” (S, 174)

War becomes a synonym for Joachim and the whole social-historical context becomes largely insignificant because “Sonia could not conceive Joachim as a German. Germans were the ones who did the shooting, burned down villages, confiscated food and livestock” (S, 83). It seems that Koziółek is wrong in his claim that “the loving Sońka implements, honestly and fervently, the policy of reconciliation.”<sup>22</sup> The protagonist is not interested in such issues. Rather, she is completely taken over by the emotion which fills her entire existence – historiosophical reflections are absent from her notion of war (which is not to imply that she is incapable of such reflections). The feeling that connects the Pole and the German does not flow from the policy of

19 Ignacy Karpowicz, *Sońka* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2014), 30. The following citations are marked in the text as (S, page number).

20 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good & Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 90.

21 Ryszard Koziółek, “Esesman, mój bliźni,” [“My neighbor, SS-man”] *Księżki 2* (2014): 11.

22 *Ibid.*, 11.

reconciliation also in the metaphorical dimension, it is located outside the historical context, focused only on itself, on the “here” and “now.” Their love is obsessive, honest and unconditional – as in Stanisław Grochowiak’s poem “Invitation to Love” where the speaker “invites” the addressee of the poem to love regardless of her age and looks.<sup>23</sup>

Joachim is “fair” (S, 92), holy (S, 93), “radiant” (S, 110), infinitely idealized: “He was the iris of my eye. The navel of my world. The tongue of my mouth. The fingerprint of each fingertip. The outline of my womanhood. My incandescent Joachim” (S, 99); “My Joachim... the aureole of my saints... My golden Joachim” (S, 137). Many of Sonia’s descriptions have religious connotations to holiness and light, that is, to the sphere of the sacred that is distinctly ideal and positive. The protagonist is fully under the Nazi’s thrall – one not based on force or violence, but on beauty.

### 3.

Also the cinema provides examples of beautiful, Nazi soldiers-tormentors embodying both beauty and power. Analyzing the essays by the Russian writer Slava Mogutin, Grzegorz Ojcewicz notes that “cinematic art significantly influenced and continues to influence the sexual image of fascism,”<sup>24</sup> not to mention *The Night Porter* (1974) where fascism is sexualized in the figure of an SS-man. The film tells the story of Max, a former SS officer and his relation to Lucia, whom he meets after the war and who was his sexually abused victim in the concentration camp in Dachau.<sup>25</sup> They renew their sadomasochistic relation in a Hegelian master-slave dialectic,<sup>26</sup> as in the poem by the Nobel prize winner, Nelly Sachs:

Footsteps –  
The primeval game of hangman and victim,  
bully and bullied,  
hunter and hunted –

23 “Gaunt – catty / Clumsy – now fat / Wearing a wig / Angered / Spectacled // I am coming to you through my rotten dreams / In the iron shoes. Stanisław Grochowiak, *Zaproszenie do miłości* [Invitation to Love], in *Poezje wybrane* (Warszawa: PIW, 2001), 179.

24 Grzegorz Ojcewicz, *Skazani na trwanie. Odmieńcy XX wieku w esejach Jarosława Mogutina* (Olsztyn: Portret, 2007).

25 *The Night Porter* (Italy, 1974), dir. Liliana Cavani.

26 See also Georg Wilhelm Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. Arnold Vincent Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).

Footsteps  
 signaling the wolf-pack's  
 urgent appetite,  
 swallowing the fugitive's last hopes  
 in blood.

...

Footsteps of the killers  
 over footsteps of the victims,<sup>27</sup>

The trauma of the past leads to a repetition of the relation, and bondage created during the war retains its hold. The characters of *The Night Porter* decide to recreate the old relationship and initiate a certain theatrical performance where they play the main parts.<sup>28</sup> Michel Foucault asserts that pleasure and power are not mutually exclusive but reinforce one another.<sup>29</sup> The protagonists of *The Night Porter* inhabit the "gray zone" (to quote Primo Levi)

in which the "long chain of conjunction between the victim and executioner" comes loose, where the oppressed becomes oppressor and the executioner in turn appears as victim. A gray, incessant alchemy in which good and evil, along with them, all the metals of traditional ethics reach their point of fusion.<sup>30</sup>

An alternative vision of World War II can be found in Quentin Tarantino's *Inglorious Basterds* (2009), including the figure of a Nazi who tries to use his power over an individual belonging to occupied French society: private Frederick Zoller (Daniel Brühl) is convinced that no woman can resist his beauty and glory of having murdered three hundred Allied soldiers. He meets a beautiful cinema owner, Emmanuelle Mimieux (Mélanie Laurent) whom he tries to woo and who remains immune to those attempts. What

27 Nelly Sachs, "That the persecuted should not become persecutors" (Auf daß die Verfolgten nicht Verfolger werden) from *Sternverdunkelung* (1949), trans. Andrew Shanks, < <http://www.nellysachs-translations.org.uk/stern.html#footsteps>>, accessed December 28, 2017.

28 See Katarzyna Przyłuska-Urbanowicz, *Pupilla* (Gdańsk: słowo/obraz terytoria 2014), 185-226.

29 Foucault, *Historia seksualności*, 50.

30 Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (New York: Zone Books, 2008), 21

Zoller does not know is that Emmanuelle is Jewish, her real name being Shoshanna Dreyfus, and that she was the only one to survive the massacre of her family.

When he finally manages to meet her alone, Emmanuelle draws a gun and shoots him. The audience is shown the face of the woman, overcome with a kind sorrow, a certain sadness resulting from her act. She leans over Zoller, probably to stroke his head, but before she does so, he also reaches for his gun and murders Emmanuelle. Both die.<sup>31</sup> The coloring of the scene is not to be ignored. Zoller is dressed in a white uniform (white being the symbol of innocence – here his innocent intentions), Mimieux wears a red dress (symbolizing extreme emotions: anger, fury, and love). It is interesting that instead of regaining peace after she shoots the Nazi, the victim of the Nazi system experiences opposite emotions. Let us compare Tarantino's scene with Zbigniew Herbert's "Achilles. Penthesilea" where the Achaean warrior, upon mortally wounding the Amazon, falls in love with her.

When Achilles with his short sword pierced the breast of Penthesilea ... he noticed that the queen of the Amazons was lovely. He laid her carefully on the sand, took off her heavy helmet, unclasped her hair, and gently arranged her hands on her bosom. He lacked, however, the courage to shut her eyes. He gave her one more, last, farewell look, and, as though suddenly overpowered by an outer force, cried.<sup>32</sup>

A similar phenomenon takes place in the scene from *Inglorious Basterds*: the "outer force" gives birth to a transgressive feeling whose signs manifest themselves on Emmanuelle's face, emphasized by the attempt at a tender gesture which turns out to be impossible as Eros and Thanatos become joined in a (im)mortal embrace, not for the first time and not the last in the history of culture. There is only a shift in the aspect of sex, a change of genders – Mimieux becomes Achilles and Zoller plays the part of Penthesilea.

In her discussion of *Inglorious Basterds*, Kazimiera Szczuka points to the "sexy Fascism" of Hugo Stiglitz (Til Schweiger) whom he describes as follows: "A dark, devastatingly handsome Wehrmacht officer... is

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31 *Inglorious Basterds* (Germany and USA, 2009), dir. Quentin Tarantino.

32 Zbigniew Herbert, "Achilles. Penthesilea," trans. Joseph Brodsky, *The New York Review of Books* (October 21, 1993) < <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/1993/10/21/achilles-penthesilea/>>, accessed November 28, 2017.

a phenomenal embodiment of the mass audience's hidden desires."<sup>33</sup> But one should not forget about the ethical context: by producing images of handsome SS men, popular cinema desensitizes audiences to fascism. Murderous ideology whose political and economic implementation cost the lives of millions, at the turn of the 21st century, becomes associated with the image of an attractive, seductive man dressed in a well-tailored black uniform.<sup>34</sup> Stanisław Buryła refers to this growing phenomenon as the "aesthetization of the tormentor"<sup>35</sup> which should be placed in the context of "mass culture's *domestication* of the Holocaust, which is its narrative totalization," notes Jerzy Topolski.<sup>36</sup>

#### 4.

Yuri Lotman and Zara Mints argue that mass culture, with its tendency for simplified generalizations, is an especially fertile ground for the creation of myth.<sup>37</sup> The popular myth of the beautiful SS-man born in second half of the 20th century, may be illustrated, for instance, by a 2012 Polish campaign to commemorate the International Holocaust Remembrance Day on 27th January. The poster presents a self-confident, young, handsome model wearing the SS-Obersturmführer uniform with the caption: "My name is Hans. I'm 25 years old. In December 1943, I killed 40 people in Warsaw's Wola district. Remember me so that the history does not repeat itself."<sup>38</sup> The author of the initiative, Wojciech Jeżowski, explains his idea as follows:

33 Kazimiera Szczuka, "Łowca niedźwiedzi," *Krytyka polityczna* 22 (2010): 125.

34 Slava Mogutin writes: "The Nazi uniform ... seems to have been created not for the war but for festivities and sexual amusement. It is too beautiful and theatrical, almost indecent and pornographic," Slava Mogutin ексусальность фашизма, <http://mitin.com/people/mogutin/fashism.shtml>, accessed August 17, 2014, cited in Ojcewicz, *Skazani na trwanie*, 225.

35 Stanisław Buryła, *Tematy (nie)opisane* (Kraków: Universitas, 2013), 404-416.

36 Jerzy Topolski, *Jak się pisze i rozumie historię. Tajemnice narracji historycznej* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2008), 328.

37 Yuri Lotman, Zara Mints, "Literatura i mitologia" ["Literature and mythology"] in *Sztuka w świecie znaków*, trans. Bogusław Żyłko (Gdańsk: słowo/obraz terytoria, 2002), 81.

38 The poster even had a Facebook fanpage, "Pamiętaj o mnie, by to się nigdy nie powtórzyło" <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Pamiętaj-o-mnie-by-to-się-nigdy-nie-powtórzyło/315851678467500>, accessed July 11, 2014.

The world of today's youth revolves around parties and shopping malls. There is less and less time to reflect. Young people remember things that shock them and raise controversy. I knew that a young, handsome man in an SS-uniform will make the poster very expressive. What matters the most to me is the fact that the issue of the Holocaust is discussed, as well as the awareness that evil may lurk in each and every person.<sup>39</sup>

But the man seductively looking down from the poster not only exemplifies the aesthetization of Fascism but, above all, diverts the audience's attention from the idea that it was meant to convey. What is at the center of the work is not the memory of the victims but of their tormentors and those behind the Nazi genocide. The actual message is encrypted, covered by the sexual object seducing the viewers with its power, crime, gaze and, most of all, appearance. It encourages, even provokes homo- and heterosexual fantasies. The explanation provided by the author ("evil may lurk in each and every person") seems rather trite and does not require a sexy Fascist to be proven. One needs to look no further than the Stanford Prison Experiment to find manifestations of the dark side of the human psyche.<sup>40</sup> The discussed poster received a "Chamlet," a mock award in recognition for the worse advertisement of the year.<sup>41</sup> This part of my argument is well summed up by a passage from Susan Sontag's essay:

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39 After Marcin Świejkowski, "Jacy piękni ci naziści!" [http://www.kampaniespoleczne.pl/kontrowersje,4110,jacy\\_piekni\\_ci\\_nazisci](http://www.kampaniespoleczne.pl/kontrowersje,4110,jacy_piekni_ci_nazisci), accessed December 2, 2012.

40 See also Philip Zimbardo, *The Lucifer Effect: Understanding How Good People Turn Evil* (New York: Random House, 2007).

41 One of the jurors, Professor Dariusz Doliński, explains: "This Chamlet was awarded for the discrepancy between the image and the message. The authors' intention seemed clear: don't be fooled by appearances, this neat looking, nice boy is a murderer. But the poster takes an entire newspaper page which the viewers look at for less than a second. This is too short to decipher the message." Cited after Małgorzata Porada-Labuda "Chamlety przyznane, nieodebrane," <<http://www.uni.wroc.pl/wiadomo%C5%9Bci/konkursy/chamlety-przyznane-nieodebrane>>, accessed December 2, 2012. Professor Jerzy Jastrzębski adds: "The statue of Chamlet, a crumpled piece of paper, was awarded to the authors of the campaign for the lack of brain and the love of for Leni Riefenstahl whose poetic they represent. I was also under the impression that the gentleman presented on the poster sends an erotic, sado-masochistic signal: 'I killed 40 people, kill me,'" cited in Lucyna Róg, "Faszyzm łągodzą seksizmem," *Gazeta Wyborcza Wrocław* (24 November 2012), 2, supplement to *Gazeta Wyborcza* 275 (2012).



Art which evokes the themes of fascist aesthetic is popular now, and for most people it is probably no more than a variant of camp. Fascism may be merely fashionable . . . The hard truth is that what may be acceptable in elite culture may not be acceptable in mass culture, that tastes which pose only innocuous ethical issues as the property of a minority become corrupting when they become more established.<sup>42</sup>

## 5.

Increasingly reproduced by mass culture, the image of the beautiful Nazi can be found also in the German miniseries, *Generation War*, personified by the main protagonist, Wehrmacht lieutenant Wilhelm Winter (played by Volker Bruch). Although not a member of the formation where the sexy Fascists typically come from – Winter is in the army and not the SS – he embodies the myth of the beautiful Nazi with regard to appearance: he is young and handsome, noble, loyal to the fatherland, he has a code of honor and is platonically in love with a nurse called Charlotte. Even when he executes a Soviet prisoner,<sup>43</sup> the audience receives a very clear message that Wilhelm is following orders which he cannot (and should not) ignore, being meticulous and conscientious. Commenting on the Eichmann's trial, Leszek Kołakowski wrote: "No one in the world is excused on the ground of following an order or fulfilling the soldier's duty."<sup>44</sup>

An unsettling cognitive dissonance appears in the sphere of ethics when the viewer realizes the whitewashing and justifications for the Nazi murders veiled by the figure of the beautiful Nazi. Wilhelm's ideal image is completed by the scenes of his later defection, the threat of death penalty, assignment to a penal battalion and lonely exile in the Soviet Union and Poland.<sup>45</sup> This means that Wilhelm's sins are entirely erased (on the surface, of course) and he holds the imagination of the viewers, mass audiences, enthralled, gaining their favor both through his looks and his tragic biography.

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42 Sontag, "Fascinating Fascism," 98.

43 *Generation War: Our Mothers, Our Fathers*, ep. I: "A Different Time" (Germany, 2013), dir. Philipp Kadelbach.

44 Leszek Kołakowski, "Casus Eichmanna," *Gazeta Wyborcza* 166 (2014): 27.

45 *Generation War* episodes II and III: "A Different War", "A Different Time."

## 6.

Jan Karski, the legendary Polish emissary and courier, who in 1943 revealed in the United States the truth about the Holocaust, was arrested by the Gestapo in 1940. He describes the figure of the SS officer who questioned him as:

an extremely handsome young man. About the age of twenty-five. He was tall, lean, had blonde hair and blue eyes... He looked like a Prussian Junker. When he energetically strode across the room, I looked at him with a certain sense of fascination.<sup>46</sup>

The SS-man tells the prisoner about his youth. Karski comments: "He was a delicate boy, interested in the arts, but his father wanted to raise a true officer."<sup>47</sup> At some point in the conversation, the German says:

I don't know if you realize but NSDAP is founded on typically male ideals. Our entire ideology is masculine ... during my school years in Ordensburg I never talked to girls voluntarily, unless it was a part of my duties. I believed that honest conversations can only concern men.<sup>48</sup>

What is revealed here is the homoerotic character of Nazism. The German school which groomed the future SS-man<sup>49</sup> constitutes a clearly masculine sphere, separated from the feminine. The right-winged, anti-humanist and totalitarian ideology became the crowning piece or even a monstrous apogee of patriarchy.<sup>50</sup> The woman was seen only in reproductive categories, as

46 Jan Karski, *Tajne państwo. Opowieść o polskim podziemiu*, ed. Waldemar Piasecki (Warszawa: Rosner & Wspólnicy, 2004), 137.

47 *Ibid.*, 138.

48 *Ibid.*, 138.

49 Attempts to locate the roots of the German Nazism can be found in Michael Haneke's 2009 *The White Ribbon* (Austria, France, Germany, Italy).

50 The German Conservative Revolution attributed, for instance, the male-male relations with statehood-creating potential as well as a monopoly for all positive and constructive action. Women were to be excluded from the sphere of these relations and completely subordinated – Elżbieta Janicka, *Sztuka czy naród? Monografia pisarska Andrzeja Trzebińskiego* (Kraków: Universitas, 2006), 220 footnote 36. "The theory of the male society (*Männerbundtheorie*) was created by Hans Blüher who formulated the thesis of two erotic drives. The first one was directed at women and founded the family. The second one allowed men create communities which opposed the world of family life, such as army, political societies, state. Both his theory and the practice of youth bunds included homosexual elements even though the author of *Die Rolle der Erotik in der Männlichen Ge-*

a future mother of ideal Aryans, a kind of incubator for the “master race”; the national-socialist worldview had no room for independent, sexually active women.<sup>51</sup> Hitler writes in *Mein Kampf*:

The People’s State will have to direct the education of girls just as that of boys and according to the same fundamental principles. Here again special importance must be given to physical training and only after that must the importance of spiritual and mental training be taken into account. In the education of the girl the final goal always to be kept in mind is that she’s one day to be a mother.<sup>52</sup>

Only the man is perceived as fully human – an Aryan man, naturally, embodying the notion of the beautiful and ideal Fascist, which in turn shaped the art of the Third Reich since, as Umberto Eco notes, Nazi mysticism and its homosexual consequences domesticated the anatomical truth following the ideological requirements.<sup>53</sup>

Homoeroticism stayed hidden behind the state’s homophobia,<sup>54</sup> programmatic for Nazi ideology and its legal instantiations (i.e. persecution, arrests, death penalty sentences, concentration camps).<sup>55</sup> The fear of homosexuality is frequently attributed to repressed homosexual desire.<sup>56</sup> The Nazi system was based on the military; SS-units were a paramilitary formation which included also fully militarized units of Waffen-SS. Slavoj Žižek notes that “homosexual libidinal economy bears witness to the fact that the discourse of the military

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*sellschaft* probably had in mind some kind of its sublimated version, enabling the creation of the specific relationship in question.” Wojciech Kunicki, “Wprowadzenie,” in *Rewolucja Konserwatywna w Niemczech 1918-1933*, ed. Wojciech Kunicki (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 1999), 74-75, quoted after Janicka, *Sztuka czy naród?*, 220, footnote 36.

51 Maiwald, Mischler, *Seksualność w cieniu swastyki*, 7 and 93-97.

52 Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, trans. James Murphy (London and New York: Hurst and Blackett Ltd., 1942) 322.

53 Umberto Eco, *Po drugiej stronie lustra i inne eseje. Znak, reprezentacja, iluzja, obraz*, trans. Joanna Wajs (Warszawa: W.A.B., 2012), 75.

54 Reich Office for Combating of Homosexuality and Abortion was founded in 1937; later the Reich Security Headquarters (RSHA) included Reich Offices for Combating Homosexuality, Drug Offences, International White Slave Trade.

55 Maiwald, Mischler, *Seksualność w cieniu swastyki*, 139-161.

56 Katarzyna Bojarska-Nowaczyk, “»Przejęte ciotki niemile widziane« – o homofobii wśród gejów i lesbijek,” *Parametry pożądania. Kultura odmierców wobec homofobii*, ed. Tomasz Basiuk et al. (Kraków: Universitas: 2006), 61-72.

community can only operate by censoring its own libidinal foundation.”<sup>57</sup> Importantly, one of the more prominent Nazi activists and SA leader Ernst Röhm who did not hide his homosexuality was murdered partly for that reason.<sup>58</sup> The subject seems to attract artists: Polish films such as *Deborah*<sup>59</sup> and *Kornblumenblau*<sup>60</sup> feature the figure of a Nazi homosexual;<sup>61</sup> *Pasażerka* tells the story of a female SS-officer platonically fascinated with a female prisoner in Auschwitz-Birkenau.<sup>62</sup>

## 7.

The phenomenon of sexy Fascism is represented best by SS-Hauptsturmführer Dr. Josef Mengele, a Nazi murderer who conducted pseudo-medical experiments on Auschwitz prisoners and wielded unlimited power over their life and death. The accounts of female prisoners and his victims suggest that he was often perceived as a handsome, interesting man, despite his deadly activities, and was referred to, among others, as “the beautiful Satan.”<sup>63</sup> The abjectivity of that expression<sup>64</sup> outlines the frame of ambivalence encountered by Mengele’s victims – there is a reason why Sławomir Buryła calls this type of criminal a “greater intellectual challenge.”<sup>65</sup>

Hanna Krall recalls the story of a Polish nurse who, attempting to save her life, approached Josef Mengele on a ramp in Auschwitz. The narrative

57 Slavoj Žižek, *The Plagues of Fantasies* (London and New York, Verso: 1997), 25.

58 Karol Grünberg, *Adolf Hitler. Biografia Führera* (Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza, 1988), 133-134; see also Karol Grünberg, *SS – gwardia Hitlera* (Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza, 1994), 47; Maiwald, Mischler, *Seksualność w cieniu swastyki*, 38-45; Slavoj Žižek *Rewolucja u bram. Pisma Lenina z roku 1917 [Revolution at the Gates: Žižek on Lenin: The 1917 Writings]*, trans. Julian Kutyla (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2007), 440.

59 *Deborah* (Poland, 1995), dir. Ryszard Brylski.

60 *Kornblumenblau* (Poland, 1998), dir. Leszek Wosiewicz.

61 More in Sebastian Jagielski, *Maskarady męskości. Pragnienie homospołeczne w polskim kinie fabularnym* (Kraków: Universitas, 2013), 379-403.

62 *Pasażerka* (Poland, 1963), dir. Andrzej Munk.

63 Ulrich Völklein *Josef Mengele. Doktor z Auschwitz*, trans. Artur Kuć, Urszula Poprawska (Warszawa: Prószyński i S-ka, 2011), 9.

64 Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

65 Buryła, *Tematy (nie)opisane*, 272.

includes the following statement: “Doctor Mengele – handsome, polite.”<sup>66</sup> Lidia Ostaszewska’s *Farby wodne* [*Water Paints*], a volume of reportages about Dina Babbit (née Gottliebová), Jewish painter who worked for Mengele in Auschwitz so that her life was spared, recalls the artist’s description of the criminal: “He had a rather nice, distinct face, with mouth shaped like the letter M... a mane of hair. But his eyes were dead... swarthy, dark-eyed, dark-haired. One of the women in our camp said he was handsome. He was indeed, but he was also an SS-man.”<sup>67</sup>

Gerald L. Posner and John Ware write: “The memory of this slightly built man, scarcely a hair out of place, his dark green tunic neatly pressed, his face well scrubbed, his Death’s Head SS cap tilted rakishly to one side, remains vivid for those who survived his scrutiny when they arrived at the Auschwitz railhead.”<sup>68</sup> And later:

Many have testified to his immaculate and well-manicured appearance as he exercised his power of life and death. Some women, whom he was not adverse to humiliating by having them parade naked while he carried out his selections, found him a handsome man... Survivors remarked on the impression made by his tight-fitting SS uniform with glistening black boots, white glove and polished cane as he surveyed his prey with a sure eye, smiling sometimes.<sup>69</sup>

Ernst Klee observes: “Mengele’s descriptions differ from the way he is usually imagined... He attached great importance to a clean appearance, and even had a prisoner-masseur.”<sup>70</sup> Doctor Mancy Schwalbe recalls that “he created the impression of an elegant, beautiful man with exquisite manners.”<sup>71</sup> Janina Gołębiowska, a camp prisoner, describes him as “proportionally built, with an charming face.”<sup>72</sup> Doctor-prisoner, Ella Lingens claims “he was a strikingly

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66 Hanna Krall, *Hipnoza* (Kraków: a5, 2002), 26.

67 Lidia Ostasłowska, *Farby wodne* (Wołowiec: Czarne, 2011), 72.

68 Gerald L. Posner, Michael Berenbaum, John Ware, *Mengele: The Complete Story* (New York: Cooper Square Press, 1986), 2.

69 *Ibid.*, 27.

70 Ernst Klee, *Auschwitz. Medycyna III Rzeszy i jej ofary* [*Auschwitz: Nazi Medicine and its Victims*], here based on the Polish translation. E. Kalinowska-Styczeń (Kraków: Universitas, 2011), 440.

71 *Ibid.*, 441.

72 *Ibid.*, 441.

beautiful and elegant man.”<sup>73</sup> Also the Slovakian doctor-prisoner Margita Schwablova mentions “an elegant and handsome man with great manners.”<sup>74</sup> Solti Dezso from Hungary remembers Mengele as “very handsome. He was extremely well-groomed... he had very thick, dark hair. I recall his eyes, very bright. He really didn’t look like a murderer.”<sup>75</sup>

*Anioł śmierci* [*Angel of Death*], a 2008 documentary, includes reports by female prisoners who survived Mengele’s experiments: “He was an incredibly handsome and elegant man”<sup>76</sup> (Wanda Marossanyi); “Handsome young man, very polite”<sup>77</sup> (Ruth Elias). When Mengele arrived in Auschwitz in May 1943, prisoner Anna Palarczyk says “we found out that there was a new doctor, that he was handsome – And I also heard that he was evil.”<sup>78</sup>

Opinions on the appearance of the Nazi criminal cited above show the degree to which human sexuality determines perception. The victims did not see Mengele (initially) as a murderer but as a handsome man. His limitless power in the concentration camp was also an important factor. Foucault argues that the relations of power to sex and pleasure branch out, multiply, measure the body and penetrate modes of conduct.<sup>79</sup> The Nazi criminal, despite the dictates of ethics, becomes an object of desire, his perfectly tailored SS uniform only enhances the impression, magnifying his sexual aura.

The reports of female prisoners illustrate the phenomenon of coding sexuality.<sup>80</sup> In the ethical paradigm, Mengele is synonymous with evil, death, crime, suffering, and indeed, he is commonly perceived as such. But when an average consumer of media and culture, born after World War II, encounters the reports of the victims who compliment the physical appearance of their tormentor, a cognitive dissonance results: expected opposition (handsome man vs Nazi criminal) is missing, because Mengele is precisely a h a n d - s o m e N a z i c r i m i n a l. The figure of the cruel SS-man inspired numerous

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73 Ibid., 441.

74 Völklein, *Josef Mengele*, 23.

75 Ibid., 131.

76 *Anioł śmierci* (Poland, 2008), dir. Marta Minorowicz-McBride.

77 Ibid.

78 Ibid.

79 Foucault, *Historia seksualności*, 50.

80 More in Ferdinand Fellman, “Miłość i seksualność w ludzkim samorozumieniu,” trans. Andrzej Przyłębski, *Fenomenologia* 8 (2010): 31-39.

filmmakers: Mengele was played by Gregory Peck in *The Boys from Brazil*,<sup>81</sup> he appears also in *The Grey Zone*<sup>82</sup> and *Out of the Ashes*,<sup>83</sup> in *The Unborn* (a horror movie) one of the characters recalls a doctor from Auschwitz who was “very handsome” and “obsessed with twins”<sup>84</sup> (Mengele’s pseudo-medical research focused mostly on twins and people with dwarfism); the *German Doctor* (2013) tells the story of a family that in the 1960s shared the house with Mengele who continued to elude capture.<sup>85</sup>

Desire escapes the laws of logic, following the law of nature and physiology. It often evades expectations and accepted social norms, especially female desire, marginalized in patriarchal culture. Desire becomes a language used by women to accentuate their subjectivity; to use Julia Kristeva’s terminology, it is semiotic.<sup>86</sup> Consequently, in this case, sexuality becomes ambivalent, coded, hidden, pushed to the sphere of fantasy, thoughts and, with time, unwanted memory. Women who met Mengele in Auschwitz-Birkenau and survived his pseudo-medical experiments were only research objects to him; their position in the concentration camp was subordinate (as victims, slaves, research objects).<sup>87</sup> Elfriede Jelinek writes that “the woman as such has no

81 *The Boys from Brazil* (USA and Great Britain, 1978), dir. Franklin James Schaffner. Discussed in Zygmunt Kałużyński’s *Bankiet w domu powieszzonego* (Warszawa: BGW, 1993), 67-69. The movie was made while the criminal was still alive (Mengele died on 7 February 1979).

82 *The Grey Zone* (USA, 2001), dir. Tim Blake Nelson, based on Miklós Nyiszli’s *I Was Doctor Mengele’s Assistant*, trans. to Polish by T. Olszański, *Byłem asystentem doktora Mengele. Wspomnienia lekarza z Oświęcimia* (Oświęcim: Państwowe Muzeum Auschwitz-Birkenau, 2000).

83 *Out of the Ashes* (USA, 2003), dir. Joseph Sargent.

84 *The Unborn* (USA, 2009), dir. David Samuel Goyer.

85 *The German Doctor* (Argentina, France, Spain, Norway 2013), dir. Lucía Puenzo, based on Puenzo’s *Wakolda*, trans. to Polish by Bernadeta Krysztofiak (Zakrzewo: Replika, 2014).

86 Julia Kristeva, *La révolution du langage poétique. L’avant-garde à la fin du XIXe siècle: Lautréamont et Mallarmé* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1974). For a discussion of the Polish reception of the distinction between the semiotic and “symbolic” see Joanna Bator, “Julia Kristeva – kobieta i “symboliczna rewolucja,” *Teksty Drugie* 6 (2000): 7-26; Paweł Dybel, *Zagadka “drugiej płci.” Spory wokół różnicy seksualnej w psychoanalizie i w feminizmie* (Kraków: Universitas, 2012) 59-61; Ewa Hyży, *Kobieta, ciało, tożsamość. Teorie podmiotu w filozofii feministycznej końca XX wieku* (Kraków: Universitas, 2003), 181.

87 “In concentration camps, the authorities treat the body as an object, biological material exposed to trials leading to the state of »bare existence«; it represented more than physical salvation, its state determined the entire... human fate. For the prisoner, the body was a private space (the only private space in the camp) and consequently, the prisoner attempted (unconsciously) to counteract it being reduced to its components ... The

worth nor value, being worthless she also is not valued as a mother... concentration camps were »shredders« of human material, they squandered people, wasting that which could be used, but profit was not the goal of concentration camps.”<sup>88</sup>

Mengele’s female victims could have been easy prey for sexual abuse, but this never took place – the criminal’s biography suggests he was a fanatical Nazi his entire life and remained faithful to the Fascist notions of master race, racial purity etc.<sup>89</sup> As such, for ideological reasons, he could not enter into any erotic relations with a member of the non-Aryan race. Thus, we can speak of a phenomenon which could be described as sexuality without sex. To Mengele, the female body in the camp was erotically silent. Only in thought could Mengele be called “handsome” and only in this way could female desire become subversive – this was the only form of corporeal discourse in the camp: Mengele and the female prisoner.<sup>90</sup>

The woman notices the beauty of the oppressor which entails the aestheticization of Fascism. It seems, however, that more transpires in the encounter between Dr. Mengele and the female prisoners in the biological but also in the ontological sphere, exceeding superficial aestheticization. Calling the Nazi criminal an “angel” or referring to the SS-man in Kosiński’s novel as a “wonderful being” comes from a physical attraction, but also attributes the oppressor with positive traits (the halo effect).<sup>91</sup>

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practice of sexuality was among those tactics of »salvation«,” Beata Karwowska, *Ciało. Seksualność. Obozy zagłady* (Kraków: Universitas, 2009), 160–161.

88 Elfriede Jelinek, “Kobieta i jej przeznaczenie. Kobiety i obozy koncentracyjne,” [“The woman and her destiny. Women and the concentration camps”] *Moja sztuka protestu. Eseje i przemówienia*, trans. to Polish by Piotr Bikont et al., ed. Agnieszka Jezierska, Monika Szczepaniak (Warszawa: W.A.B., 2012), 312.

89 Zob. Posner, Berenbaum, Ware, *Mengele*, 263, 266–267, 305.

90 Literary images of sexuality, both female and male, and the body’s existence in several orders (social, political, erotic) in the concentration camps are discussed in Beata Karwowska, *Ciało. Seksualność. Obozy zagłady*. What seems especially interesting in the context of the present article, is the subject of female prostitutes visited by the prisoners and the SS-men (described, among others, by Tadeusz Borowski in “Here in Our Auschwitz.” See also Elfriede Jelinek, “Kobieta i jej przeznaczenie,” 306–315; Beata Karwowska, *Ciało. Seksualność. Obozy zagłady*, 171–194; J. Ostrowska, “Wielkie przemilczenie. Prostyucja w obozach koncentracyjnych,” *Krytyka Polityczna* 14( 2007): 176–192; Joanna Stöcker-Sobelmann, *Kobiety Holokaustu. Feministyczna perspektywa w badaniach nad Shoah. Kazus KL Auschwitz-Birkenau* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Trio, 2012), 50–51.

91 The tendency to automatically attribute character traits basing on the positive or negative impression.



Thus, sexy Fascism appears to be a behavioral but also a psychological issue. In “the world of stone,”<sup>92</sup> noticing the beauty of the oppressor is not purely sexually driven; it comes from the need to give meaning to one’s existence, emphasize one’s humanity and subjectivity despite it being reduced to a prisoner’s number.

## 8.

Cultural texts discussed in this article present the phenomenon of “sexy Fascism,” derived from Susan Sontag’s notion of “fascinating Fascism,” and illustrate Michel Foucault’s argument about the relation of sex and power. The ethical issue, resulting from a cognitive dissonance, appears to be the most unsettling aspect of the problem: fascism becomes aestheticized and sexualized while the criminal nature of the system is ignored or whitewashed.

Piotr Uklański’s observation on the matter seems particularly insightful here: in one of the interviews, the artist behind *Naziści*<sup>93</sup> comments: “Soon we will know the war only from movies, where Nazis are played by handsome blondes.”<sup>94</sup> While this is taking place in popular culture, high culture has nonetheless produced numerous texts, both cinematic<sup>95</sup>

92 Tadeusz Borowski, “The World of Stone,” in *This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen* (New York: Penguin, 1976).

93 A composition consisting of a series of color and black and white portraits of actors playing the roles of Nazis, created in 1998 and first exhibited in Photographer’s Gallery in London.

94 “»Żaby bym nie ukrzyżował.« Z Piotrem Uklańskim rozmawia Piotr Pacewicz,” *Wysokie Obcasy* 7 (2013), 46. Similarly, Sławomir Buryła concludes: “The Holocaust topic (as may already be seen) will be increasingly taken over by the broadly understood popular and mass culture...This may entail a fascination with the Fascist supremacy of strength and violence including the Nazi emblems, and result in kitch, empty entertainment which ignores the moral and historical contexts,” Sławomir Buryła, “Topika Holocaustu. Wstępne rozpoznanie.” *Świat Tekstów. Rocznik Szlupski* 10 (2012): 151.

95 It is worth to recall for instance the broadly praised *Schindler’s List* by Steven Spielberg (USA, 1993) where Amon Göth, commandant of the concentration camp in Płaszów, is played by Ralph Fiennes because of his “dark sexuality,” *Schindler’s List* <<http://www.filmweb.pl/Listaschindlera/trivia>> accessed September 6, 2014. In Steven Spielberg’s Oscar-winning movie, the audiences see Göth using his position in the camp, the resulting power and appearance to draw into a sado-masochistic game a Jewish servant, Helena, presented solely for the sexual aspect. Bartosz Kwiecieński notes that Spielberg’s version of the Shoah proves “how easy cinematic imagination gives in to the erotic aspect of totalitarian terror and acknowledges the terror as a metaphor of the seductive power of Nazism, with its promise of purity and submission of the slave races,” Bartosz Kwiecieński, *Obrazy i klisze. Między biegunami wizualnej pamięci Zagłady* (Kraków: Universitas, 2012), 305.

and literary,<sup>96</sup> concerned with aesthetization and erotization of Nazism. Mogutin argues that “the sexual character of Fascism was transformed from a taboo into profitable commerce. Fascism remains a show-business,”<sup>97</sup> as seems to be evidenced by Nazi exploitation movies, the pornographic variety of the exploitation genre,<sup>98</sup> dating back to the 1970s when “Fascist symbols and gadgets began to turn into fetishes and found broad application in the porno business.”<sup>99</sup>

The category of “sexy Fascism” is related also to the aspect of discovering and defining the body whose physicality and aesthetic functions were (and still are) frequently ignored or excluded from the cultural discourse on war and occupation, as was pointed out by Bożena Karwowska.<sup>100</sup> Consequently, this article aims to present a “bodily” perspective on cultural texts concerning the Holocaust.

*Translation: Anna Warso*

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96 Apart from Jerzy Kosiński's and Ignacy Karpowicz's novels, it is worth to mention for instance Andrzej Kuśniewicz's, *Eroica* (Warszawa: KAW, 1988); Jonathan Littel's, *Łaskawe* [*The Kindly Ones*] trans. to Polish by Magdalena Kamińska-Maurugen (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2008); Marian Pankowski's, “Moja SS Rottenführer Johanna,” *Fraza* 4 (1997): 25-35 and *Teatrowanie nad świętym barszczem. Wybór utworów dramatycznych* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1995) (the writer claims that “Moja SS Rottenführer Johanna” was based on his own experience, see Piotr Marecki, “Nam wieczna w polszczyźnie rozróżba! Marian Pankowski mówi” (Kraków: Korporacja Ha!art, 2011), 115, 118; Marian Pankowski's, *Z Auszvicu do Belsen. Przygody* (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 2000); Antoni Sobański, *Cywil w Berlinie* (Warszawa: Sic!, 2006). Discussed by Sławomir Buryła in *Tematy (nie)opisane*, 311-316, 410-412.

97 Jarosław Mogutin, Сексуальность фашизма <<http://mitin.com/people/mogutin/fascism.shtml>> accessed August 17, 2014. Cited in: G. Ojcewicz, *Skazani na trwanie*, 231.

98 For instance, *Ilsa-She Wolf Of The SS* (USA-Germany, 1975), dir. Don Edmonds; *Salon Kitty* (France, Italy, Germany, 1976), dir. Tinto Brass.

99 Przyłuska-Urbanowicz, *Pupilla*, 195.

100 Karwowska, *Ciało. Seksualność. Obozy*, 8-9.

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Tomasz Kaliściak

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## Railways of Desire: Prus – Freud – Grabiński<sup>1</sup>

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*The two primary motions are rotation and sexual movement, whose combination is expressed by the locomotive's wheels and pistons.*

G. Bataille, "The Solar Anus"<sup>2</sup>

### 1.

In 1841, before the first iron tracks were laid in the Kingdom of Poland, writer, educator, and popular humorist Teofil Nowosielski published a laudation in honor of the railroad arguing without irony that the invention "would have a great impact on love."<sup>3</sup> Nowosielski's facetious article shows clearly that the railway figured sexually almost from the start. The humorist rightly suspected that railways would not only connect distant cities and

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1 In Polish the title reads "Pociąg seksualny: Prus – Freud – Grabiński." The Polish word »pociąg« is a homonym that denotes both »a railway train« and »drive« – as a concept in psychology.

2 Georges Bataille, "The Solar Anus," in *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927-1933*, ed. and trans. Alan Stoekl (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 6.

3 Teofil Nowosielski, "Koleje żelazne i parowe," in *Humoreski* (Warszawa, 1841) as cited in Wojciech Tomasik, *Inna droga. Romantycy a koleje* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IBL PAN, 2012), 123. If not otherwise specified all translations of referenced works are provided by the translator of the article.

stations, but also entice passion and bring closer the bodies of spatially separated lovers. It was a fully accurate diagnosis even though it predated numerous tales of train travel, including such notable examples as Stefan Grabiński's erotically charged short stories ("In the Compartment" or "Chance," among others), or the Skierniewice passages in Bolesław Prus's *The Doll*. The railway soon became an "icon of modernity"<sup>4</sup> symbolizing the vast range of social, economic, and industrial transformations of the nineteenth century and played a significant role in man's psychic life. It facilitated communication by shortening the physical distance between the desirous lovers but, first and foremost, it put into motion the complex machine of discourse which enabled fascinating journeys into the depths of the human psyche.

It seems that the desire to be closer to the woman he loved motivated Wokulski to plan the train journey from Warsaw to Krakow with his fiancé, Izabela Łęcka, her father Tomasz, and the profligate Kazimierz Starski. For that purpose he rents the saloon carriage, where the passengers are supposed to spend comfortably several hours. The railway plays an important role in Prus's novel, argues Wojciech Tomasiak, as it contributes both to the realism of the presented reality and to the psychological depth of the characters:<sup>5</sup> Wokulski travels by train for business, usually sleeping through the majority of the journey. Trying to escape his love for Izabela, he sets out for Paris from the Warsaw terminus of the Warsaw-Vienna railway route, and on the way back (hoping that Łęcka reciprocates his feelings), he departs from Gare du Nord. After the return to Warsaw, the protagonist goes – also by train – to Zaslawek, where he and Izabela spend their happiest moments together. Clearly, the railway becomes an important element in his economy of love, as it takes Wokulski closer and moves him away from the object of desire.<sup>6</sup> But it is the aforementioned journey to Krakow (which for the main protagonist

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4 Wojciech Tomasiak, *Ikona nowoczesności. Kolej w literaturze polskiej* [*The Icon of Modernity: The Railway in Polish Literature*] (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo UWR, 2007).

5 Wojciech Tomasiak, "O jednym przypisie do *Lalki* (którego nie ma)" ["On one (nonexistent) footnote to *The Doll*"] in: *Pociąg do nowoczesności. Szkice kolejowe* [*The Train to Modernity: Railway Sketches*] (Warszawa: IBL PAN, 2014), 117–136. Tomasiak focuses largely on the technical aspects of "railway realism" and its psychological consequences. His valuable remarks should be complemented, however, with a commentary on the medical (psychiatric) aspect, which is the focus of the present article.

6 See also Jerzy Sosnowski, "Czas żelaznych potworów," ["The Era of Iron Monsters"] in *Szybko, szybciej. Eseje o pośpiechu w kulturze* [*Fast, Faster: An Essay on Haste in Culture*], ed. Dorota Siwicka, Marek Bieńczyk and Aleksander Nawarecki (Warszawa: IBL PAN, 1996). In his analysis of Prus's *The Doll* and Żeromski's *Homeless People*, Sosnowski views the passenger as a "place where great passions are released," including the "erotic ones" (135).

ends suddenly in Skierniewice) that seems especially important. In the saloon carriage, Wokulski overhears Łęcka talking to Starski in English about the engagement medallion which she has lost. At that point, the journey acquires an additional level of signification for the deeply hurt protagonist. Trying to come to terms with the painful truth of the overheard confession, he becomes acutely aware of the train's shuddering:

For some moments he heard only the rattle of the wheels, and noticed that the carriage was swaying. "I never felt a carriage sway so before," he told himself.<sup>7</sup>

This reaction is intertwined with the sensation of shock caused by the speed of the racing train. Wokulski feels as if he is about to faint or as if a railway disaster is about to happen.

A mist veiled Wokulski's eyes. "Am I losing consciousness?" he thought, grasping the strap by the window. It seemed to him the carriage was beginning to rock and that it would be derailed any moment.<sup>8</sup>

Sudden disappointment resulting from Izabela's overheard confession, intensified by the swaying of the carriage, leads to a state of nervous tension bordering on panic.

[...] he was forced to admit that there's something worse than betrayal, disillusion and humiliation.

But - what was it? Yes: travelling by train! How the carriage was shuddering... how it was rushing along. The shuddering of the train made itself felt in his legs, lungs, heart, brain; everything inside him was shuddering, every bone, every fibre of nerve...

And this rushing onwards through limitless fields, under the enormous vault of sky! And he had to travel on, God knows how much further... Five, perhaps even ten minutes...

What was Starski, or even Izabela? One was as bad as the other... But this railroad, this railroad... and this shuddering.<sup>9</sup>

7 Bolesław Prus, *The Doll*, trans. David Welsh (Budapest, London, New York, Central European University Press, 1996), 567.

8 *Ibid.*, 576.

9 *Ibid.*, 577.

The vibrations and the speed of the train influence the nervous system of the passenger. The mechanical excitements, including the experience of shock, lead to a series of hysterical reactions.

He felt he would burst into tears, begin screaming, smash the window and jump out...

He shut his eyes, clenched his teeth, gripped the edge of the seat with both hands; sweat burst out on his forehead and streamed down his face, and the train shuddered and rushed along... Finally a whistle was heard, then another, and the train stopped in a station.<sup>10</sup>

Tomasik argues that the train journey is for Wokulski first and foremost a somatic experience permeating “every fibre of nerve.” The trauma he experiences results not only from the overheard conversation between Łęcka and Starski, cruel and hurtful, but also – perhaps to an even greater degree – from the awareness of being trapped in a passenger car, locked by the conductor from the outside.<sup>11</sup> Wokulski’s hurt feelings mix with the fear of a railway disaster and take the form of a neurosis whose symptoms continue increasing with every passing hour despite the fact that he has already left the train: the protagonist wanders aimlessly along the tracks, hallucinating and plagued by racing thoughts. The tension of the nervous system causes also several somatic symptoms characteristic for neurosis whose description in the novel is both realistic and medically accurate. They include impaired vision in one eye, piercing pain in the chest accompanied by the conviction of approaching death as well as trembling of the entire body; he is saved from the wheels of an oncoming train by Wysocki, the railway watchman. But also Wokulski’s morning return from Skierniewice deserves a closer look. He suffers from temporary amnesia and cannot recall leaving the train. “In Warsaw, he didn’t come to himself until he was riding in a droshky on Jerusalem Avenue. But who had carried his valise for him and how did he get himself into the droshky? This he did not know, and it didn’t even matter to him.”<sup>12</sup> Following the tragic events at the Skierniewice station, Wokulski shuts himself off, becomes apathetic, loses his sense of time, and Dr. Szuman suspects that he suffers from neurasthenia.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 577.

<sup>11</sup> Tomasik, “O jednym przypisie,” [“About a Footnote”], 120.

<sup>12</sup> Prus, *The Doll*, 597.

<sup>13</sup> Wokulski’s neurotic personality was described by Jan Tomkowski in “Neurotyczni bohaterowie Prusa,” [“Prus’ Neurotic Heroes”] in *Mój pozytywizm [My Positivism]* (Warszawa: IBL PAN, 1993), 131-173.

This neurasthenic anxiety may originate from an urge, a drive – a hypothesis substantiated possibly by the sense of jealousy the protagonist experiences while watching Starski and Łęcka engaged in an intimate conversation and acting as if Wokulski was not there. Watching their affectionate exchanges while he himself remains hidden, or rather, watching the reflection of the scene in the car window, Wokulski feels like an intruder who accidentally witnesses a love scene. Analyzing his own dream,<sup>14</sup> one which, significantly, took place on a train, Sigmund Freud recalls a similar, although not identical, event. In the dream, Freud enters the carriage where a rather elegant middle-aged couple ignores his greeting; throughout the journey they continue to ignore the unwanted guest. Freud interprets this scene as “a somewhat extravagant phantasy that my two elderly travel companions had treated me in such a stand-offish way because my arrival had prevented the affectionate exchanges which they had planned for the night.”<sup>15</sup> He explains his own attempt to take part in their conversation as a reference to “a scene of early childhood in which the child, probably driven by sexual curiosity, had forced his way into his parent’s bedroom and been turned out by his father’s orders.”<sup>16</sup> The scene witnessed on the train approaching Skierniewice places Wokulski in a similar position. His anxiety related to being excluded from an affectionate exchange could be read therefore as a repetition of a traumatic scene from childhood where the child is punished for its sexual curiosity.

Numerous elements of “psychiatric realism” in Prus’s novel seem to confirm Dr. Szuman’s diagnosis. We could thus assume with a degree of certainty that the suddenly interrupted train journey, combined with other circumstances of the protagonist’s love life, contribute to the manifestation of the neurotic trait in Wokulski’s personality. The question is: could all of this have been conceived without the invention of the railway?

One could also look here at Karol Borowiecki’s journey from Berlin to Lodz in Reymont’s *The Promised Land*. Having learned about a fire in the factory, Borowiecki rents a special train to Aleksandrów and change to the “extra-train” to Lodz via Skierniewice and Koluszki. The prolonged railway journey increases his agitation: “the nightmare of anxiety continues, persistent, burying its thin claws in every nerve, every center and tearing away ever more

14 Paweł Dybel presents an interesting interpretation of this dream in “Pociąg do stacji Holthurn” in *Okruchy psychoanalizy. Teoria Freuda między hermeneutyką a poststrukturalizmem* (Kraków: Universitas, 2009), 133-152.

15 Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (London, Vintage: 2001) Vol. 5, 458.

16 *Ibid.*, 459.

painfully.”<sup>17</sup> This nervous journey results in a symbiotic union of man and machine: Borowski’s psyche merges with the impetus of the locomotive, sensing the work of its mechanism, and in turn, the machine appears to recognize the protagonist’s anxiety. Reymont, one of the most insightful observers of modernity who had also personal connections to the railway environment, presents the boundary between human and machine as being quite blurry.

Both of the above examples seem to confirm that the railway became a framework for expressing intense emotions: fear and anxiety (as well as erotic bliss). Having reached Lodz, Borowiecki shows barely any emotions looking at the burnt-down factory: “not a single nerve quivered in sorrow, all nervousness, all fears and anxieties which had rattled him on the train, vanished confronted with the sight before his eyes.”<sup>18</sup> One could hypothesize that progressive industrialization shaped a new kind of sensitivity typical of modern man.

## 2.

The aim of this article is to discuss the ways in which progressive industrialization and mechanization – embodied most fully by the nineteenth century invention of the railway – influenced the human psyche, resulting in the emergence of knowledge about drives (instincts) determining human life. Consequently, human psyche started to be conceived as a device which operates according to complex mechanisms; Sigmund Freud used the notion of “psychic apparatus”<sup>19</sup> comparing the human psyche to a “compound microscope or a photographic apparatus.”<sup>20</sup> I believe that a prototype for several images of human psychic life can be traced to the steam engine and the locomotive, which were responsible for the development of the dynamic aspect in psychoanalysis: upon the invention of the railway, motion became an obsession of modernity and at the same time, it was the key element in how the psychic apparatus functioned. Already in 1844, Polish novelist and diarist Anna Nakwaska, witnessing the steam locomotive depart from Wrocław Station, wonders in awe: “How many insights and philosophical observations are provoked by this power of nothingness which is not identical with the

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17 Włodzimierz S. Reymont, *Ziemia obiecana* (Wrocław, Ossolineum: 2014), 746. (Here and further in the article based on the Polish edition of the novel - A.W.)

18 Reymont, 756-757.

19 See “psychic apparatus” in Jean Laplanche, Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-analysis*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (London, Karnac Books, 2006), 358. Further in the essay referred to as SP.

20 Freud, *Standard Edition*, vol. 5, 536.



power of steam and which puts other powers into motion?”<sup>21</sup> The “power of nothingness” derived from steam and able to animate iron giants must have amazed not only those who traveled by train. The iron railway, just as the human psyche, hid numerous mysteries which mesmerized contemporaries and demanded to be explored.

The discourse surrounding the railway was of interest to engineers and railway professionals, but it also shaped human thought, reflected in literature, philosophy, sociology, law, and medicine. Walter Benjamin noted that the shock caused by technological progress and increased mechanization of life in the nineteenth century became one of the most poignant experiences of modernity: “technology has subjected the human sensorium to a complex kind of training.”<sup>22</sup> Traffic also played an important role as it involved “the individual in a series of shocks and collisions.”<sup>23</sup> Analyzing the mental life of city inhabitants, Georg Simmel emphasized the “swift and continuous shift of external and internal stimuli.”<sup>24</sup> Everyone wondered about the influence that the railway and the perception of motion (experienced now with an unprecedented intensity) may have on the human organism, especially the human brain and the nervous system. Etienne Trillat, for instance, posits that increasing mechanization and the invention of the railway in particular paralleled the increase in the number of trauma cases where symptoms resembled neurological hysteria.<sup>25</sup> Thus, the development of the railway and the resulting threats lead also to the invention of new psychological disorders. All nineteenth century theories of neurosis argue that anxiety is the price the modern citizen needs to pay for taming nature in the name of technological development and civilizational progress.<sup>26</sup>

It should be emphasized that almost simultaneously with the emergence of the railway, a specific railway discourse emerged and influenced the language of medical discourse describing human life processes through the categories

21 A. Nakwaska, “Wspomnienia krótkiej podróży 1844 roku” [“Memories of a Short Journey in 1844”], *Pielgrzym 1845* [*The Pilgrim 1845*], Vol. 1, 223–224, in Tomasiak, *Inna droga*, 133.

22 Walter Benjamin, “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire,” in *Selected Writings: 1938–1940* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996), 328.

23 *Ibid.*, 328.

24 Georg Simmel, “The Metropolis and Mental Life,” in *The Blackwell City Reader*, ed. Gary Bridge, Sophie Watson (Chicester: John Wiley & Sons, 2010), 103.

25 Etienne Trillat, *Historia hysterii*, [*History of Hysteria*] trans. Zofia Podgórska-Klawe, Elżbieta Jamrozik (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1993), 131.

26 K. Kłosińska, “Teorie neurozy,” [“Theories of Neurosis”] in *Powieści o “wieku nerwowym”* [*Novels about “the Neurotic Age”*] (Katowice: “Śląsk”: 1988), 10–39.

of dynamics and mechanization. The invention of the steam engine had also other further reaching consequences which contributed to the perception of the human being as a machine fueled by energy. Therefore, I believe that the railway discourse, especially the concepts of “railway neurosis” and “traveler’s fugue,” believed to be prototypical forms of male hysteria, played an important role in the development of psychoanalysis. Additionally, they shaped the literary discourse of the railway tales of Stefan Grabiński, who was one of Poland’s most courageous “engineers” of the human psyche: his phantasmal world of railroad adventures was undoubtedly influenced by the notion of moral panic related to the unpredictable results of technological development, which his contemporaries feared would be the end of human civilization. One of the most telling reactions of panic to the invention of railway was expressed by Hungarian philosopher Max Nordau, author of *Degeneration* (1892), a work famously criticizing the state of European civilization at the end of the nineteenth century. In his vision of decadent modernity, Nordau suggests that each manifestation of industrial development and every human act submitted to mechanization degenerates the human nervous system and the entire organism, resulting in a “wearing of tissue”:

Even the little shocks of railway travelling, not perceived by consciousness, the perpetual noises, and the various sights in the streets of a large town, our suspense pending the sequel of progressing events, the constant expectation of the newspaper, of the postman, of visitors, cost our brains wear and tear.<sup>27</sup>

In a comprehensive analysis of several medical and legal texts from the second half of the nineteenth century focusing on the issue of railway disasters and their consequences (which manifest not only as physical damage, but also neurotic symptoms), Ralph Harrington outlines the dark side of the railroad which:

with its speed, power and danger, was a focus of nervous and psychological disorders; the neuroses associated with the shock of the railway’s appearance in the landscape, the exhaustion and sensory disturbance of the journey, the catastrophe of the railway accident, were all aspects of the railway’s potency as a focus and agent of the destructive, destabilizing, degenerative energies of technological modernity.<sup>28</sup>

27 Max Nordau, *Degeneration* (London, William Heinemann, 1895), 3.

28 Ralph Harrington, *The Neuroses of the Railway: Train, Travel, and Trauma in Britain, c. 1850-c. 1900*, (PhD diss. University of Oxford, 1998), 225-226. Available at: <http://ora.ouls.ox.ac.uk/objects/uuid:28dfe6cd-64ea-4924-a7bd-234c002c0fae>, accessed November 10, 2017.

## 3.

Analyzing the connection between the invention of the railway and the work of Sigmund Freud's, Laura Marcus posits that the former shaped not only the assumptions of psychoanalysis, but also Freud himself. Already as a child, he feared the railway.<sup>29</sup> Trying to locate the source of this fear, Marcus looks at Freud's experience of leaving Freiberg in Moravia (Příbor in today's Czechia) where he was born and spent the first years of childhood, which was interrupted when the family had to move house. He traveled with his parents first from Freiberg to Leipzig, and then to Vienna. At the station in Wrocław he saw a lit gas lamp through the window of the train and believed he was in hell. The second part of the journey, from Leipzig to Vienna involved sharing the bedroom with his mother. Seeing her naked at night awakened his libido. Marcus believes that these events were responsible for Freud's railway phobia and significantly influenced his theory of the Oedipal complex. Freud's fear of the railway took the shape of obsessively imagining a missed train which is why as an adult he always showed up at the station at least an hour before departure. Freud himself explains this fear as a consolation for another kind of anxiety, the fear of death related to the image of a departing train.<sup>30</sup>

The railway plays an important role also in his analysis of little Hans's case. The boy lived with his parents in Vienna (near the Northern Railway) and they often traveled by train to Lainz and Gmunden. One of the first images awaking the young patient's anxiety connected with sexual curiosity was the sight of the locomotive: "When he was at the station once (at three and three quarters) he saw some water being let out of an engine. "Oh, look," he said, "the engine's widdling. Where's it got its widdler?"<sup>31</sup> the boy asks. With time, the autoerotic interest in having a penis was repressed, tied to the fear of horses: Hans once saw a stallion whose large organ made him scared. The fear of horses expanded to include street traffic, and later also the railway. It was strongly connected to an event described by Hans's father:

This morning Hans again thought something to himself: "A street-boy was riding on a truck, and the guard came and undressed the boy quite naked and made him stand there till next morning, and in the morning the boy gave the guard 50,000 florins so that he could go on riding on the truck."

29 Laura Marcus "Psychoanalytic Training: Freud and the Railways," in *The Railway and Modernity. Time, Space and the Machine Ensemble* (Oxford: Peter Lang: 2007), 155-157.

30 Freud, *Standard Edition*, Vol. 5, 385.

31 *Ibid.*, Vol. 10, 9.

"The Nordbahn [Northern Railway] runs past opposite our house. In a siding there stood a trolley on which Hans once saw a street-boy riding. He wanted to do so too; but I told him it was not allowed, and that if he did the guard would be after him. A second element in this phantasy is Hans's repressed wish to be naked."<sup>32</sup>

As he analyzed the boy, Freud noted that "Hans's imagination was being coloured by images derived from traffic [*der Verkehr*], and was advancing systematically from horses, which draw vehicles, to railways. In the same way a railway-phobia eventually becomes associated with every street-phobia."<sup>33</sup>

He found a similar structure in Dora's second dream whose scenery was also related to the railway:

I was walking about in a town I did not know. I saw streets and squares which were strange to me... Then I went to the station [*Bahnhof*] and asked about a hundred times: "Where is the station?" I always got the answer: "Five minutes." I then saw a thick wood before me which I went into and there I asked a man whom I met. He said to me: "Two and a half hours more." He offered to accompany me. But I refused and went alone. I saw the station in front of me and could not reach it. At the same time I had the usual feeling of anxiety one has in dreams when one cannot move forward. Then I was at home. I must have been travelling in the meantime but I know nothing about that."<sup>34</sup>

In an explanatory footnote explaining the significance of the railway station in the patient's dream Freud emphasizes the ambiguity of the word *Verkehr* (meaning "traffic," "intercourse" but also "sexual intercourse") and notes that the station is used for purposes of "Verkehr," becoming a "psychical coating in a number of cases of railway phobia."<sup>35</sup> These two cases share an important similarity: fear of the railway signals repressed thoughts about sexual activity. In Freudian psychoanalysis, railway-related symbolism is a part of sexual topography where the station (or the tunnel) symbolizes the female genitals and the train - the penis. Melanie Klein and Jacques Lacan return to this aspect of Freud's thought in their works.

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., Vol. 10, 83.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., Vol. 10, 84.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., Vol. 7, 94.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., Vol. 7, 99.

There is another striking similarity between these two cases, namely, the presence of a stranger near the railroad tracks. In Hans's fantasy, he is represented by the street-boy evoking thoughts about nudity, and in Dora's dream it is the man in the wood whose offer to help she rejects. What function does this character serve in the fantasy? Does he have anything in common with the figure of the "mad traveler" and the concept of *automatisme ambulateur* from Sigmund Freud's already mentioned dream (which I will return to later in the text)? Did Hans and Dora encounter at some point a mad wanderer possessed by the desire for motion? An unambiguous answer will not be easy. There exist, without a doubt, connections between the work of the dream and the traveler's fugue. Dora's dream also includes also an interesting element of amnesia: she does not recall the way home from the station and the train journey is repressed. A similar amnesia characterizes two literary "mad travelers" in the state of dissociative fugue: Tadeusz Szygoń and Stanisław Wokulski.

In the context of the signaled ambiguity of *Verkehr*, it may be interesting to look at the Freudian theory of drives (instincts),<sup>36</sup> both in its primary and secondary form, which will also indirectly suggest an answer to the question of potential influence of the railway on the development of psychoanalysis. The notion of drive (instinct) can be found already in Freud's early psychoanalytic writing, its general definition introduced in *Three Essays on Sexuality* (1905) and summarized in a later work, *Instincts and Their Vicissitudes* (*Trieb und Triebchicksale*) (1915) In both texts Freud uses the German word *Trieb* denoting motion and impulse but also pressure, which clearly indicates a direction. Freud's basic belief was that human behavior is directed by various drives (instincts) which have their sources (*Triebquelle*),<sup>37</sup> random objects (*Objekt*)<sup>38</sup> and aims (*Triebziel*),<sup>39</sup> that is satisfaction. Freud argues that the essence of drive (instinct) lies in pressure (*Drang*):

By the pressure of an instinct we understand its motor factor, the amount of force of the measure of the demand for work which it represents. The characteristic of exercising pressure is common to all instincts, it is in fact their very essence.<sup>40</sup>

36 For a commentary on the English translations of "Trieb" as "drive" and "instinct" see for instance Laplanche, Pontalis, *The Language*, 214. (A.W.)

37 Laplanche, Pontalis, *The Language*, 424.

38 *Ibid.*, 273.

39 *Ibid.*, 21-22.

40 Freud in Laplanche, Pontalis, *The Language*, 330.

The example above proves that Freud, without a doubt, imagining the work of drive (instinct) relied on the basic notions of dynamics where the concept of motion plays the key role. Following Freud, Laplanche and Pontalis define drive (instinct) as a “dynamic process consisting of a pressure (charge of energy, motricity factor) which directs the organism towards an aim.”<sup>41</sup> Their definition concretizes pressure as a “charge of energy, a motor determinant,” in other words as a force which propels. One of the consequences of the dynamic notion of drive is also the notion of inhibition defined by Freud as “the expression of a restriction of an ego-function.”<sup>42</sup> One could therefore assume that in psychoanalysis, parameters, such as motion and inhibition describing the work of a steam locomotive, constitute key properties of the human psychic apparatus which performs work as arduous as pulling train carriages.

The sexual instinct or drive (*Sexualtrieb*)<sup>43</sup> has a special place in Freudian theory, since it has various sources and aims as well as random objects; it is defined in opposition to self-preservation instincts (*Selbsterhaltungstrieb*)<sup>44</sup> whose aim is to satisfy the needs associated with the bodily functions necessary for the preservation of the individual. Freud emphasizes the fluctuating fate of the sexual drive which is essentially disordered and unpredictable. It can therefore lead to sexual pleasure or shift and become its opposite (hatred, sadism),<sup>45</sup> or be redirected against the person experiencing it in various forms of self-punishment; sexual drive can also be repressed, inhibited, and sublimated. Freud refers to the energy animating the sexual instinct as “libido.” He modified the original theory of drives in a later work, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), by distinguishing two opposite drives: the “death drive” and the “sexual drive.” *Sexualtrieb* and *Selbsterhaltungstrieb* are part of the principle of life personified by Eros while all drives aiming at destruction or self-destruction are elements of the death drive represented by Thanatos.

Freud imagined the sex drive as “a certain sum of energy forcing its way in a certain direction.”<sup>46</sup> We can thus assume a similarity between the figure of the iron railway and the theory of drives. The first and most obvious anal-

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41 Laplanche, Pontalis, *The Language*, 214.

42 Freud, *Standard Edition*, Vol. 20, 89

43 Laplanche, Pontalis, *The Language*, 417.

44 *Ibid.*, 220.

45 *Ibid.*, 399-400.

46 Sigmund Freud, *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* (NY: Martino Fine Books, 2013), 125.

ogy can be found in the “pressure” exerted by libido, the “energy” animating both the human and the steam engine. Drives, like a rushing train, are always directed somewhere, have a source and aim, even if the latter is to be achieved via various routes. The analogy runs even deeper and touches upon a conviction popular in the late 19th century that an unrestrained sexual drive combined with a lack of inhibitions may cause a disaster, encapsulated by the metaphor of a train speeding out of control.

In *Three Essays on Sexuality*, Freud presents an interesting argument which may shed more light on the analogy between the sexual drive and the railway: in his discussion of sexuality in children he claims that the sex drive has its source in excitation. He focuses especially on the physical stimulation, “rhythmic mechanical agitation of the body,” related to the pleasure experienced while traveling by train:

The shaking produced by driving in carriages and later by railway-travel exercises such a fascinating effect upon older children that every boy, at any rate, has at one time or another in his life wanted to be an engine driver or a coachman. It is a puzzling fact that boys take such an extraordinarily intense interest in things connected with railways, and, at the age at which the production of phantasies is most active (shortly before puberty), use those things as the nucleus of a symbolism that is peculiarly sexual. A compulsive link of this kind between railway-travel and sexuality is clearly derived from the pleasurable character of the sensations of movement. In the event of repression, which turns so many childish preferences into their opposite, the same individuals, when they are adolescents or adults, will react to rocking or swinging with a feeling of nausea, will be terribly exhausted by a railway journey, or will be subject to attacks of anxiety on the journey and will protect themselves against a repetition of the painful experience by a dread of railway-travel.<sup>47</sup>

This observation helped Freud formulate a more general thesis that “the pleasure derived from sensations of *passive* movement is of a sexual nature or may produce sexual excitation.”<sup>48</sup> Movement (in this case, of the train) is a stimulus for the human sexual drive, as evidenced by the case of little Hans: his primary fascination with the locomotive is repressed and transforms into a fear of traffic and trains in general. It seems that the source of Wokulski’s fear of the railway may also have its origins in repressed sexuality.

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47 Freud, *Standard Edition*, Vol. 7, 202.

48 *Ibid.*, 202.

An interesting manifestation of children's fascination with trains discussed by Freud can be found in a series of five surviving photographs of locomotives taken between 1899 and 1900 in Zakopane and Lviv by 14-year old Stanisław I. Witkiewicz.<sup>49</sup> A perceptive commentary on his fascination with the railway and its influence on Witkiewicz's work can be found in Wojciech Tomasiak's analysis of *The Crazy Locomotive*, where the author quotes the artist's father who claimed that "Stasiek just entered the stage of love for the steam engine" and "found his ideal in the locomotives which he now adores and photographs." Witkiewicz's photographs are a testimony to the emerging artistic sensibility of the painter, but they are also an interesting case of train-spotting<sup>50</sup> whose underlying psychology is related to the Freudian concept of sexual drive. Further, the child's fascination with trains should be juxtaposed with Witkiewicz's adult fear of mechanization symbolized by the figure of the "crazy locomotive," borrowed – Tomasiak argues<sup>51</sup> – from the stories of Stefan Grabiński, but rooted in the experience of modernity. In the light of interpreting mechanical agitation in Freudian terms, the artist's fear may be a symptom of repression.

Freud's passage concerning the mechanical stimulation of drives indicates that he was familiar with medical studies on the phenomenon of "railway neurosis," also known as "railway spine." He must have encountered the condition during his practice in Charcot's Salpêtrière hospital between 1885 and 1886 – notably, the clinic also treated cases of male hysteria caused by railway disasters and frequent accidents suffered by railway workers which attracted doctors and lawyers between 1886 and 1885.<sup>52</sup> Their interest stemmed from the rising numbers of lawsuits against railway companies brought by the victims of train wrecks demanding compensation for the physical and mental suffering caused by accidents. Analyzing the impact of those accidents on the

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49 They belong to the first photographs taken by the artist, preserved as glass plates and stored by Muzeum Tatrzańskie in Zakopane. Reproductions can be found in Ewa Franczak, Stefan Okołowicz, *Przeciw Nicości. Fotografie Stanisława Ignacego Witkiewicza* (Kraków, Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1986), il. 73, 74, 76-78.

50 An unusual pastime which involves watching trains and registering their names and numbers as well as photographing and filming them. Interestingly, although train-spotting is commonly believed to be a men's hobby, the first evidence of such behavior can be traced to 1861 and the 14-year old Fanny Johnson who kept a diary with the names and numbers of the Great Western Railway trains. (I have learned about this from the *Train-spotting* exhibition held at the National Railway Museum in York between 26.09.2014-15.03.2015.)

51 Tomasiak, *Ikona nowoczesności [The Icon of Modernity]*, 131-138.

52 Trillat, *Historia hysterii [The History of Hysteria]*, 131-138.



human nervous systems, medical examiners attempted to create a systematic classification of railway-related conditions: important contributions in the field include the work of British and German doctors, such as John E. Erichsen, Herbert W. Page, and Hermann Oppenheim, who investigated physical injuries but also injuries to the psyche in patients who suffered no physical damage but exhibited hysteria-like symptoms.<sup>53</sup> Freud returns to this issue in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* where he talks about “traumatic neurosis” (*Traumatische Neurose*)<sup>54</sup> combining the notion of “railway neurosis” – used in psychiatry and neurology – and the “war neurosis” whose mechanism was recognized in the traumatic experiences of soldiers wounded on the fronts of the Great War. Wolfgang Schivelbusch believes that the concept of traumatic neurosis understood as “a consequence of an extensive breach being made in the protective shield against stimuli”<sup>55</sup> is generally reflected in Freud’s notion of how the mechanization of life (including the invention of the railway) influenced human psychic processes and perception.<sup>56</sup>

#### 4.

Connections between the literary world of Stefan Grabiński’s short stories collected in *The Motion Demon* and Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalysis seem rather obvious. They were indicated by the author himself when he discussed the genesis of “Engine-driver Grot” referring directly to concepts such as the work of dreams or psychic trauma in an attempt to explore “in a clinical fashion” the motives of his mad engine-driver.<sup>57</sup> Four decades later, Grabiński scholar Artur Hutnikiewicz located the source of the dynamic concept of being, found in *The Motion Demon*, first and foremost in Henri Bergson’s philosophy, and in Freud’s psychoanalysis. The iron railroad and its symbolism of motion revealed to the writer a yet unknown and mysterious area of the human psyche which was closely tied to fantasizing. In fact, Katarzyna Kłosińska notes, rather than madness and insanity, several of Grabiński’s tales explore

53 Wolfgang Schivelbusch, “Railroad Accident, »Railway Spine« and Traumatic Neurosis,” in *The Railway Journey: the Industrialization of Time and Space in the 19th Century* (Berkeley–Los Angeles, University of California Press: 1986), 134–149.

54 Laplanche, Pontalis, *The Language*, 470.

55 Freud, *Standard Edition*, Vol. 18, 31.

56 Schivelbusch, “Stimulus Shield: or, the Industrialized Consciousness,” 159–170.

57 Stefan Grabiński, “Z mojej pracowni. Opowieść o Maszyniście Grocie. Dzieje noweli – przyczynek do psychologii tworzenia,” *Skamander* 2 (1920): 109.

fantasizing which resists madness revealing the reality of desire.<sup>58</sup> Thus, the scenery of the railway becomes a privileged phantasmal space for the writer. Hutnikiewicz argues that:

Grabiński liked the railway, enjoyed traveling by train, he even wanted, for some time, to become a railroad worker. Working on *The Motion Demon*, he studied thoroughly the reality of the railway life. Its mysteries were revealed to the writer by his brother in law and engineer, Wiktor Sankowski. Grabiński interviewed several railway workers, spent hours at the station in Przemyśl tracking train traffic, learning about the techniques of driving the locomotive, getting lost in the labyrinth of tracks and switches in order to absorb and become satiated with the aura of this strange and up until now unknown life.<sup>59</sup>

“Engine-driver Grot” is a story where Grabiński pays a symbolic “tribute to the clinical motive” related to psychic trauma.

For Grot’s ideal was a frenzied ride in a straight line, without deviations, without circulations, a breathless, insane ride without stops, the whirling rush of the engine into the distant bluish mist, a winged run into infinity. Grot could not bear any type of goal. Since the time of his brother’s tragic death a particular psychic complex had developed within him: dread before any aim, before any type of end, any limit. With all his might he fell in love with the perpetuality of constantly going forward, the toil of reaching ahead. He detested the realization of goals; he trembled before the moment of their fulfillment in fear that, in that last crucial moment, a disappointment would overtake him, a cord would break, that he would tumble down into the abyss – as had Olek years ago.<sup>60</sup>

The nervous agitation of engine-driver Krzysztof Grot, manifested as an obsessive fear of the train stopping at a station – which could be read as a classic inhibition with regard to the satisfaction of a drive – is in fact the consequence of a psychic injury related to the trauma of war and to witnessing the death of

58 Krystyna Kłosińska, “Stefana Grabińskiego *Kochanka Szamoty*, czyli o tym, jak mężczyzna rodzi kobietę,” in *Fantazmaty. Grabiński – Prus – Zapolska* (Katowice: Wydawnictwo UŚ, 2004), 13-57.

59 Artur Hutnikiewicz, *Twórczość literacka Stefana Grabińskiego (1887-1936)* (Toruń – Łódź, PWN: 1959), 149.

60 Stefan Grabiński, *The Motion Demon*, trans. M. Lipinski (Ash-Tree Press: 2005), electronic edition.

his brother, Olek. In other words, “Engine-driver Grot” is a story where war neurosis meets railway neurosis.

Grabiński must have been familiar with the notion of railway neurosis as it appears in several of his train tales. Its symptoms are exhibited by Godziemba (“In the Compartment”), Agapit Kluczka (“The Perpetual Passenger”), and Zabrzezski (“Chance”), but the general atmosphere of nervousness affects almost all of the writer’s protagonists who travel by train. However, Grabiński’s notion of the “railway neurosis” acquires a clearly erotic aspect, related to the concept of “mechanical agitation” known from Freud.

Godziemba’s railway neurosis manifests through a special kind of excitement caused by the speed of the train:

Godziemba was a fanatic of motion. This usually quiet and timid dreamer became unrecognizable the moment he mounted the steps of a train. Gone was the unease, gone the timidity, and the formerly passive, musing eyes took on a sparkle of energy and strength. [...]

Something resided in the essence of a speeding train, something that galvanized Godziemba’s weak nerves – stimulating strongly, though artificially, his faint life-force.[ ...]

The motion of a locomotive was not just physically contagious; the momentum of an engine quickened his psychic pulse, it electrified his will—he became independent. ‘Train neurosis’ seemed to transform temporarily this overly refined and sensitive individual into someone who exhibited a beneficial, positive force. His intensified excitement was maintained on an artificial summit above a frail life that, after the retreat of the ‘fortunate’ circumstances, descended into a state of even deeper prostration. A train in motion affected him like morphine injected into the veins of an addict.<sup>61</sup>

Like a drug, traveling by train stirs the waning, otherwise weakened life force of the “chicken-hearted wallflower” triggering the transformation from a “notorious daydreamer” into a conqueror; from a boy into a man. The railroad intensifies sensation and opens up a space for new experiences: “Godziemba liked riding trains immensely and repeatedly invented fictional travel goals just to opiate himself with motion.” On one such journey he meets a young couple, Mr. and Mrs. Rastawiecki. He becomes especially interested in the young engineer’s wife, Nuna, who evokes in him an “irresistible attraction,” one which is difficult to explain as “she did not fit his ideal” and “one couldn’t call her beautiful.” Godziemba, who “was by nature rather cool,

61 Grabiński, “In the Compartment,” in *The Motion Demon*.

and in sexual relations abstinent," catches the bashful, flirtatious look of the woman which enkindles "a secret fire of lust within him." At one point, their knees touch. Perverse rubbing, intensified by the rhythmical shaking of the train, or (to use a Freudian term) mechanical agitation, awakens in both a dormant "sex demon." When the engineer falls asleep wearied by the monotonous journey, Godziemba and Nuna embrace behind a partition. Lost in passion (described in much detail) they do not see the husband who, now awake, attacks the rival. A violent fight ensues and Rastawiecki meets his death under the wheels of the train, pushed from the platform between the coaches. Upon leaving the train and joining the station crowd, Godziemba abandons the woman he had seduced. Rejecting the role of the victor, he resigns from being a man and returns to the state of fearful exhaustion typical of the dissociative fugue: "A maddened flight ensued along the back-streets of an unknown city..."

The example of Godziemba, who becomes a man only when he travels by train, confirms Herbert Sussman's intuition that, in the nineteenth century, male sexuality became thoroughly redefined as a result of technological developments and civilizational progress related to the rise of industrial capitalism.<sup>62</sup> Sussman postulates that the industrial revolution produced new forms of masculine identity and that the steam engine played a particularly important role in the process: replacing the power of male muscles, it devalued older models of masculinity rooted in agrarian culture and the ancient cult of the body. Referencing the work of Anson Rabinbach,<sup>63</sup> who asserts that the formulation of the laws of thermodynamics in the 19th century changed the image of the body now seen as an engine (*motor*), Sussman argues that the male body is a living machine and the steam engine its most meaningful symbol.<sup>64</sup> Within this framework masculinity does not function independently but is created in relation to the machinery of the modern world. One could even say that masculinity is a spatial event inscribed in the

62 Herbert Sussman, *Masculine Identities. The History and Meanings of Manliness* (Santa Barbara, Praeger: 2012), 80-99.

63 Anson Rabinbach, *The Human Motor: Energy, Fatigue, and the Origins of Modernity* (Berkeley – Los Angeles: University of California Press: 1992).

64 The notion of the "living machine" appeared already in Sussman's earlier book, *Victorian Technology. Invention, Innovation, and the Rise of the Machine* (Santa Barbara, Praeger: 2009). In the chapter titled "The Living Machine and the Victorian Computer" he outlines the Victorian concept of the human body as a machine which blurs the boundaries between the human and the mechanical. The Victorians often viewed machines as living creatures, often human-like (evidenced for instance by the practice of naming locomotives and ships), and – conversely – they saw human bodies as machines.

architecture of the modern city-arcade now made of iron. Walter Benjamin believed that it was precisely the arcades that gave birth to a new “kind” of man (in terms of gender), the *flâneur*.<sup>65</sup> For little Hans, initiation into masculinity accompanied leaving the house and joining the movement on the streets. In Grabiński’s short stories, the world of the iron railroad creates and sustains identity, confronting masculinity with new challenges that the modern man is unable to meet. This is because the world of iron machines is contrasted by Grabiński’s weak, neurasthenic protagonists who seem to be crippled outside the reality of the railway tracks. Outside, they live like amputees. The railroad returns their dignity and becomes a prosthetic for masculinity.

## 5.

In order to explain the concept of dissociative fugue, we must return to Freud and a certain “twilight” episode he experienced on a train journey. At some point, Freud awakens from a daydream and realizes that he is in a different car than the one he originally got on. Yet, he cannot recall changing cars and concludes that he must have done it while he was dreaming.

How did I suddenly come to be in another compartment? I had no recollection of having changed. There could be only one explanation: I must have left the carriage while I was in a sleeping state – a rare event, of which, however, examples are to be found in the experience of a neuro-pathologist. We know of people who have gone upon railway journeys in a twilight state without betraying their abnormal conditions by any signs, till at some point in the journey they have suddenly come to themselves completely and been amazed by the gap on their memory. In the dream itself, accordingly, I was declaring myself to be one of these cases of *automatisme ambulateur*<sup>66</sup>

He experiences amnesia, as Dora did in her second dream, and explains it with the phenomenon of *automatisme ambulateur*. The concept must have seeped into Freud’s thought from a lecture by Jean-Martin Charcot, who in 1888 became interested in the traveler’s (dissociative) fugue, a state known also as dromomania and described first by Philippe Tissié in his doctoral dissertation

65 Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland, Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press: 2002).

66 Freud, *Standard Edition*, Vol. 5, 457.

entitled *Les aliénés voyageurs* (1887) and devoted to the case of Jean Albert Dadas, a Bordeaux gas-fitter born in 1860. It is also possible that Freud learned about Dadas's case from Tissié's later work, *Les rêves, physiologie et pathologie* (1897), which discusses the question of dreams and Freud rather generally references in *The Interpretation of Dreams*.

In his thorough discussion of Dadas's case, Canadian philosopher of science Ian Hacking claims that Dadas was the first diagnosed example of the "mad traveler" (*fugueur*) whose colorful biography supplied psychiatrists with ample material for the study of male hysteria.<sup>67</sup> At the age of twenty-six, Dadas was admitted to the Saint-André hospital in Bordeaux as a result of disorders related to his obsessive compulsion to travel. He caught the attention of a young medicine student, Philippe Tissié, who with the help of hypnosis diagnosed and described a disorder manifesting itself through repeated and compulsive attacks during which the patients, often suffering from blackouts or amnesia, left home and with no apparent reason went on unplanned journeys to unknown places. "Mad travelers" were mostly unable to explain their motivation nor describe the events of those journeys and tended to "wake up" in a strange towns, highly anxious and unpleasantly surprised by their current situation and location. They often broke the law as they traveled without valid tickets, money, or identity documents and sometimes, upon waking up, could not recall who they were and where they came from. But they did not look like madmen or beggars, seeming perfectly fine on the surface with their impeccable clothing, and they rarely displayed any symptoms of their obsession. Unless they attracted the attention of the police, mad travelers remained unnoticed and melted with the crowd. Hacking also notes that the cases of the traveler's fugue in the 19th century were highly correlated with class and gender: "mad travelers" were usually male and belonged to the working or lower middle classes. Dadas's case seems especially interesting here even though it is hard to tell which of his experiences were real (he suffered from amnesia), and which were produced by the interaction between the doctor and the patient (several pieces of information resurfaced as a result of hypnotic suggestion). Based on the information found in Tissié's dissertation, Hacking reconstructs Dadas's case history and argues that *automatisme ambulatoire*, classified as illness thanks to Tissié and Charcot, became a classic example of madness and male hysteria in the era of modernity. Although hysteria was usually interpreted as

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67 See Ian Hacking, *Mad Travelers: Reflections on the Reality of Transient Mental Illnesses* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998); the monograph contains several passages of Tissié's dissertation translated to English.

the body language of female powerlessness, the dissociative fugue became the body language of male hysteria.<sup>68</sup>

The figure of the “mad traveler” who suddenly and with no apparent reason leaves his home guided by some unknown and irresistible drive and travels compulsively to a distant place became an inherent element of the railway world in the 19th century, as evidenced by Freud’s own dream or the mysterious “street-boy” seen by little Hans. It appears also in *The Motion Demon* – Stefan Grabiński’s railway cycle – in the eponymous story, and in “The Sloven.” Both tales feature the character of Szygon travelling by train without a valid ticket; in “The Sloven” he catches the attention of an equally mysterious ticket controller, Błażek Boron, a thoroughly unpleasant man and lover of trains, possessed by the passion for motion.

Fundamentally, Boron couldn’t stand passengers; their “practicality” irritated him. For him, the railway existed for the railway, not for travelers. The job of the railway was not to transport people from place to place with the object of communication, but motion in and of itself, the conquest of space. [...] Stations were present not to get off at, but to measure the distance passed; the stops were the gauge of the ride, and their successive change, as in a kaleidoscope, evidence of progressive movement.<sup>69</sup>

Boron’s dislike, or even contempt toward the passengers comes from the “practicality” of their travel resulting from the need to relocate. Boron’s ideal is embodied by a “nameless vagabond” traveling “without a penny to his name” and “with no specific aim, just for the hell of it, from an innate necessity to move.” This “mad traveler,” to use Tissie’s terminology, takes the form of “an individual named Szygon” who travels without a ticket “between Vienna and Trieste,” “apparently a landowner from the Kingdom of Poland,” one “certainly rich,” or so Boron assumes. Others see him as a lunatic but “according to Boron, if he was mad at all, then it was a madness with panache.” When asked where he was going “he answered that in point of fact he himself didn’t know where he got on, where he was bound for, and why.” He confessed only: “I have to go forward; something is driving me on.” Boron sees Szygon as a perfect traveler, one of “these rare pearls in an ocean of riff-raff.”

But the longest literary description, or rather, the most detailed literary study of the dissociative fugue that I know of can be found in “The Motion

68 Ian Hacking, “»Automatisme Ambulatoire«: Fugue, Hysteria and Gender at the Turn of the Century,” in *Modernism/Modernity* 3 (2) (1960): 31-43.

69 Grabiński, “The Sloven,” in *The Motion Demon*.

Demon,” where the character of Szygon makes another appearance. Found “in one of his famous »flight« phases,” in “an almost trance-like state” he travels on a train rushing from Paris to Madrid.

In any event, there was in Tadeusz Szygon’s improvised rides a certain mysterious and unexplained feature: their *aimlessness*, which entailed a strange *amnesia* towards everything that had occurred from the moment of departure to the moment of arrival at an unknown location. This emphatically attested to the phenomenon being, at the very least, puzzling. [...]

Most interesting of all was surely Szygon’s state during these “flights” – a state almost completely dominated by subconscious elements.

Some dark force tore him from his home, propelled him to the railway station, pushed him into a carriage – some overpowering command impelled him, frequently in the middle of night, to leave his cozy bed, leading him like a condemned man through the labyrinth of streets, removing from his way a thousand obstacles, to place him in a compartment and send him out into the wide world. [emphasis T. K.]

Grabiński’s description of the protagonist’s psychic state during the train journey teems with important details indicating without a doubt that we are dealing with a case of the traveler’s fugue (*automatisme ambulatoire*) translated, in fact, by the author quite literally as “flight” (Lat. *fugue*) and described as “almost completely dominated by subconscious elements.”<sup>70</sup> The crucial symptoms include: compulsive and aimless travelling, a somnambular trance, complete amnesia, estrangement from reality, anxiety upon waking up, and a sense of alienation.

What is the force that drives Szygon? Why is he tormented by the “motion demon” and what is its nature? Grabiński tries to answer these questions indirectly, using the logic of periphrastic indeterminacy: the motor behind the action is a kind of “dark force,” an “overpowering command.” The “motion demon” who haunts Szygon and drives him to visit all those places is clearly a literary paraphrase of *automatisme ambulatoire* which Grabiński must have been familiar with, just as he must have been familiar with the concept of railway neurosis. In the phantasmal world of his tales, two syndromes revealing the dark side of the modern experience of masculinity (“railway neurosis”

<sup>70</sup> The Polish text also mentions automatization, absent in translation: “a state of almost complete automatization, almost completely dominated by the subconscious reference.” [A.W.]



and “traveler’s fugue”) interweave to reveal a gripping, dramatic, and socially repressed image of male hysteria. A compulsive flight from oneself in the form of railway wandering signals the presence of repressed, drive-related content. In Freud’s psychoanalysis, the desire for flight is a key, perhaps even a paradigmatic metaphor for repression. In Szygon’s case, the desire takes the form of the dissociative fugue. Naturally, “flight is of no avail, for the ego cannot escape from itself.”<sup>71</sup> The repressed drives return in the shape of heightened anxiety sending the protagonists blindly forward onto their next journey. Grabiński’s railway almost always takes the passengers to the sphere of the unconscious, and the motion is an allegory of the drive.

## 6.

In the discourse of psychoanalysis, the railway is a telling example of the symbolism of sex and the gendering of space.<sup>72</sup> This is evidenced most explicitly by two passages from the writings of Melanie Klein and Jacques Lacan. Let us first take a look at an excerpt from *Écrits*:

A train arrives at a station. A little boy and a little girl, brother and sister, are seated in a compartment face to face next to the window through which the buildings along the station platform can be seen passing as the train pulls to a stop. “Look”, says the brother, “we’re at Ladies!”; “Idiot!” replies his sister, “Can’t you see we’re at Gentlemen.” [...] For these children, Ladies and Gentlemen will be henceforth two countries towards which each of their souls will strive on divergent wings.<sup>73</sup>

In her analysis of Lacan’s example, Virginia L. Blum notes the emergence of a fundamental metafiction, namely, a “train ride to gender” where the shaping of the subject’s gender identity is presented as a railway journey ending as the train reaches the terminus which signifies the completion of the process of gender symbolization.

In Lacan’s story, the train journey concludes with selecting gender. Gender becomes the journey’s destination and the names of the stations, LADIES and

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71 Freud, *Standard Edition*, Vol. 14, 146.

72 I base this part of my argument on Virginia L. Blum “Ladies and Gentlemen. Train Rides and Other Oedipal Stories,” in *Places Through the Body*, ed. Heidi J. Nast and Steve Pile (London - New York, Routledge: 1998), 197 - 209.

73 Jacques Lacan, “The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious or Reason Since Freud,” in *Écrits. A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London and New York, Routledge, 2005), 115-116.

GENTLEMEN, chosen respectively by the boy and the girl, reveal themselves as objects of desire. The choice of doors made by the boy and the girl means both a choice of gender identity and of the object of desire. Consequently, a space is established from which the subject (having made the choice) is banned forever. This is because the choice of the object can be read also as a sign prohibiting entry to the “country” inhabited by “other” bodies. Lacan’s model is thus clearly based on a heteronormative structure: the subject’s choice determines also the choice of the opposite as the object of desire.

The train’s arrival at the station can be thus understood as reaching the heteronormative aim, in other words, as complete, finished symbolization. However, reversing Lacan’s argument, one could ask what would happen if the train stopped not in the “right” place, but a little further away or a little closer, and the boy saw the GENTLEMEN sign while the girl the LADIES? What would happen if the train took a different route, derailing the Lacanian model of desire? A train which does not reach its destination signifies an impossible symbolization, and consequently, the possibility of a different desire, one located beyond the heteronormative logic of identity rooted in the Oedipal complex.

Blum discusses this possibility in her interpretation of Melanie Klein’s report on the case of a four-years old autistic patient named Dick. In one of the key passages Klein writes:

I took a big train and put it beside a smaller one and called them “Daddy-train” and “Dick-train.” Thereupon he picked up the train I called “Dick” and made it roll to the window and said “Station.” I explained: “The station is mummy; Dick is going into mummy.” He left the train, ran into the space between the outer and the inner doors of the room, shut himself in, saying “dark” and ran out again directly. He went through this performance several times. I explained to him: “It is dark inside mummy. Dick is inside dark mummy.” Meantime he picked up the train again, but soon ran back into the space between the doors.<sup>74</sup>

In her analysis, Klein pays special attention to the boy’s inhibitions in the process of symbol-formation (symbolization) resulting from “the lack of any affective relation to the things around him, to which he was almost entirely indifferent.”<sup>75</sup> Dick showed no interest in objects and people, he even shunned

74 Melanie Klein, “The Importance of Symbol-Formation in the Development of the Ego,” in *Love, Guilt and Reparation: And Other Works 1921-1945* (New York, The Free Press, 1975), 225.

75 *Ibid.*, 224.

toys, unable to understand their meaning or purpose. The toy train was an exception: “he was interested in trains and stations and also in door-handles, doors and the opening and shutting of them.”<sup>76</sup> Klein’s therapy for the little patient involved encouraging him to develop the ability for symbolic representation understood as establishing relations with the objects in the outside world. The train example shows that Dick’s entrance into the symbolic world happened through activating or verbalizing the Oedipal content. Commenting on the case, Lacan notes the brutality and violence of Klein’s method to realize the therapeutic goal.<sup>77</sup> Under the guise of play, Dick is identified with a small train-penis reaching its destination – the station symbolizing the body of the mother. This Oedipal identification defines Dick’s sexual identity basing on the conflict with the “Daddy-train.” In this gender economy, Blum argues, “the mother’s body is the passive station in relation to the boy’s active locomotion – his train-identity.”<sup>78</sup> However, she stresses Dick’s repeated escape into the dark space between the outer and the inner doors of the room, which she interprets as a refusal to enter the Oedipal system based on a binary model of gender. Dick’s resistance to the choice of doors made, for instance, by the boy and the girl in Lacan’s “station tale,” is a resistance to the Oedipalized gender. Dick chooses the space between the doors, one outside the binary order, a “third” place beyond the logic of the inside and the outside, located in a pure reality (in the in the Lacanian sense) which resists linguistic and symbolic differentiation.<sup>79</sup>

Trains in Grabiński’s short stories never reach their destination, straying onto unknown tracks, stopping suddenly mid-way or at uncharted stations, disappearing and appearing out of nowhere. Most get derailed and if they do reach the terminus, they come to a halt too early or too far ahead (“Engine-driver Grot”). Railway disasters and all kinds of traffic disturbances, often irrational, become a testimony to a complete failure of symbolization, a proof that the craving which disturbs it is, so to say, multi-track and aimless. The story of engine-driver Grot who “felt a natural dread of stations and pauses”

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76 Ibid., 224.

77 See Jacques Lacan, “Freud’s Papers on Technique 1953-1954” trans. John Forrester (New York, London, W.W. Norton & Company), 68-70.

78 Blum, “Ladies and Gentlemen,” 201.

79 Lacan notes: “Melanie Klein differentiates Dick from a neurotic by his profound indifference, his apathy, his absence. In fact, it is clear that, for him, what isn’t symbolised is reality. This young subject is completely in reality, in the pure state, unconstituted. He is entirely in the undifferentiated.” Lacan, “Freud’s,” 68

perfectly captures the desire that evades “closing” and fixture in the process of symbolization.

The same happens in *The Doll*: Wokulski’s journey is a journey abruptly interrupted, an unfinished symbolization thwarting all intentions. His train does not arrive at the terminus (Cracow), stopping mid-way in Skierniewice. The protagonist does not achieve the planned goal: to become closer to his fiancé. From that moment on, he gradually moves away from Izabela and in the end, by taking a train destined, probably, for Moscow, “takes flight” again, a flight from which he is unlikely to return. Just like the protagonists in Grabiński’s tales, Wokulski is “derailed” by a desire overshadowed by the death drive. “Give me an aim... or death,” he cries dramatically as he escapes to Paris: “Who will listen to me in this machinery of blind forces I’ve become the plaything of?”<sup>80</sup> This machinery of blind forces is, in other words, a pure drive which could be visualized as a rushing locomotive steering Wokulski into the embrace of death. Suffice to say that Dr. Szuman compares him to a broken steam engine:

A steam-engine is not a coffee-grinder, you know, but a huge machine: but when its wheels break, it becomes a useless object and is even dangerous. In your Wokulski, there is such a wheel, that is rusting and breaking down...<sup>81</sup>

Let me reiterate: Wokulski is a man-machine, whose mechanism of masculinity is faulty – it jams and breaks down all the time.

*Translation: Anna Warso*

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<sup>80</sup> Prus, *The Doll*, 385.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 308.

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Wojciech Śmieja

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## A Piece of Fedora Cake: The Male-Centric Imagination of Jerzy Andrzejewski and the Scholarly Reconnaissance

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**W**e would be hard-pressed to find a common denominator for new readings of works by the author of *Ashes and Diamonds*, aside from the fact that they are linked (I believe) by the “depoliticization” of both the author and his work, the abandonment of what Dariusz Nowacki neatly termed “the Andrzejewski affair.”<sup>1</sup> Contemporary interpreters continue to suggest novel approaches to interpreting Andrzejewski’s work: poetological (Janusz Detka<sup>2</sup>), biographical (Dariusz Nowacki,<sup>3</sup>

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- 1 See Dariusz Nowacki, “Ja” nieuniknione. O podmiocie pisarstwa Jerzego Andrzejewskiego [The Inevitable “Self.” On the Subject of Jerzy Andrzejewski’s Writing] (Katowice: Wydawnictwo UŚ, 2000). We may surmise that Andrzejewski’s new biography and a critical inquiry into his journals, currently being prepared by Anna Synoradzka-Demadre, will reignite a broader interest in the author of *Ashes and Diamonds* and his work.
  - 2 Janusz Detka, *Przemiany poetyki w prozie Jerzego Andrzejewskiego* [The Transformation of Poetics in the Writings of Jerzy Andrzejewski] (Kielce: Wyższa Szkoła Pedagogiczna im. Jana Kochanowskiego, 1995).
  - 3 Nowacki, “Ja” nieuniknione.

Jan Potkański<sup>4</sup>), “vampirical” (Maria Janion<sup>5</sup>), gender-based (German Ritz<sup>6</sup>), mythological (Zbigniew Kopeć<sup>7</sup>), and intertextual (Agnieszka Gawron<sup>8</sup>).

Undoubtedly, Andrzejewski’s writings are open to other interpretive modalities with psychoanalytic readings at the top of the list. Its “traces” can be found in the majority of the approaches listed above (e.g. in the work of Dariusz Nowacki). The lack, therefore, of a comprehensive psychoanalytical inquiry into this particular body of work can indeed be confounding.

The rough sketch I will be proposing below is an interpretive attempt, heterogeneous in character. As the subject matter I will be working with is writerly imagination, rather than privileging one particular interpretive language (e.g. the language of psychoanalysis), I am going to propose that we take on a multi-pronged theoretical approach in which the discourses of psychoanalysis and queer theory will play a distinct role in the belief that the light cast by the two discourses together will illuminate the figure of the writer standing on stage better than either of them would singly.

### 1. “What, Besides our Mates, Can we Believe in?” The Scholarly Perspective

Andrzejewski’s *oeuvre* has been subject to numerous attempts at ordering and categorizing, hammering (to paraphrase the author himself) the pulp that is the work into shape. And so, taking his cues from Miłosz and his *Captive Mind*, Janusz Detka found that the theme of night is a common thread running through Andrzejewski’s work. Earlier, Artur Sandauer attempted to outline distinct creative periods in Andrzejewski’s writing and arrange them in an orderly way, using nomenclature that seemed taken straight out

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4 Jan Potkański, “Andrzejewski: perwersje wpływu,” [“Andrzejewski: Perversions of Influence”] in *Lektury płci. Polskie (kon)teksty* [Reading Gender. Polish (Con)texts], ed. Mieczysław Dąbrowski (Warszawa: Dom Wydawniczy Elipsa, 2008), 262–278.

5 Maria Janion, “Krucjata niewińątek,” [“The Innocents’ Crusade”] in *Wobec zła* [In the Face of Evil] (Chotomów: Verba, 1989).

6 German Ritz, “Jerzy Andrzejewski: maski pożądania i ich funkcja w poetyce powieści” [“Jerzy Andrzejewski: Masks of Desire and Their Function in the Poetics of the Novel”], trans. Andrzej Kopacki, in *Nić w labiryncie pożądania* [A Thread in the Labyrinth of Desire] (Warszawa: Wiedza Powszechna, 2002), 217–231.

7 Zbigniew Kopeć, *Jerzy Andrzejewski* (Warszawa: Rebis, 1999).

8 Agnieszka Gawron, *Sublimacje współczesności: pisanstwo Jerzego Andrzejewskiego wobec przemian prozy XX wieku* [Sublimations of Modernity: the Writing of Jerzy Andrzejewski in Light of the 20th Century Transformations of Prose] (Łódź: Wydawnictwo UŁ, 2003).

of *Ferdynand*.<sup>9</sup> Teresa Walas divided Andrzejewski's body of work into two separate parts – one subordinate to the “sphere of morality” and the other subject to the “sphere of history.”<sup>10</sup> Tomasz Burek, on the other hand, focused on the integrity and identity of the work,<sup>11</sup> while Dariusz Nowacki examined what he believed to be two separate development phases in Andrzejewski's writing. In the first, Andrzejewski was supposedly implementing the “overachiever strategy,” while adopting the “finding oneself strategy” in the second.<sup>12</sup>

My interest leans towards identifying integrative categories, that is those that will allow us to read Andrzejewski's work not in terms of chronologies charting individual breakthroughs and progressive fluctuations in hopes and disappointments, but rather in terms of the “deep structure” which sees a couple of distinct leitmotifs reappear throughout Andrzejewski's body of work – from *Mode of the Heart* to *Nobody*, the latter published nearly 50 years after the former. By trying to identify a category that could establish a basic continuum, I am repeating the efforts of Janusz Detka, at least to some extent, who believed – with considerable proof to back his claim – night to be such a category. The Kielce-based scholar points out that a nocturnal setting is a dominant compositional feature in Andrzejewski's work, its reign stretching from *Unavoidable Roads*, his debut short story collection published in 1936, all the way to the senile *Nobody*, published in 1981.<sup>13</sup> One other category that, akin to “night,” runs like a thread through the entire body of

9 Artur Sandauer, *Bez taryfy ulgowej* [No Concessions] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1974), passim.

10 Teresa Walas, “Zwierciadła Jerzego Andrzejewskiego,” [“The Reflections of Jerzy Andrzejewski”] in *Prozaicy dwudziestolecia międzywojennego. Sylwetki* [Prose Writers of the Interwar Period. Profiles], ed. Bolesław Faron (Warszawa: Wiedza Powszechna, 1972).

11 Tomasz Burek, “Pisarz, demony, publiczność. Jerzy Andrzejewski,” [“Writer, Demons, Audience. Jerzy Andrzejewski”] in *Sporne postacie polskiej literatury współczesnej* [Controversial Figures of Polish Contemporary Literature], ed. Alina Brodzka (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IBL PAN, 1994).

12 Nowacki, “Ja” *nieuniknione*.

13 Andrzejewski himself explained the basis for the prevalence of nocturnal settings in his work: “It is easier for me to deal with men than landscapes [...] it is my awareness of the fact that I find world building difficult that drives the ubiquity of night-time, darkness, dimness, fogs, and blurred contours in my work.” (ZDN 1, 149). See Detka's remarks (226-230). Passages from Andrzejewski's works will be quoted in the following manner: acronym of the title, page number (A – *The Appeal*, Warszawa, 1983; GZC – *Playing with a Shadow*, Warszawa, 1987; NG – *A Kind of Cope and Other Stories*; ZDN 1 – *From Day to Day*, Vol. 1, Warszawa, 1988; ZDN 2 – *From Day to Day*, Vol. 2, Warszawa, 1988). If not otherwise specified all translations of referenced works are provided by the translator of the article.

work of the author of *The Gates of Paradise*, is the category of “masculinity,” defined broadly for the purpose of this essay. Andrzejewski problematizes masculinity across his entire *oeuvre*. The majority of his characters are men, men entering in a variety of different relationships with other men. From this angle, his novels and stories seem to be vehicles for reflection over the conditions upon which masculinity is contingent, and its limits; their author seems intrigued by the social frame of its constitution as well as the relationship between male sexuality and aggression, along with the positions of dominance and subordination ascribed to them. In fact, it is mostly male-male relationships that are problematized across Andrzejewski’s body of work, to the detriment – rather obvious to more attentive readers – of relationships between different sexes, ethnicities, and generations (the latter, often in the form of trans-generational conflict, emerges in his work co-dependent on “male-centric relationships”). One of Andrzejewski’s earliest stories, *Lies*, has an exclusively male cast of characters; in *Mode of the Heart*, published a couple of years later, Father Siecheń, Michaś, and Siermion are caught up in an eroticism-laced psychomachia; the characters of *On Trial* and *Roll Call* set out to test the limits of male solidarity, while *Ashes and Diamonds* gives Jan Błoński reason enough to ask “in what – aside from his mates – does Maciek Chelmicki believe in”<sup>14</sup>; the crusade in *The Gates of Paradise* is driven by the forbidden love of Count Ludwik, Aleksy, and Jakub; Ortiz in *He Cometh Leaping Over the Mountains* “leaps over” an affair with the young Françoise who turns out to be nothing more than a medium channeling his youthful indiscretions with Giuseppe Barba; in his final novel *Nobody*, Andrzejewski spins a whole web of male-male relationships and, if we are to believe the excerpts, journal entries, and remarks coming from the author’s friends, *Heliogabal*, the novel Andrzejewski did not manage to complete before passing away, was supposedly focused solely on the bonds between men.<sup>15</sup> This peculiar “fixation” with masculinity evident in *A Kind of Copse*, *Almost Nothing*, and *Now the Annihilation Upon You*, this “male-centricity” mostly eludes readers consuming individual works, where relationships between male characters are inscribed into relevant contexts and conflicts (economic, political, social, etc.). Only a more comprehensive look at Andrzejewski’s *oeuvre*<sup>16</sup> allows us to identify these relationships as a privi-

14 See Jan Błoński, “Portret artysty w latach wielkiej zmiany,” [“Portrait of the Artist in Times of Upheaval”] in *Odmarz [Fall Out]* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1978), 241.

15 For passages from that final novel, see *Kwartalnik artystyczny* 4 (1997): 79–81.

16 When speaking about *oeuvre*, I am acutely aware of the reservations brought up by Dariusz Nowacki (“Ja” *nieuniknione*) which force me to arbitrarily treat the term “oeuvre” as



leged subject, one that seems especially close and moving to the author and particularly inspiring to his imagination. However, in contrast to the self-awareness that the author has demonstrated with regard to “night,” “male-centricity” as a synthesizing category remains undiagnosed or at least – as such – unspoken of, which in turn can breed significant reservations that this “male-centricity” is nothing more than the product of the universally dominant position of the male in public spaces, a fact prevalent across European cultures. This rather obvious situation may have driven the overrepresentation of male characters and “masculinity” in the narratives of Andrzejewski’s highly politicized writings. To some extent that is true. However, we need to point out (and I will develop this particular notion later in the essay) that male-male relationships do not play a stabilizing role in Andrzejewski’s writing – on the contrary, directed against the public sphere, they’re destructive, dangerous, and anarchic; they oppose societal and cultural orders in which that they function in.

A quick and superficial appraisal of “male-centric” themes appearing in Andrzejewski’s most important works forces us to ask the question that was once considered anathema and is still treated with considerable suspicion, that is the question about the biographic context of Andrzejewski’s interest in the issue of masculinity. The most superficial of answers – offered by essayists such as Krzysztof Tomasiak – combines artistic realizations with the biographic homosexuality of the author. The chapter dedicated to Andrzejewski Tomasiak titled “Potential Emancipation”, assuming that in a different cultural climate, Andrzejewski may very well have led a reappraisal of values associated with homosexuality.<sup>17</sup> Tomasiak believes that Andrzejewski had a chance to succeed in such an endeavor given his status as the first public figure “whose image was permeated by homosexual elements” which, in turn, “dovetailed with his body of work into a cohesive whole which could be seen as potentially emancipatory.”<sup>18</sup> Tomasiak’s opinion, absolutely valid as essayistic speculation, is however, potentially dangerous due to its interpretive sterility and somewhat striking in its essentialist treatment of categories which even if not constructed from the ground up, as the more radical proponents

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meaning the overall body of texts (and their variants) published during the author’s lifetime. So defined, *oeuvre* encompasses both fictional texts as well as diary entries and memoirs.

17 Krzysztof Tomasiak, “Potencjalna emancypacja. O Jerzym Andrzejewskim,” [“Potential Emancipation. On Jerzy Andrzejewski”] in *Homobiografie: pisarki i pisarze polscy XIX i XX wieku* [*Homobiographies: Polish Writers of the 19th and 20th century*] (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2007), 114-123.

18 Tomasiak, “Emancypacja,” 122.

of queer theory would have it, would still require cultural and historical contextualization.<sup>19</sup> Additionally, binding the writer to an articulation of non-normative sexuality in such a manner carries considerable risk of succumbing to a particular reading reductionism which sees literature subordinate itself to some teleology external to its own self (although we should note here, as Tomasiak did, that “*Pulp* achieved cult status among gays.”<sup>20</sup>) The biographical interpretation of Anna Synoradzka-Demadre engenders similar reservations. In her essay *Epitafium dla E.B. O pewnym wątku w twórczości Jerzego Andrzejewskiego* [*An Epitaph for E.B. On a Certain Theme in Jerzy Andrzejewski's Work*],<sup>21</sup> this highly distinguished scholar and biographer of Andrzejewski claims that the template, the prototype for relationships in Andrzejewski's work can be found in the love triangle between the author, Eugeniusz Biernacki, and Barbara Siekierzyńska. The scholar identifies specific coincidences between that relationship, outlined or alluded to in certain passages of his earlier works, and the narrative structure of *Mode of the Heart*. She also mentions that a similar romantic arrangement appears in Andrzejewski's work in two versions of *Pulp* – in both the fictional and journalistic sections. I am not sure whether such an attempt to match specific writings to a matrix of their author's experiences is valid and justifiable or an attack against the self-contained nature of the literary text; nevertheless, my deep belief that Andrzejewski's writerly imagination focuses primarily on masculinity and relationships (of all sorts) that men enter into is further reinforced when I realize the actual deficit of representation of male-female relationships, particularly the happy ones; even the Maleckis portrayed in *Holy Week* are written so that Anna, the wife, repulses her husband who, in turn, has some unfinished romantic business with a beautiful and effective Other – Irena Lilien.<sup>22</sup>

A study positing that masculinity or homosociality (to use the theoretically resonant category crafted by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick) is the chief problem in Jerzy Andrzejewski's work simply cannot refrain from inquiring into whether

19 Anna Synoradzka is more careful with Andrzejewski's sexual – and gender – identity, preferring to claim in her biography that Andrzejewski was actually “bisexual.”

20 Tomasiak, *Homobiografie*, 114.

21 Anna Synoradzka-Demadre, “Epitafium dla E.B. O pewnym wątku w twórczości Jerzego Andrzejewskiego” [“An Epitaph for E.B. On a Certain Theme in Jerzy Andrzejewski's Work”], *Odra* 3 (2013): 52–60.

22 Let us bring up a couple of similarly written characters from Andrzejewski's works, e.g. the wartime *Intermezzo* (a husband abandons a wife he hates during the fateful September of 1939), passages from *The Return* (the breakup of the Gaszycki marriage) or the late *Dark Star* (the emotional torpor of the Ankwiczes).

there exist any linkages between the author's works and his biography, particularly in the sphere of sexuality. Such a study should also take into account the many degrees of fictionality which, particularly in Andrzejewski's work, define specific receptive modalities.<sup>23</sup>

## 2. "... Origins Dark and Unclean": the Gombrowicz Perspective

No comprehensive monograph of Andrzejewski's journal entries has been published yet, but we can easily put forth a couple of rather obvious hypotheses. Firstly, the entries serve as an extension of his literary work and provide relevant commentary for his works.<sup>24</sup> After he completed *Pulp*, the writer's diary became his most important work – and the only channel of communication with the readers left to him after he found himself the subject of the censor's unblinking gaze. Andrzejewski uses this particular platform to experiment with fiction (fragments of his novel *Hundred Years Ago and Now*), sometimes to self-aggrandize, to model the specific readings of his works through self-commentary, and to render literary judgments. On many levels, his journal seems to style itself after the model laid down by Witold Gombrowicz's *Diary* – I would even go so far as to posit that it often leeches off it – the essence of my second hypothesis. Sandauer's opinion that the release of *And Darkness Covered the Earth* marks the moment "Andrzejewski dropped satire and broke out from the influence of Gombrowicz"<sup>25</sup> was somewhat premature – the entries from 1972–1981, published in *Literatura*, are both modeled on Gombrowicz's *Diary* and function – in light of the highly regulated availability of Gombrowicz's works – as a veiled argument therewith.

The opening pages of *From Day to Day* contains the following passage:

demons, regardless of the sphere of thoughts and deeds that they oversee and of personal hierarchies, are bound by mysterious ties of kinship.

23 The "literariness" of Andrzejewski's work is multilevel in nature and its relationship to the extraliterary reality also gets complicated – one only needs to bring up the multilevel fictional constructs in *Pulp* or the inflationary multiplication of narrator figures in the journal entries. Cf., among others, Walas, "Zwierciadła," *passim*.

24 See, among others, Erazm Kuźma, "Funkcja dziennika w prozie Jerzego Andrzejewskiego," ["The Role of the Journal in Jerzy Andrzejewski's Prose"] in *Między konstrukcją a dekonstrukcją. Studia z teorii i historii literatury [Between Construction and Deconstruction. Inquiries into Theory and History of Literature]* (Szczecin: Wydawnictwo Naukowe USz, 1994), 147–148.

25 Sandauer, *Bez taryfy ulgowej*, 61.

Angels and angelhood I prefer to not discuss, they are not my business, I do not know them nor my way around them. One does not write with angel feathers nor in the shade of their wings. The origins of writing are dark and unclean, and the greatest deficiency of Polish literature is the writers' cowardly unwillingness to acknowledge these internal well-springs. (ZDN 1, 16)

This rather sweeping remark accompanies a question that Andrzejewski poses after reading Iwaszkiewicz's *Sérénité*. The writer asks himself which of his contemporary authors could himself become a character in a novel. The names he ponders include Iwaszkiewicz, Putrament (these two without a question mark), Herbert, Brandys, Strykowski, and Nowakowski (these four with question marks). These seem to be the "demons" bound together by mysterious ties.

Let us contrast the above passage with an entry from Gombrowicz's *Diary* dated 1958:

My springs pulsate in a garden whose gate is guarded by an angel with a flaming sword. I cannot enter. I will never get through. I am condemned to an eternal circling of the place where my truest enchantment is sanctified.

I am not allowed in because... these springs bubble with shame like fountains! Yet there is the internal imperative: get as close as you can to the sources of your shame! I have to mobilize all my reason, consciousness, discipline, all the elements of form and style, all the techniques of which I am capable in order to get closer to the mysterious gate of that garden, behind which my shame bursts into flower. [...] Eternally the same thing! Dress up in a splendid coat in order to step into an inn on the docks. To use wisdom, maturity, virtue, in order to get close to something that is just the opposite!<sup>26</sup>

The similarity in the methods of presentation and segmentation of content evident in both fragments will become even more clear when we realize that the final lines of the above quoted passage appear in *He Cometh Leaping Over the Mountain* (coming from the mouth of Paul Allard as he sends his lover away), a fact that will later become a bone of contention between the writers. And Reiner von Brösigke, the exalted uncle of the protagonist of *Almost*

26 Witold Gombrowicz, *Diary. Volume 2 (1957-1961)*, trans. Lillian Vallee (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1989), 87-88.

*Nothing*, dies in an *Inn on the Docks*.<sup>27</sup> The threefold reappearance of passages from the *Diary* in Andrzejewski's work clearly proves that the latter attached considerable importance to the book and interpreted in ways that suited his own purposes. Homoeroticism, only suggested in Gombrowicz's take, becomes the "closed fountain" in Andrzejewski's work quite unequivocally – the novelistic allusions (taking place over a dozen years) clearly situate them in this particular context, making them as much dangerous as they are appealing.

In his notation, Andrzejewski reproduces Gombrowicz's specific representation process and the only thing he does is expand the conclusions to cover the whole of Polish literature. He leaves the threefold consequences of describing a body of work revolving around an inaccessible "dark origin" in the sphere of presupposition. Firstly, we are dealing with criticism of its pre-existing condition – and this is where Andrzejewski most resembles Gombrowicz. Secondly, by contrast – it seems to be an artistic declaration – if such is the deficiency of literature, the notation's author seems to suggest that he will try to remedy it to the best of his ability and draw on those "origins dark and unclean." The third problem we run into is linked with the embodiment of the "darkness" and the "uncleanliness" of these "internal wellsprings," with their potential portrayal and the language that should be used to discuss them. Andrzejewski's solution, which we will discuss later in this essay, can be found in the diary entries penned down by the author of *The Gates of Paradise*.

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27 Andrzejewski suffered from a Gombrowicz complex. Readers of *From Day to Day* and *Playing with a Shadow* will get the impression that the most delicate point of said complex, if we were to use such a phrase, is both writers' sensitivity to youth: "Gombrowicz," Andrzejewski writes, "spoke often and in a moving manner, seemingly enraptured by youth, about its charms but he saw youth primarily from a physical angle; and because he was highly intelligent, he sought an intellectual formula that would capture flesh – he believed that fascination with form may educate him. [...] It is possibly regrettable that a grand and heroic writer such as Gombrowicz would not be permitted to live out his days in his homeland, because here, in this country, he could possibly realize in his final days that the spirit of youth may turn out to be much more beautiful than young flesh." (ZDN 2, 69). Elsewhere, he discusses Gombrowicz and a renowned critical essay drafted by Sandauer which accuses the author of *Ashes and Diamonds* of pushing derivative ideas: "I do not deny that there may be similarities between Gombrowicz and me in that respect [meaning their proclivity for youth – author's note]. However, any conceptual insinuations suggesting some sort of dependence in one direction or another would verge on the ridiculous; in truth, Sandauer only saw one possibility: that it was I who pinched the entire problem of youth from Gombrowicz" (GzC, 97). The "half-hearted confidences" with regard to the alleged homosexuality of the author of *Operetta* are reflected in Andrzejewski's "partial confessions" (GzC, 158) – as if he truly felt compelled to paraphrase the specific writing style of the Vence-based former acquaintance, as if he couldn't muster the courage to make his language self-contained, autonomous.

If we acknowledge the manifold representations of masculinity to be an essential theme of a body of work self-admittedly driven by the willingness to reach these “origins dark and unclean,” then we naturally have to circle back to the issue of biography, or – to put things more precisely, to the manner in which the author himself situates his masculinity within the context of social relations, the prevalent societal beliefs, and his very own idiosyncrasies. How does he act towards other men? And how do they act towards him?

In the context of Andrzejewski’s biography, it is undeniable that his relationships with the men around him were very complicated. As a result of his homoerotic relationship with Eugeniusz Biernacki, Andrzejewski had a falling out with his father; the novel he based on that relationship led to a disagreement with the conservative circles associated with the *ABC* daily.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, the unrequited love for Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński determined the horizon for subsequent, more or less fortunate, affairs and “affairs,” including the one with Marek Hłasko. Although Andrzejewski’s circle of friends included many outspoken homosexuals (including Marek Eiger and – after the war – Wilhelm Mach), and he himself lived with his sexuality more or less out in the open in postwar Communist Poland, in both the early and final stages (the notorious letter affair which was later revealed to be a provocation of the security services) of his writing career, Andrzejewski suffered rejection and exclusion due to the homoerotic nature of these relationships.

The result is, I assume, the internalization of a conceptual apparatus wherein the homosexuality of writers is associated with condemnation, darkness, sin, and stigma. These, in turn, serve as the *primum movens* of writerly activity and prompt the expansion of the limits of individual sensibility. And although Andrzejewski does not confess as much in his self-commentary, he repeatedly “projects” such a “sinful” view of non-normative sexuality and its consequences onto the figures of his writer friends. Such is definitely the case of Maria Dąbrowska. A brief vignette dedicated to her in *From Day to Day* brings up the same associations as the passage quoted above:

Subject to demons and angels, both of them local, homebound; petite, although with a less than striking figure; slightly cross-eyed, with a thicket of flaxen hair (which grew beautifully grey in later years) in a Piast-like bowl cut—she was able to be both a possessive, despotic man and a submissive little woman. (ZDN 1, 71)

28 As Nowacki points out, the release of the book also forever exiled him from the ideological faction that he strived to belong to. See Nowacki, “Ja” *nieuniknione*, 32–34.

Whether Dąbrowska was simply androgynous or Andrzejewski was trying to bring up – and invert – the *anima muliebris virili corpore inclusa* topos, rather prevalent in paramedical discourse, is not really relevant here. What is much more interesting is that Dąbrowska's presupposed position on the intersection of gender and sexuality – subject to the whims of demonic forces (at least to some extent) due to its hybrid nature – equipped the writer with a particular set of receptive qualities:

The woman whose considerable knowledge of love, I believe, was much greater than anything she wanted to (dared to?) write on the subject in her books, once told me, this was still during the war, I think, that *On Trial* was a story about love. (ZDN 1, 71)

Dąbrowska censors herself when it comes to the sensitive – too sensitive for Andrzejewski – subject of same-sex relationships. Her opinion of the wartime story,<sup>29</sup> where the power of such a bond reveals itself under dramatic circumstances, can be offered solely in an unofficial manner. With respect to Dąbrowska, Andrzejewski positions himself as an indulgent mentor – according to his own spatial metaphor, he is located closer to these “internal wellsprings” which inform and feed his writing. When it comes to Dąbrowska, Andrzejewski is not certain whether the limitations she imposed on herself are a product of her own decisions or contingent upon external circumstances; what he is certain of, however, is that her actions resemble a sort of spiritual amputation that impairs writing itself.

she [Dąbrowska – author's note] was astonished with the specific style of *The Gates of Paradise*. Was she [...] fully aware of the proud obedience that she herself exhibited in her pursuit of compliance with the severe norms of the societal spirit and the many dark and violent gifts of her nature that she renounced in the name of this said higher purpose of writerly service to the nation?

Among the many clichés that Andrzejewski invokes – as much periphrastic as implying homosexuality – the “dark and violent [...] nature” seems his favorite. The gothic<sup>30</sup> lexicon of darkness, violence, and demonic influence

29 “In December, I wrote *On Trial*, a short story which I believe to be the best of everything I have ever written. Maybe this one will prevail...” ZDN 1, 322.

30 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick wrote extensively on the relationship between “deviant” sexuality and the gothic imaginary; Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men. English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia, 1985), 83–96. She notices that: “the

resurfaces in profiles of artists whose homosexual orientation often informed the shape of their works and – more often than not – led to personal catastrophes.<sup>31</sup> Such is the explanation of the “dark origin,” which is both the source of value of Andrzejewski’s work and the source of others’ death and destruction suffered by others. Let us bring up a handful of examples. From Andrzejewski’s reading of Lechoń’s correspondence “emerges a dramatic and grotesque image of Lechoń himself: a snob, a mean-spirited gossip, and simultaneously a man in constant pain, tortured by creative unfulfillment, loneliness, as well as hallucinations and genuine dangers” (ZDN 1, 162). Lechoń’s death, whose homosexual background was no secret in literary circles, seems in Andrzejewski’s take a victory of that “hellish” part of Serafinowicz’s being which

adored the splendor of the upper classes, loved to rub elbows with society types (and those with lesser pedigrees), loved to shine, loved publicity and acclaim, but belonged to the tribe of reprobates, and was bound by dark pacts to suffering and death [emphasis mine]. Eventually, the wretch overcame and wrestled down the elements that still withstood and delayed his demise. (ZDN 1, 163)

The term “tribe of reprobates” brings up very Proustian associations (*la race maudite*) and notions positing the existence of some sort of a gay Masonic lodge that – in line with Gothic imaginary and demonology – concludes dark compacts that bind them to suffering and death. The mentioned pacts will resurface in the discussion of another of Andrzejewski’s gay friends – Wilhelm Mach who “gave himself to causes considered important with a determination some could see as desperation and it was this dark force [emphasis mine], I believe, that led to his untimely and tragic death” (ZDN 2, 508). The common denominator for these two very different men (one was a poet, the other a prose writer, one was a highly conservative émigré, the other a committed socialist, one concealed his homosexuality, the other was out and proud about his emotions and desires) is their “essence,” a sort of dark and demonic force which drove their lives, to fatal results. Józef Czechowicz, another figure discussed by Andrzejewski in his diary, was treated by the author only

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Gothic novel [is] an important locus for the working-out of some of the terms by which nineteenth- and twentieth-century European culture has used homophobia to divide and manipulate the male homosocial spectrum.”

31 My discussion of existential catastrophes follows the pattern laid down by Tomasz Kaliściak who saw the artistic and existential catastrophism as a constant in many artistic biographies of 20th century writers and poets (see Tomasz Kaliściak, *Katastrofy odmieńców [Disasters of the Others]* (Katowice, Wydawnictwo UŚ, 2011).



slightly better, as his portrayal is focused on emphasizing his dual nature (the duality linking him with other “reprobates”):

A neurotic, he was often seen in a state indicating utter and complete self-neglect; he also had better days, when he walked around bathed and groomed, content like the full moon. Many personal affairs, however, pained him to no end... (ZDN 2, 88)

Andrzejewski used a similar tone to discuss Marek Eiger (Stefan Napierski), calling him a “man hollowed out by misery,” and marked him “a member of that particular caste of men who are unable to experience happiness.”<sup>32</sup>

Andrzejewski’s self-referential columns in *Literatura*, where he explored his own relationships with other men, are slightly different in character. The author seems to believe his own experiences and emotions immune from the influence of the “dark forces” (but may be doing so for the readers’ sake). Remarkably, he also used the widely read column to discuss his long-term affair with Eugeniusz Biernacki, as if it was perfectly obvious for everyone,<sup>33</sup> as if the private details of his pre-war affairs and relationships, revealed through the use of a particular diminutive, were perfectly obvious. If we were to treat the notion of approaching the dark pulsating springs borrowed from Gombrowicz seriously, then Andrzejewski’s strategy leading towards it would necessarily entail objectivization and naturalization of description. The issue, however, managed to remain enigmatic because the average reader of *Literatura* in the 1970s had more or less no idea who Biernacki really was and what role he played in the life of the author of *Ashes and Diamonds*. We can hypothesize, therefore, that Andrzejewski’s remarks have a dual reader address: one is broad, while the other, privileged, includes the author’s close friends and loved ones. The dual address hypothesis is lent further credibility by the fact that Andrzejewski often read his works to close friends before they were published as well the fact that some of his works, such as *As If a Copse*, dedicated to Irena Szymańska, were structured in a way that revealed their inherent ironies only to those who knew the author well.<sup>34</sup> We should also add here that using a dual reader address is a device writers often employ in order to communicate homoerotic content in an ostensibly “neutral” text. I have pointed out that fact elsewhere with regard to stories authored by Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz: *The Maids*

<sup>32</sup> As quoted in Kaliściak, *Katastrofy*, 183.

<sup>33</sup> The paradox was pointed out already by Synoradzka in Synoradzka-Demadre, “Epitafium dla E.B.,” 58

<sup>34</sup> See Nowacki, “Ja” *nieuniknione*, 53.

of *Wilko* and, above all, *Psyche*<sup>35</sup> (with Jerzy Andrzejewski definitely one of the intended, in-the-know readers). The strategy of objectivization and use of informational shortcuts employed by Andrzejewski is, essentially, a mere pretence of objectivity – legible only to a few, leaving the remaining readers without the requisite instruments and the requisite context that would allow them to grasp the true meaning.

Andrzejewski juxtaposes his love for Biernacki with his love for Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński, and he speaks of the latter in declarative, measured tones.<sup>36</sup> In contrast to the death of the poet, “the tragic death of Gienio B. [“Gienio” is a diminutive of the name Eugeniusz – translator’s note] marked the passing of nothing but memory. It did not take anything living from me, nor did it wound me deeply; I have spent the month after the death of G. on writing *Nights* and it brought me a measure of balance” (ZDN 1, 313). Moreover, Biernacki’s death “opens” Andrzejewski, in his own opinion, to the successful – contrary to his first marriage – relationship with Maria Abgarowicz: “I wrote about Marysia before I ever knew her. That death,” continues Andrzejewski, “opened me up to longing for another, as yet unknown life. I prophesied it for myself” (ZDN 1, 313). Only on the ruins of an archetypical male-male relationships, we may surmise, can a traditional familial arrangement be erected – the marriage with Maria.

In another passage, the author discusses the dilemmas that plagued him in his relationship with Biernacki (forty years earlier), but, we should note, the discussion lacks the demonic and gothic atmosphere of references. In contrast to his affair with Baczyński, his relationship with Biernacki was not mythologized. Rather than “mythologize” and “gothicize,” the writer prefers to discuss psychological processes, as well as the social context that precluded him from releasing his novel in print: “My experiences with Gienio B-cki bore passages of a novel that I rewrote multiple times, and which exhausted me to no end, fragments of which were later printed in *Droga* and later in *Prosto z Mostu* [...] This was when I was 34 and 35, these years were very difficult for me, very complicated” (ZDN 1, 318). It is hard to divine what exactly the difficulty of these years entailed, we know, however, that the novel that so exhausted the author was “autobiographically bold” and that it was to serve as a “liberation, a way to cleanse and justify himself.” It could not have been printed in *ABC*

35 See Wojciech Śmieja, *Literatura, której nie ma. Szkice o polskiej “literaturze homoseksualnej”* [*The Non-Existent Literature. Essays on Polish “Homosexual Literature”*] (Kraków: Universitas, 2010), 20-26; 61-95.

36 I will not be discussing the relationship between Andrzejewski and Baczyński just yet, because, if we adhere to the categories used by Andrzejewski himself, the author of *Elegy for a Polish Boy* was not a member of the “tribe of reprobates.”

which Andrzejewski was a part of back then, because “Piasecki read a draft of *Night* and decided that the author of such a scandalizing book could not be a collaborator of a magazine with the ideological profile of *ABC*” (ZDN 1, 318).<sup>37</sup> It is probable, then, that the novel’s narrative was based around Andrzejewski’s affair with Biernacki, the same affair which led to his falling out with his parents.<sup>38</sup> Homoerotic desire turns out to be not only the essential foundation of Andrzejewski’s subsequent relationship with Maria, but it also allows the writer to come into being as a sovereign subject.

Biernacki’s death opened the writer to a relationship with Maria, but the death of Baczyński and, before that, the writer’s love for him, prevented that relationship from ever reaching full bloom. If we were to seek the presence of the metaphor of abyss, of dark chasms, then we shouldn’t be looking in non-normative sexuality itself, as Andrzejewski did in the case of Dąbrowska, Eiger or Lechoń, but rather in the sphere of the rupture that separates that which is and that which we would be. Thus, Andrzejewski performs a subtle semantic shift which allows him to question whether he himself is a member of *la race maudite*:

A state of half sleep, desensitization, and numbness. I’m drinking too much vodka, I’m too dependent on the intoxication and the pathetic looseness it brings. Sometimes, I think that only a violent, passionate love could pull me from this slumber. I need a wife – like Marysia, a son – no other than Marcin, and a home to live; I love all of them and all of it, but it would seem that my love is not strong, exclusive, or responsible enough to quash this desire for another love, one that exists beyond those I live with and am supposed to live with ‘til death do us part. Is this desire a value born of Krzysztof’s death? (ZDN 1, 314)

The desire for love referenced here by Andrzejewski is universal and is not tied to one specific gender.<sup>39</sup> It is also uplifting in nature – it is, as the writer states very clearly, a value in itself. That fact it is realized as male desire seems only incidental. Unfortunately, satisfying this desire would be ideal, but as such is wholly unattainable; thus, it is this impossibility, rather than the “darkness” of

37 And so, Andrzejewski’s unwritten novel joins the “shadow cabinet” of homoerotic narratives that includes Szymanowski’s *Epebos* (completed but never released), and the early draft of Iwaszkiewicz’s *Conspiracy of Men*, and the novel written by Czechowicz.

38 This is not purely my conjecture. Synradzka-Demadre reached very similar conclusions.

39 And this is one of the reasons why Andrzejewski, contrary to Tomasik’s wishes, could never be an emancipating writer.

desire itself, that becomes the very thing that crushes and destroys the subject (“a state of half sleep, desensitization, and numbness”).<sup>40</sup> If it ultimately becomes “dark,” then it does so only secondarily, because of the unattainability that ravages the subject. Andrzejewski thus fell into a conceptual trap that Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick tried to describe in the chapter of her *Epistemology of the Closet* dedicated to Marcel Proust and his work. In his literary journal, Andrzejewski, in a manner similar to Proust’s opening essay in *Sodom and Gomorrah*, unveils before us the spectacle of the closet, with the aforementioned writers playing the main roles.<sup>41</sup> The spectacle is performed, as we have already seen, with gothic set decorations, and it portrays the “tribe of reprobates” as a minority with an already established identity, whose members become the objects of descriptions drafted by an external observer (Andrzejewski), who places himself, however, on the side of the audience (viewpoint of the closet). That does not mean, however, that there is nothing linking him with the characters in the spectacle. Rather, the difference is born of the double standard of seeing oneself and others (the essence of the conceptual trap): seeing others is highly essentializing (Sedgwick would call it a minoritizing view), whereas self-description gravitates towards the universalization (the universalizing view, according to Sedgwick) of the desiring subject and its desire.

Therefore, the clever concept of the “inevitable self” developed by Darisusz Nowacki also applies to the shapes that the author of *The Gates of Paradise* imposes on literary representations of masculinity: the Self is closely related to them, the Self permeates them, the Self recognizes itself through them. And, in this case, we are not dealing with the psychologism of the straightforward translation of biographical experience into literary images, but rather the identification of a couple of biographical reference points around which condense signs and their constellations within the order of the literary work in order to achieve broad autonomy within its limits.

Later in the essay, I will explore one such “biographical reference point” and I will try to apply it to the “order of the literary work” in its broadest, structuralizing way.

### 3. “... Seemed Very Pretty to Us”: the Baczyński Perspective

Polish literature is absolutely rife with weak and absent father figures. The crisis of fatherhood is deep and has many aspects. Scattered across different

<sup>40</sup> The notion of impossible love is explored most comprehensively in *The Gates of Paradise*. See Gawron, *Sublimacje współczesności*, 161.

<sup>41</sup> See Sedgwick, *Epistemology*, 222

texts and often inscribed into different narrative contexts, it seems to elude the more synthetic approaches of literature scholars. And the relationship with the (literal) father and the (symbolic) Father is – to quote Freud and Lacan – constitutive of social ties and the social order, the latter still often labeled “heteropatriarchal.”

Jerzy Andrzejewski experienced the demise of fatherhood first hand:

I did not like my father, felt incapable of liking him, and probably did not want to like him too, among the myriad reasons which decide whether we like someone or not, the will to like that person, the unselfish gesture of respect for an unfamiliar condition, plays a crucial role. And there was no such will in me towards my father.

I cannot unambiguously say whether I appreciated the better qualities of his character while he was still alive. The answer is probably no, they were not my own and he himself presented them in a manner so average that they could never make an impression on me. He was honest towards the norms that prevailed in his circles, whereas I sacrificed that particular virtue on the Altar of Writing quite early in life, leaving the remaining spheres of my life with much more latitude. Father was not miserly, but highly conscientious about his spending habits; I, on the other hand, threw money around with considerable recklessness. He was a reliable and practical man, where I was twisted, full of contradictions [...] I tried to oppose his male egoism with my wastefulness extravagance, spiritual and carnal... (NO, 163)

The fact remains that Andrzejewski was lower-middle class by birth and his family suffered through continuous impoverishment in the 1920s, something that the writer's father was unable to prevent or stop. The writer, on the cusp of his literary career, constructs his artistic personality in opposition to the personality of his weakening, bourgeois father. This opposition is founded upon wastefulness: economic, intellectual (spiritual), and carnal, in which homosexuality played an important part (his relationship with Eugeniusz Biernacki served as a catalyst for his falling out with his family) as the absolute antithesis of the values his father espoused and held dear.<sup>42</sup>

42 Wasteful spending can easily be associated with sexual promiscuity: squandering money, like homoeroticism or masturbation, brings no tangible returns and is seen as unproductive, contrary to the spirit of capitalism. On the analogies between one and the other, see Tomasz Kaliściak, “Statek Odmieńców, czyli o marynarskiej fantazji Witolda Gombrowicza,” [“The Ship of Freaks, or On the Nautical Fantasies of Witold Gombrowicz”] in *Literatura popularna. Dyskursy wielorakie* [Popular Literature: Various Discourses], ed. Ewa Bartos and Marta Tomczok (Katowice: Wydawnictwo UŚ, 2013), 340; and Thomas W. Laqueur, *Solitary Sex: A Cultural History of Masturbation* (Kraków: Universitas, 2006), 158.

The empty field engendered by the negation of the importance of the father (biological) – son relationship is then filled with artificial, substitute bonds. Undoubtedly, the same-sex cross-generational relationship is Andrzejewski's *idée fixe*, while the authority of the older man is the value one desires and strives toward (see, e.g., the story *My Boyhood Ideal*).<sup>43</sup> The figure of Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński plays a special role here, the relationship with whom is replete with paradoxes, at least as described herein:

I can think that and I can say that: he was my greatest love; its greatness possibly stemming from the fact that it was never fulfilled although always requited; he knew the character of my feelings well and as such accepted them; although he never submitted himself to these feelings, he was made for loyal, loving friendship with one older than himself, one whom he treated sometimes like a father and sometimes like a lover, but always as a friend; thus, he was my greatest love – I can think that and I can say that... (A, 134)

The paradoxical nature of that relationship stems, one may surmise, from the instability of the positions assumed by the father-admirer-friend and the son-the-object-of-admiration-friend, relative to one another. The paradox lies in not only the lack of fulfillment, but also in requiting love or, more precisely, "loving friendship." Such fluctuation is possible only as a sort of self-creation and/or mutual staging, whose existence is contingent on the negation/circumvention (?) of the social injunctions against incest and family structures founded on oedipality. Andrzejewski undertakes to erect, for his own purposes, a separate, alternative order of reality wherein the suspension of these injunctions produces the emergence of a quasi-erotic relationship with Baczyński in which the conceptual crisis of drawing the lines between homo- and heterosexuality will be successfully resolved in favor of the subject and will overlap with the incertitude of the positions taken by the subjects in the symbolic exchange which, according to both structural anthropology and psychoanalysis (incest), should remain unambiguous because only as such can they guarantee the stability of society and culture. This utopian project, which seems to exclude women, is supposed to materialize in a somewhat paradigmatic manner in the author's relationship with Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński. We should also point out that the establishment of this "new" relationship requires effort, including considerable locutionary labor

43 "The theme of young man – old man in Andrzejewski's prose (as an attractive topic of culture) deserves a lengthy, in-depth monograph study of its own," so claims one of Andrzejewski's careful readers; Nowacki, "Ja" *nienieknione*, 131.

– the author bookends the memory of Baczyński with the phrase: “I can think (that) and I can say (that)” – this “capability” has dual meaning. First: I can, because I am able to, because I verbalized everything that resists verbalization. Second: I can, because I am entitled to, because I have drawn up rules that can be observed by the recipient from outside, from the sphere established by norms whose performativity can be suspended, for its own purposes, by Andrzejewski’s sovereign subject.

From this perspective, Andrzejewski’s memory of the birth of his son, Marcin, is also highly significant. His wife and the mother of his son – Maria Abgarowicz – seems to be completely absent from his recollection,<sup>44</sup> while the spotlight and center stage seem to be taken by the author of *Elegy for a Polish Boy* who symbolically adopts Marcin as his own by becoming his godfather:

[...] accompanied by Krzysztof, I saw Marcin, then three days old, for the first time [...], before that, I ate dinner with Krzysztof in “Fregata” on Mazowiecka Street, we were both in great spirits, we were a little drunk and we didn’t have flowers, but I brought a slice of the “Fedora” chocolate torte in my jacket pocket [...] it was quite expensive, I remember: it cost five złoty; when Marysia was pregnant, she joked that if we will have a boy, she will get an entire “Fedora” torte as a gift; to make good on the promise, Krzysztof and I brought her a piece. I remember what Krzysztof was like on that day very well – when the nurse brought Marcin down, he seemed very pretty to us, us meaning his father and godfather, as it was arranged that Krzysztof would be my child’s godfather a long time ago; so, Marcin seemed very pretty to us back then, but it was probably because we were in such good spirits, the entire world seemed beautiful; in reality, a three-day-old infant is an unsightly reddish and bluish creature, with a face wrinkled like an old man’s... (A, 135-136).

The writer’s wife seems to be playing the role of surrogate mother here, the toil of her labor rewarded with a slice of cake, although she had expected the whole thing. This slice, brought by the father and godfather, wrapped in a paper napkin, squashed flat in Andrzejewski’s jacket pocket – it is not the symbolic appreciation of/reward for the newly-minted mother, quite the opposite: it emphasizes her rejection after she has served her purpose; Andrzejewski himself highlights the fact that he did not even bring flowers. If we were to see the birth of a son from a transactional perspective, Maria “gives” her husband

44 Just like his daughter Agnieszka was absent from the above-quoted passage: “Sometimes, I think that only a violent, passionate love could pull me from this slumber. I need a wife – like Marysia, a son – no other than Marcin, and a home to live...”

a son, but he fails to hold up his end of the “contract,” he dismisses his wife with a meagre substitute of the expected symbolic equivalent (flowers and cake). The surrogate mother receives her bite-sized reward and that is where her role ends; moreover, the cake is brought to her by two fathers, further reinforcing the separation of mother from her boy child and its (biological) father, and its inclusion into an exclusively male relationship – the entire cultural process of including a child into the social order also takes place beyond the mother’s control: the examination and acceptance (it seemed pretty) of the infant is performed by both fathers; in the above quoted passage, the plural pronouns and first person plural forms of verbs referring to both men appear eight times.<sup>45</sup> Additionally, the author forcefully emphasizes that the “us” in the passage refers to the child’s “father and godfather.” The mother is incidental and uncertain – she may have bore a girl (then she would not even have got that meager piece of cake); but the reverse is true for the child’s godfather – it is been certain for quite some time who will serve in that particular capacity. The child can be accepted only in the presence of the godfather (“we were in such good spirits, the entire world seemed beautiful”), his gaze uplifting and invalidating the biological Reality (“a three-day-old infant is an unsightly reddish and bluish creature, with a face wrinkled like an old man’s”).

In a world independent of biological ramifications and the social praxis of heteronormativity, the injunctions against incest stemming from the Oedipal complex are suspended, and Baczyński’s position – maybe due to the passage of time – shifts from partner-father towards more of an adoptive relationship:

obviously I know his poems, and a handful of surviving photographs, one of them a small ID picture, it’s been sitting for the past two decades under glass, next to the photo of my son taken when he was two... (A, 136-137)<sup>46</sup>

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45 Do not underestimate the pronouns – says Judith Butler, arguing with Lacan in *Antigone’s Claim*: “In Lacan, that which is universal in culture is understood to be its symbolic or linguistic rules, and these were understood to encode and support kinship relations. The very possibility of pronomial reference [...] appears to rely on this mode of kinship that operates in and as language.” Judith Butler, *Antigone’s Claim. Kinship Between Life and Death* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 19.

46 Baczyński, as the “son-father,” appears also in a dream that Andrzejewski wrote down in *From Day to Day*: “The first thing I managed to remember after waking in the dead of night is a tall, thick wall, then oblivion, and then a black wall crumbling and letting light through [...] suddenly, out of the wall walks Krzysztof – I didn’t know whether he was beyond the wall or inside it. There was also a stroller in that dream of mine, and inside it Marcin, cooing like the 11-month-old that he was; in the dream, Krzysztof bent over the stroller and said something, but I don’t remember what it was...” (ZDN 1, 43). Baczyński (ZDN 2, 372) “was very serious about his position as godfather.”



Today is the thirty-seventh anniversary of Krzysztof Baczyński's death. [...] since then, the belief that whatever was between us back then has remained there took root in my consciousness; as did Krzysztof himself, not a day older than this twentysomething year old, fulfilled in unfulfillment and loyal to the end, exists not in a sudden suspension, but rather persists in an adjournment, no longer lethally wounded by death itself, but friendly towards life, as he may at any moment be called forth from the infinite spaces. And answer the call. (GZC, 285)

In his works, Andrzejewski seems to exhibit a sort of tendency for building paternal relationships, situated however outside the biological context, which – at least in some cases – seems to legitimize fantasies involving incestuous desires usually initiated by the elder. In these relationships, the regulative function of oedipality is negated (further excluding any trace of femininity), allowing the unpunished accretion of erotism within the (symbolic) father-son or, less frequently, brother-brother relationship. Naturally, first and foremost among these relationship is the one between Ludwik, Aleksy, and Jakub in *The Gates of Paradise*, but Andrzejewski has over the years crafted a number of similar couples (triangles), including Father Siecheń-Michaś-Siemion, Maciek Chełmicki-Andrzej Kossecki-Szczuka, Diego-Mateo-Torquemada, Cain and Abel, Reinger von Brösigke-Herman Eisberger-Doctor Lubetzky, and Odysseus-Eumaeus-Noemon.<sup>47</sup>

*Translation: Jan Szelągiewicz*

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47 In the very interesting essay "Andrzejewski: perwersje wpływu," Jan Potkański argues that Bloomian categories of "precursor" and "ephebe," along with their many mutual references (especially when subjected to a peculiar "queerization") can be found in the narratives of *The Gates of Paradise* and *Pulp*. Potkański was looking for biographical references, particularly in the context of the position held by Andrzejewski in literary circles; Potkański claimed that Andrzejewski "strived to supplant Iwaszkiewicz in his privileged position just as the Bloomian ephebus strives to replace the precursor." Without questioning Potkański's hypotheses but still within the context of these Bloomian categories, I would like to point out that Andrzejewski saw not only Iwaszkiewicz but also Gombrowicz as the precursor, while the most important of his writer friends, Baczyński, occupied the position of both precursor (structurally shaping the mature writer and his works) and ephebus (Andrzejewski launches him on his poetic trajectory). See Potkański, "Andrzejewski: perwersje wpływu," 262-278.

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 Adam Lipszyc
 

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## The Little Pole and the Phantasy of Impotence

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**T**he reactions provoked in Poland by the migrant crisis gave voice to a heterogeneous nexus of passions. One of the threads in this nexus deserves particular attention, though it may not be the most conspicuous among them. Among the loud objections to the idea that even a handful of families in need might be invited to Poland, and alongside the deplorable yet predictable outpouring of xenophobia, there were expressions of amazement at the very notion that the European Union might demand anything at all of us. At the heart of this affect lay not the migrants themselves, but the notion of our being encumbered with any sort of duty. If I am not mistaken, this astonishment – which of course immediately gave rise to indignation – stems from a certain fascinating memory structure. Polish society at large behaved (and continues to behave) as if it once made a payment of some sort – as if it had done or experienced something – that absolved it of any subsequent duty. But if a given subject assumes stances, holds convictions, and undertakes actions that are driven by this phantom memory of nonexistent events – and let us be honest, no “payment” of any sort was ever made, and we have done nothing to justify such beliefs – then it may be surmised that these thoughts and actions are

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prompted by a bundle of unconscious phantasies about oneself and one's relation with the outside world. If so, and if our goal is to produce at least a partial diagnosis of the condition and mechanisms of Polish memory, then it is worth referring to a heterogeneous tradition of thought that provides an abundance of tools with which to extract and describe these sorts of unconscious phantasies. I am referring, of course, to the psychoanalytic tradition.

Among the many compartments in the psychoanalytic conceptual toolbox available to us, I propose that we employ the vocabulary developed by Melanie Klein.<sup>1</sup> As we know, Klein's theory relies on a fundamental discernment between two "positions." A position is a bundle of defenses and the unconscious phantasies in which they are realized, which begins to crystallize in early infancy and subsequently returns at various stages of a subject's life. The first position enumerated by Klein is the paranoid–schizoid position. In simplified terms, we may say that in this position the subject divides the world into emphatically distinct collections of good and bad objects, frequently splitting individual things into their good and bad versions: this is particularly true of the original object that is the mother's breast. The subject feels persecuted by the bad object and fantasizes about its annihilation, entertaining in the process dreams of his own destructive omnipotence. The sense of omnipotence enables the subject to further believe that he retains full control over the idealized good object, with which he essentially feels unified. The loss of the original object and the relative integration of the world (i.e., the discovery that the good and bad breasts are one and the same) prompt the subject's progression to the depressive position: feelings of persecution give way to depressive anxiety and guilt caused by the belief that the subject's own destructive phantasies are to blame for the loss of the object. Reparation – the gradual and never fully complete process of coping with this position – involves regaining our faith in the existence of relatively good objects and the mounting sense that while we have much to answer for, not everything is our fault. And since the depressive position and the process of coping with it are both very difficult, the subject finds himself repeatedly regressing to the paranoid–schizoid position or, alternatively, falling into a manic state of vehement denial of his loss, in which he celebrates his narcissistic omnipotence and refuses to see any wrongdoing or aggression.

Hanna Segal, a student of Melanie Klein's, proposed that these categories be applied to international relations.<sup>2</sup> Building on the Freudian notion of culture as the source of suffering, Segal posits a simple yet attractive thesis: that

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1 See Melanie Klein, "Some Theoretical Conclusions Regarding the Emotional Life of the Infant," in *Envy and Gratitude* (London: Vintage, 1997), 61–93.

2 See Hanna Segal, "Silence is the Real Crime" and "From Hiroshima to the Gulf War and After: Socio-Political Expressions of Ambivalence," in *Psychoanalysis, Literature and War: Papers 1972–1995*, ed. John Steiner (London: Routledge, 1997), 117–128 and 129–138.

when we as individuals face others and societies at large, the depressive position and its attendant feelings of duty are, in a sense, imposed on us. However, when we appear as a group – together, rather than *vis-à-vis* each other – the painful system of mutual control disappears, and we can then allow ourselves to regress to the paranoid–schizoid position. In other words, while we are required as individuals to be more or less mature and responsible, as groups – and as nations in particular – we are inclined to paranoia. As Segal observes:

In our private lives we have to contend with a superego which puts a check on destructiveness. If we vest the individual superego in a joint group superego, [i.e., if we begin to feel and act not as individuals, but as members of a group – A.L.] we can apparently guiltlessly perpetrate horrors which we couldn't bear in our individual existence. I think that the degree of dehumanization we encounter in such group practices as genocide we would see in an individual only in the psychotic or the criminal psychopath. When such mechanisms get out of hand, the groups, instead of containing psychotic functioning, put it into practice and we get such irrational behavior as wars and genocide.<sup>3</sup>

Or, put briefly: “[groups] use mechanisms in a way that if used by an individual would be considered psychotic.”<sup>4</sup> Segal explains how groups self-idealize, slide into narcissism and paranoid anxiety, and deny the criminal consequences of their actions; she shows how they project onto their enemies the evil and aggression they feel within themselves. The British psychoanalyst applies this uncomplicated bundle of ideas and observations to the psychosis of the Cold War era and the demonization of the enemy that was rampant at the time. Perhaps more interestingly, Segal attempts to demonstrate how Klein's categories inform our understanding of the international situation following the end of the Cold War. She notes that the Western world at the time had found itself in a particular sort of emotional distress. Having lost the clearly-defined enemy that had once allowed it to remain in the paranoid-schizoid position, the West faced the prospect of progressing to the depressive position, in which it would have to come to terms with its responsibility for a variety of transgressions, from neocolonialism and environmental catastrophes, to insufficiently investing in culture and welfare state structures while spending exorbitant amounts of money on arms. According to Segal's interpretation, by avoiding this threat, the West first fell into a manic, self-congratulatory

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

state and began to celebrate the end of history along with the victory of liberal democracy, only to invent a new enemy, Saddam Hussein, overnight, and thus recreating the paranoid–schizoid position (as we now know, Saddam Hussein was soon replaced by other actors in this libidinal theater).

Naturally, these analyses are only applicable to the Polish situation in a highly indirect way, yet they illustrate the relative usefulness of Klein's categories in describing collective phenomena. Encouraged by this example, we might venture an attempt at applying these tools to our own circumstances – an undertaking that must be carried out with exceeding care. It is clear that, at the broadest level, the group known as the Polish nation can be ascribed qualities that Segal finds in all national communities: narcissism, paranoid anxiety, shirking responsibility, and the tendency to deny inconvenient facts while demonizing enemies. That is as accurate as it is trite. It would be better to loosen our categories and allow them to mutate as they are applied to this specific instance; it is only then that we will capture the peculiar nature of the Polish situation and, more specifically, Polish memory.

To begin, let us observe that Poles as a group (i.e., Poles appearing together and next to each other as Poles, rather than individuals facing each other) do not actually have a propensity for maniacal euphoria. That, in a popular joke, the victory of the national football team elicits the same cries of “It is all right, Poland, nothing happened” that are typically heard following defeats tells us something about this issue. This disinclination toward mania is also apparent in the realm of memory. As has been observed time and again, the successful Wielkopolska Uprising of 1918 is rarely remembered by Poles, this despite repeated efforts to commemorate the event. The 4th of June holiday, which invites (on a Polish scale) the sort of euphoria that Segal describes the West indulging in after the end of the Cold War, has always been rather disappointing. The main attraction of Flag Day was a chocolate eagle. And even Independence Day felt more like an awkward picnic until it was appropriated by enraged nationalists, who, in their constant fury, engage not in maniacal self-congratulation, but in the impudent expression of resentment. Exaggerating a bit for the sake of clarity, we may state that there is no such thing as Polish mania. Like every nation, the Polish nation is a narcissistic one, but this narcissism is not the narcissism of self-congratulation.

Our next step will be to conjecture that this particular defense mechanism, namely, manic defense, does not present itself in the Polish patient as the patient is not exposed to the condition that is supposed to be prevented by this method. This condition is depression. In other words, the Polish patient is not at risk of developing the depressive position, feelings of guilt, or – once the position has been successfully worked through – the ensuing level-headed sense of responsibility for his own actions. This leads us to the inevitable

conclusion that there is no such thing as the Polish depressive position. We have never been in this position, we do not know how to assume it, and it does not appear that we will ever learn it. This is because Poland's characteristic paranoid-schizoid position is a thoroughly tangled figure, one that transcends – as far as I can tell – Klein's conceptual framework. This position is in a sense uncapsizable; unlike "normal" paranoia, it cannot progress into the depressive position without first undergoing some radical transformation. Let us try to describe it.

The key characteristic of this position is its dialectical opposition to the narcissistic sense of omnipotence: something best described as a phantasy of impotence. This would be a phantasy that our actions lack any real consequences, a phantasy about the loss of all agency. Naturally, this sort of imaginative construct is just as menacing as the phantasy of omnipotence: if I believe that my actions have no real consequences, then I can do terrible things without even noticing, much less remembering them. However, the bubble of delusion in which this phantasy locks us, this dream about the lack of agency, is anything but pleasant. The subject indulges himself in this phantasy, drawing libidinal benefits from it by shirking all responsibility, while also bemoaning his victimhood and his dependence on external forces that prevent him from rising up to true independence. He thus wallows both in the phantasy of impotence and feelings of injustice. He is like a petulant child who complains about his dependence on his mother; furious at how he relishes this dependence, he makes rebellious attempts to prove that these conditions have been imposed on him against his will, yet he does so with no conviction that it will have any real effect, nor would he want it to; meanwhile, he fails to notice that his actions may leave other kids battered and bruised, and his mother may also be hurt in the process.

I believe that it is this exact mental nexus that characterizes the Polish nation as a group in its present condition. For two hundred years, with a brief intermission, this national community was truly stripped of sovereignty and agency on the international stage, and truly fell victim to myriad injustices at the hands of international forces, and for these reasons it absolutized its condition and conjured from it a coherent phantasy of impotence, thus walling itself off from the actual consequences of its own actions and its responsibility for those actions. By doing so it derived and continues to derive libidinal gain from its position of victimhood, or otherwise its position of dependence. This dependence-on-dependence itself is nevertheless inconvenient – no narcissist would ever admit to such pleasures – and so it must perform a series of simulated movements. Thus when the State Chairman delivers proud speeches and his constituents pays heed, the two sides are linked by a special bond of understanding. In the explicit message, the

speaker emphasizes the need to regain national pride, and the listener applauds these statements. In the implicit message, the one that slips below the consciousness of the listener (whether the speaker is himself conscious of it I dare not say), the communiqué is different: “Relax! Nothing is going to happen. We have been stripped of all agency. And if anything does happen, well, we will not even notice the connection between our actions and events in the real world.” Yet the pretense of impudence is itself indispensable, as it proves that we have made an effort to cast off the shackles of dependence. And if we fail – well, that is not our fault; that is just the sad fate of the Little Pole.<sup>5</sup>

This situation directly affects what we remember, how we remember it and, more significantly, what we do not remember. Firstly, we do not remember the injustices we have visited upon other ethnic groups. This reason seems rather obvious: no one likes to remember the harm they have done to others. But if I am right, the Polish disremembering of these sorts of offenses is governed by a peculiar mechanism, a product of our phantasy of impotence. We could not have harmed anyone, because we – ever beaten, ever dependent, ever stripped of autonomy – cannot do anything at all. There is another, perhaps more interesting circumstance associated with the above, namely, that we are equally unwilling to remember the catastrophes we have brought upon ourselves as the consequences of our own actions. The slaughter of civilians during the Warsaw Uprising – recalled selectively, if at all, preferably without mentioning less photogenic catastrophes such as the mass rapes at the “Zieleniak” market in Ochota – is not remembered as a consequence of the criminal mindlessness of the uprising’s commanders, but as a result of the German army’s operations and the Red Army’s cynical idleness.<sup>6</sup> Secondly, we are quick to forget our actual and not always forced complicity in historical processes and events that were in fact imposed on us by external actors; again, by the power of the phantasy of impotence, we ascribe them entirely to outside forces. Perhaps this is how we have managed to “sleepwalk” through a significant portion of Poland’s recent history: not only because others have done in our name things that correspond to our hidden desires, making us trans-passive subjects of events, but also because we were in fact complicit in

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5 The “Little Pole” appears in the opening lines of a patriotic call and response chant taught to Polish children: “Who are you? A little Pole. What is your sign? The white eagle” [translator’s note].

6 The brave insurgents retreated from Ochota in the first days of August 1944, leaving the civilian population to the mercy of the RONA brigades. A transit camp was set up at the “Zieleniak” market, and mass rapes took place at the nearby school. See Ludwik Hering, “Zieleniak,” in *Ślady* (Warszawa: Czarna Owca, 2011), 7–17; Sylwia Chutnik, *Kieszonkowy atlas kobiet* (Kraków: Ha!art, 2008), 79–136.

some of these events, yet we remember them as if they had occurred beyond our control.<sup>7</sup>

How can we relate this mental nexus to the categories developed by Melanie Klein? What is the peculiar nature of the Polish paranoid–schizoid position? Is it even a position of that kind anymore? As we recall, in the standard paranoid–schizoid position, the manichaeistically disposed subject splits the original object (the mother's breast) into an idealized good object and a slandered bad object. This division orders his reality and libidinal economy while enabling the later synthesis of the two objects, an event that exposes the subject's guilt over the unified object and prompts the depressive position. The issue seems somewhat more complex in the case of the Polish paranoid–schizophrenic position. In order to understand it, we may look to the categories developed by Walter Benjamin in his meditations on myth.<sup>8</sup>

Benjamin saw myth as an oppressive historiosophical structure whose main features included something that the author of the *Arcades Project* named demonic ambiguity. Myths are ambiguous, the argument goes, because within the mythical structure all opposites – freedom and enslavement, equality and hierarchy, purity and sinfulness – permeate each other. I believe that the Polish paranoid–schizoid position is demically ambiguous in the sense that within it the good and bad objects are not subject to a Manichaean split, but are instead ambiguously confused. This bears emphasizing: they are ambiguously confused, not unified, as would be typical of the depressive position, which normally results in our perceiving the object as somewhat good and somewhat bad. This ambiguous confusion means that while the subject perceives one and the same object, it appears to him as simultaneously good and bad. More specifically: it is good because it is bad, and it is bad because it is good.

The object is bad: it is the oppressor that persecutes us; but because it is bad, it is also good, as it enables us to maintain our state of dependence, which in turn allows us to indulge in our convenient phantasy of impotence, avoid all responsibility for our actions, and forget that we have done anything at all (specifically, that we have visited injustice upon others). The object is good: it is a supportive outside force, an empire or superpower; but because it is good, it is also bad, as we experience our convenient dependence on it at once as oppression and injustice, as a violation of our narcissistic agency.

7 See Andrzej Leder, *Prześlona rewolucja. Ćwiczenie z logiki historycznej* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2014).

8 See Walter Benjamin, "Fate and Character" and "Critique of Violence," trans. Edmund Jephcott, in *Selected Writings. Volume 1 1913–1926*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge: Belknap, 1996), 201–206 and 236–252.



It is for this reason that we are incapable of idealizing the good object – but not because of our cool and collected perception of it; as we must justify our own grievances against it, the object never feels good enough, helpful enough, or caring enough, which is why, in the end, it inevitably strikes us as indifferent, treacherous, and simply bad. In the mythical structure described by Benjamin, the enslaved subject has just enough autonomy to blame it. In the demonically ambiguous paranoid–schizoid position, meanwhile, the subject has just enough autonomy to complain about its insufficiency, though he does not wish to be more autonomous, as that would require him to give up his phantasy of impotence.

I believe that this perspective allows us to explain the minor puzzle that is the phantom memory of a nonexistent past, which, as we saw at the beginning, reared its head in the Polish response to the migrant crisis. The unconscious phantasy that is at least partially responsible for eliciting these reactions presented, in my view, the following structure. From the (unconscious) Polish point of view, the European Union is the libidinal heir of all the great objects that have treated us with injustice and/or have kept us in a state of dependence. In libidinal terms, it is synonymous not only with the so-called indifferent West, but also with the partitioning powers and invaders. We are owed restitution for all the injustices we have suffered at the hands of this homogeneous-yet-ambiguous object. By “restitution,” I of course do not mean working through the depressive position, that is, recuperating; I mean compensation for damages. European Union subsidies are a form of this restitution. And if that is the case, then we incur no responsibility by accepting them, as they are nothing more than just compensation for our past suffering. But there is more. If I am indeed correct, then we are insulted by the very fact that these subsidies are provided to us; the object is bad because it is good. In Benjamin’s world of the myth, the blamed subject makes a sacrifice with the goal of purification, only to immediately discover that the sacrificial mechanism itself perpetuates the power of mythical oppression. The Polish paranoid–schizoid position is once again revealed to be the dialectical reverse of the Benjaminian construct: here the subject demands restitution for injustice and receives it, yet he treats the compensation as an act of aggression and the violation of his autonomy, and thus demands yet another installment of compensation. Like in the joke I heard in a suburb of Warsaw: “Why should the EU pay us? Because it pays us, that is why.”

If the image sketched above corresponded directly to reality, there would be little hope for us. The demonic version of the paranoid–schizoid position cannot give way to the depressive position: there cannot be a unification of the good and bad object, as these remain in a state of ambiguous confusion, forming the truly demonic figure of the *goodbad* upon whom we are all dependent.

And since this object is good because it is bad and bad because it is good, this construct is simply uncapsizable. This would mean that we have managed to create in the figure of the Little Pole the perfect narcissist of resentment, one who luxuriates in his indignation yet cares nothing for responsibility. It is pointless to confront him with the consequences of his current and past actions, as this phantasy allows him to deny any agency on his part.

Fortunately, there are many more facets and dimensions to reality than such hyperbolic depictions would lead us to believe. It is precisely this multifacetedness and multidimensionality that provides an opportunity to break out of this demonic predicament. At least two issues are worth considering in this regard. Firstly, even if it is true that we behave differently as Poles than we do as individuals – that when we stand next to each other, not facing each other, we have a tendency to regress to the demonic paranoid–schizoid position – we still must not forget that there simply is no such thing as a collective entity, and thus each of us acts out this collective program somewhat differently. It is therefore untrue that stubborn efforts to confront us with the aspects of Polish history that we have purged from our memories with the help of our phantasies of impotence (or never noticed to begin with) are necessarily futile. Even if these efforts provoke a defensive response, individual people – one man here, another woman there – do change when confronted with the facts. Secondly, it has been brought to my attention that the model I present above may be an (exaggerated) image of the “position” typical of Warsaw or what was once Congress Poland, rather than the Poland of today. While there is certainly truth to that claim, it is likewise true that this position has been made ubiquitous by Warsaw’s colonization of Poland via the media, school curricula, and political propaganda. And yet other narratives of memory endure and may provide a means of cracking open the seemingly monolithic and demonic paranoid–schizoid position and its attendant manner of remembering based on the phantasy of impotence. Perhaps one day, having been confronted with forgotten pathways and alternative narratives, this position will deregulate and open the way to the depressive position, which we will then have to learn to work through. For now, it does not seem likely that we will have to deal with this difficult task in the near future. The Little Pole is all too comfortable indulging in his phantasy of impotence.

*Translation: Arthur Barys*

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 Paweł Wolski
 

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## Excessive Masculinity: Boxer Narratives in Holocaust Literature

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### 1. Konzentrationslager Las Vegas

"Guys fight to the death. It's not right, but it's «Dog House» rules" – these words could belong to Kurt Franz, one of the commanders of KZ Treblinka, who practiced boxing on his powerless prisoners, or to Walter Dunning, a kapo from Auschwitz, who often took part in boxing matches organized in the camp. But, these are the words of Floyd Mayweather Junior, a contemporary licensed boxer and professional boxing promoter in the state of Nevada, who, in light of his licenses and in contrast to hegemonic rulers and masters of the lager, is bound by numerous, clearly stated sporting rules, which are regulated by state laws. As well as by a particular, though – as I will attempt to show – not at all intuitive, ethic of a "manly sport."

Mayweather spoke these words in September 2014, on an *All Access* television program, which featured, among other things, scenes from his boxing club in Las Vegas, called the "Dog House" by the boxer.<sup>1</sup> The champion

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1 The official name is different – "Mayweather Boxing Club" – but the boxer himself refers to it as "The Dog House," having on his mind either the place itself or the rules which apply there.

exaggerated only slightly in his reference to death – the program shows a sparring of Sharif Rahman with Donovan Cameron, which lasts a single, although thirty-minute-long round, which ends only when the latter of the two boxers has no more strength to keep fighting on. For this reason the boxing commission of the State of Nevada decided to investigate the case. Mayweather, who is bound by sporting rules, organized a fight which contradicts them. What is worse, he paraded on the same program in the company of numerous scantily dressed girlfriends who smoked marihuana. He did everything that might be expected from a boxer, that is, most of all, he praised a heroic disregard for death and emanated sexual and ethical promiscuity – things to which the boxer himself cannot ever openly admit. Not a boxer who is bound by rules, that is.<sup>2</sup>

Rules in modern boxing are a fairly new phenomenon. Their authorship is attributed to the 9th Marquess of Queensberry, John Sholto Douglas. They were adopted by British boxers around 1866, but the first written-down rules of the sport were drawn up over a hundred years earlier, in 1743, by a London rafter and boxer, John Broughton, who thanks to his boxing fame opened his own amphitheater. This is worth mentioning, as the history of boxing is believed to have started with the drafting of rules by the Marquess, who therefore transformed former street-fights into a sport that in itself is an activity devoid of any practical aim and therefore gains – due to this lack of a teleological nature – a noble, sacred dimension. Rules introduced by Broughton were not as much motivated by the need of adding some nobility to the sport, which, by the way, from its beginnings in the eighteenth-century was commonly, and prior to any formal regulation, called an art (“art of bruising” or “sweet science”; both terms refer to art and science in their premodern understanding as “techne”), but most of all resulted from the need to create a common ground for settling disputes over monetary bets.<sup>3</sup> In Broughton’s rules the paragraph disallowing beating of a person who is down, and punches beyond the waist, was lower in the hierarchy of rules than the paragraph setting the way of distributing the proceeds from the fight (the winner was to receive two-thirds of the

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2 Mayweather was deposed on September 23rd, 2014. He did not testify under oath. For this reason many experts commenting on his case (among them, writer and sports journalist Thomas Hauser, in his official blog) doubt the sincerity of his arguments – otherwise highly interesting from a narrative standpoint. According to the boxer, there were several breaks in the over half-hour-long round that were removed in post-production of the episode, and the marihuana smoked by the women invited to his house was merely a stage prop.

3 Kasia Boddy, *Boxing. A Cultural History* (London: Reaktion, 2009), 31.

stakes).<sup>4</sup> Boxing as a sporting activity has therefore undergone probably the same process as most other areas of art – from a preindustrial and teleological form (fist-fights in the Middle ages – Polish “kułajki” – probably were, like rochwist, which was a kind of horse-racing, a way of choosing rulers and solving conflicts).<sup>5</sup> Erasmus of Rotterdam in his *Colloquies* asserts that “We must play for some stake or else the game will lag.”<sup>6</sup> In the seventeenth century “all popular games – football, boules, croquet, bowling – are based on bets. Being a primal form of a game, wagers provide a minimum of respectability”<sup>7</sup>), to a form ruled by the logic of capitalism. The metamorphoses of boxing are a reflection of the mechanism of this formation, of which the fetishizing of the body as a commodity and the specialization of categories in which it is understood are probably the clearest examples. In contemporary boxing this manifests, among other things, through the creation of weight categories (they existed previously but as an approximation, an arbitrarily determined figure; the rules set out by the Marquess of Queensberry merely required respecting the categories and not their scrupulous safeguarding, to the very last gram),<sup>8</sup> and through world championships sponsored by innumerable sanctioning organizations. In short, boxing today is a fully developed element of late capitalist culture – an expert culture that considers the necessities of economy to be a basic mode of thinking,<sup>9</sup> which accommodates cruelty and irrationality within an economic epistemological model that considers excess to be a form of more or less quantifiable data, therefore dispelling the aspect of unacceptability it might have possessed:

The vilest forms of human decision-making and behavior – torture by sadists and overt and covert foreign intervention by government leaders – are now for all of us comprehensible [...], whatever we think of them.<sup>10</sup>

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4 Ibid., 31.

5 Wojciech Lipoński, *Historia sportu na tle rozwoju kultury fizycznej* (Warszawa: PWN, 2012) 189–192.

6 Desiderius Erasmus, *Colloquies*, trans. Craig R. Thompson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 76.

7 Georges Vigarello, “Ćwiczyć, grać,” in *Historia ciała*, vol. 1: *Od renesansu do oświecenia*, ed. Georges Vigarello, trans. Tomasz Stróżyński (Gdańsk: słowo/obraz terytoria, 2011), 239.

8 Boddy, *Boxing*, 92.

9 Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke, 2003).

10 Ibid., 268.

## 2. Limits of Sport. Limits of Genocide

It therefore seems that the previously quoted opinion of Floyd Mayweather Junior – nicknamed “Money,” as he is the world’s highest-paid athlete – should not be considered aberrant in the context of boxing, which is understood in the way described above. This sentence, alongside another expressed on the same program (“It’s about pushing these fighters to the limit. And when we say push it to the limit, which will you believe – there’s no limit”), becomes a definition of postmodern sport as an emanation of a technicized approach to reality (“the viewer partaking in a [sport] spectacle is no longer immersed in a moving crowd but in an infinite sequence of references and numbers”<sup>11</sup>). At the same time it aptly points out the fundamental difficulty sport as such – and combat sports in particular – poses for culturally oriented definitions of categories such as the body, femininity, and masculinity. Sport, employing the category of boundary as its ontic cornerstone (there are numerous boundaries fundamental for sport, such as: the distinction between winner and loser, winners in respective weight or age categories, and the like; between female, male, and intersexual competitors; between able and disabled players – who often partake in separate games and competitions, often in disciplines that have no equivalent in non-disabled sport<sup>12</sup>), is built on the idea of overcoming boundaries. Peter Sloterdijk summed this up pointedly, though not necessarily having only sport in mind:

The definition of the trainer is that they want the athlete to want what they, the trainer, want for them. Needless to say, the athlete is meant to want something that is not entirely impossible, but fairly improbable: an unbroken series of victories.<sup>13</sup>

*Thymos*, which the trainer tries to arouse in his athlete,<sup>14</sup> pushes him to overcome the common preconceptions about the limits of possibility, re-producing the category of limitlessness as the only limit term. “In the process,

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11 Georges Vigarello, “Stadiony. Widowisko sportowe – od trybun do ekranów,” in *Historia ciała*, vol.3: *Różne spojrzenia. Wiek XX*, ed. Jean-Jacques Courtine, trans. Krystyna Belaid and Tomasz Stróżyński (Gdańsk: słowo/obraz terytoria, 2014), 341.

12 Honorata Jakubowska, *Gra ciałem: praktyki i dyskursy różnicowania płci w sporcie* (Warszawa: PWN, 2014).

13 Peter Sloterdijk, *You Must Change Your Life* (Cambridge: Polity, 2013), 291.

14 For Sloterdijk an athletic trainer is just one of many social models, most frequently – in all probability – exemplified within the field of sports, but not necessarily restricted to it.

the boundaries between the commonplace and the unusual are shifted – people increasingly become the creators of self-performed miracles.”<sup>15</sup> Boxing, and probably sport as a system in its entirety, is governed by the rule of excessiveness, which is tantamount to affirming boundaries by constantly transcending them.

The essence of a concentration system – as is confirmed by numerous analyses of this phenomenon – rests upon a converse propensity, a drive to obliterate the boundaries separating good and evil,<sup>16</sup> the perpetrator and the victim,<sup>17</sup> life and death.<sup>18</sup> And, finally – between a man and a woman. Milchman and Rosenberg recall in this context the notion of “individual *gleichschalten*,”<sup>19</sup> backed by the Foucauldian thesis of producing docile bodies (they write not only about the camps, but about the system of the Third Reich as a whole – this is important for my further argument), and Catherine Bernard quotes the testimony of women who named depriving them of physiological boundaries that identify womanhood – through actions such as cutting hair, clothing in striped uniforms, the loss of bodily shape and bodily functions (e.g., menstruation) – among the worst acts of cruelty, closely associated with those most viscerally experienced such as devastating labor, malnutrition, and physical abuse, that they were subjected to.<sup>20</sup> In turn, Bożena Karwowska examines this phenomenon in the context of male prison camps in an interesting way, by analyzing the narratives of Stanisław Grzesiuk, among others, in which the author describes homosexual relations of the prisoners attempting to regain the lost boundary separating masculinity from the unmasculine

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15 Sloterdijk, *You Must Change*, 190.

16 Jean Améry, *Poza winą i karą. Próby przełamania podjęte przez złamanego*, trans. Ryszard Turczyn (Kraków: Homini, 2007).

17 This diagnosis returns in numerous narratives, most notably in the chapter “The Gray Zone,” in Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, trans. Raymond Rosenthal (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988).

18 This state is explained by Giorgio Agamben – in the context of an Auschwitz football match, by the way – through the example of a camp “Muselmann,” an extremely exhausted prisoner of a concentration camp. Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Brooklyn: Zone Books, 2000).

19 Alan Milchman and Alan Rosenberg, *Eksperymenty w myśleniu o Holocauście. Auschwitz, nowoczesność i filozofia*, trans. Leszek Krowicki and Jakub Szacki (Warszawa: Scholar, 2003) 298.

20 Catherine Bernard, “Women Writing the Holocaust,” *Other Voices* 1 (2000), accessed October 5, 2014, <http://www.othervoices.org/2.1/bernard/womanwriting.php>.

(strikingly, as the researcher points out, the author – though raised in a strongly heteronormative environment – does this in a rather non-judgmental manner).<sup>21</sup>

### 3. Boundaries and Ruptures of (Male) Community

The last of the aforementioned aspects of this eradication of difference does not, nevertheless, make it easier to grasp the specificity of the cruel manipulation that was perpetuated by the camp system on the category of masculinity, among others. All in all, Grzesiuk's narrative depicts the mechanism of all hermetical homosocial communities, in which the reconstruction of boundaries between the sexes and of the social roles ascribed to them serves both as a way of regaining normalcy and of exerting violence. Masculinity in extermination camps and in the value system implied by Nazism – for these and previously mentioned reasons – is from the contemporary perspective a highly complicated category as its formation occurred in conditions both similar to previously known circumstances (e.g., planned destruction of ethnic or religious groups, such as the Armenian Genocide), and at the same time framing them as an occurrence without precedent, a rupture in the historical understanding of humanity and its metadescriptive categories, such as masculinity, femininity, and finally humanity itself.<sup>22</sup>

Irrespective of this circularity it would seem that the understanding of Shoah should be rather considered within the aporetic imaginary. The revolution carried out by thinkers such as Hannah Arendt or Zygmunt Bauman, for example, that reveals the automatism and banality of evil, comes down in the end to recognizing the Holocaust as a rupture, one which emphasized the universal and non-aberrant nature of death's excessiveness. This rupture manifested in the form of crematoriums is final proof of the fact that crematoriums are the product of capitalist logic which in itself is devoid of any ruptures. When Jean-Luc Nancy attempts to highlight the moment when an attempt

21 Bożena Karwowska, "Obozy zagłady jako doświadczenie cielesne – przypadek Stanisława Grzesiuka," *Przegląd Humanistyczny* 2 (2006): 79.

22 The irresolvable dispute between "the universalists and the particularists," when it comes to thinking about the Holocaust was summarized by Yehuda Bauer this way: "if what happened to the Jews was unique, then it took place outside of history, and it becomes a mysterious event, an upside-down miracle, so to speak, an event of religious significance in the sense that it is not man-made as that term is normally understood. On the other hand, if it is not unique at all, then where are the parallels or the precedents?" Yehuda Bauer, *The Holocaust in Historical Perspective* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1978), 31.



to perform a gesture of absolute consolidation of communal logic occurs – an attempt to cleanse it of all deviant and excessive elements, leading to a state of absolute immanence – he has the logic of Nazi Germany in mind,<sup>23</sup> which is a metonymy of the drive to absolutize aberration (in another context, and with a different intention, this was described as the permanence of the state of exception).

Ollivier Pourriol attempts to explain the mechanism of excesses in sport, by analyzing the gestures of contemporary sportsmen. He begins with the memorable incident at the 2006 FIFA World Cup Final in which Zinedine Zidane head-butted Marco Materazzi's torso, when the latter insulted him. In this way Zinedine laid to rest Materazzi's verbal provocations, and for his action he was disqualified in this important, final match. Pourriol dismisses the denouncements appearing in this context of Zidane's purported hubris (*hybris*),<sup>24</sup> instead viewing his gesture as induced by *thymos* – in the same sport-oriented and transgressive interpretation of this notion that was proposed by Sloterdijk – and being a manifestation of his *andreia*. Therefore, in other words, this gesture was an act of male courage fundamentally different from hubris, and more akin to the whim of Achilles, who through a decision – fully independent from both irrational emotion and cold calculation – to participate in the battle, could have changed the outcome of the Trojan War. A crucial aspect in this whole exchange, Pourriol clarifies, is the body-part Zidane has chosen to strike. It was not the face – which would be the most hurtful realization of the emotional need of revenge – but the chest, the heart. It was between the head and the heart where Greeks placed the source of *thymos* – controlled anger – the most noble of masculine forms of courage. This controlled gesture of a street-wise fiend becomes later in Pourriol's book (alongside five other gestures of this kind) a symbol of a sudden, reality-transcending rupture in the social order that is experienced by the sportsmen and which we, as spectators, also experience while participating in an athletic spectacle – the cultural regulation of these natural reflexes arouses universal bewilderment at these communal excesses against the everyday.

The *thymos* of an athlete inspired by his trainer (to recall Sloterdijk's previously quoted exegesis) therefore transcends all social orders, including the order separating that which is "male" from that which is "female," and at the same time delineates the boundlessness of the sportsmen's wants. The sportsman is constructed as a figure both strengthening the (cultural) order

23 Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, trans. Peter Connor et al. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004).

24 Ollivier Pourriol, *Éloge du mauvais geste* (Paris: Nil éd., 2010), 22.

and destroying its (natural, physiologically determined) limits – just like the hero Achilles, whose decision remains beyond good and evil, cowardice (re-treating) and courage (partaking). In sport transgression against the norm is simultaneously a basic principle and a source of amazement that entails a re-consideration of the scope and the definition of surpassed limits. Therefore it stands in stark contrast to the ontology of Shoah and its prefiguration, where transgression is a gesture impeding the process of metadescription rather than enabling a redefinition of categories of self-identity. The confrontation of these two orders, in effect, brings to light the way social categories are constructed in the context of a liminal experience, which persecution, genocide, and war undoubtedly are. A vast trove of textual material pertaining to sport and sportsmen experiencing this fate in the 1930s and 1940s provides a solid background for such a confrontation.

#### 4. Boxers and Death

The archive of narratives interlinking boxing with the Holocaust is surprisingly vast. In Polish literature the persona of Tadeusz Pietrzykowski stands out.<sup>25</sup> He was a boxer imprisoned in Auschwitz and Neuengamme, who became the hero of two biographies,<sup>26</sup> one short story,<sup>27</sup> which was later adapted into a 1962 film directed by Peter Solan; and a number of feature stories<sup>28</sup> (other Polish boxers from the ghettos and camps – such as Szepsł Rotholc or Antoni Czortek – did not enjoy the same level of interest). In popular literature there is a number of texts worth mentioning – besides numerous narratives of purely historical value – to name a few according to a genre classification: autobiographies (these are among the most numerous, e.g.: *Un survivant*<sup>29</sup> or

25 This most interesting of all Polish literary texts in this field (besides the short stories written by Pietrzykowski himself – published as an annex in Marta Bogacka, *Bokser z Auschwitz: Losy Tadeusza Pietrzykowskiego* (Warszawa: Demart, 2012) was already analyzed by me in greater detail in Paweł Wolski, "Boks w Auschwitz. Sport a przedstawialność Zagłady," in *Adlojada: biografia i świadectwo*, ed. Jaromir Brejdek, Dariusz Kacprzak and Beata Wolska (Szczecin: Wydawnictwo MNS, 2014).

26 Joanna Cieśla and Antoni Molenda, *Tadeusz Pietrzykowski "Teddy" (1917–1991)* (Katowice: Towarzystwo Opieki nad Oświęcimiami, Oddział Wojewódzki, 1995); and, Bogacka, *Bokser Z Auschwitz*.

27 Józef Hen, "Bokser i śmierć," in *Bokser i śmierć* (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1975).

28 Jarosław Drozd, *Bokserzy i śmierć*, accessed October 5th, 2014, [www.bokser.org/content/2009/07/02/000137/index.jsp](http://www.bokser.org/content/2009/07/02/000137/index.jsp).

29 Moshé Garbarz and Élie Garbarz, *Un survivant: Auschwitz-Birkenau-Jawischowitz-Buchenwald 1942–1945* (Paris: Plon, 1983).

*Pendu à Auschwitz*<sup>30</sup>), biographies (e.g. the biography of Hertzko Haft by Alan Scott Haft<sup>31</sup>), novels (e.g. *The Berlin Boxing Club*<sup>32</sup>), graphic novels,<sup>33</sup> film (*Triumph of the Spirit*, directed by Robert Young or *Victor Young Perez*, directed by Jacques Ouanich) and many other.

In the aforementioned narratives boxing, almost without exception, reinforces its position of a “stronghold of masculinity,” as Honorata Jakubowska calls this sport.<sup>34</sup> The persona of Hertzko Haft – a poor Jew from Bełchatów, who managed to survive Auschwitz thanks to boxing and later went on to make a boxing career in the United States – in both versions of his biography fits into the narrative of a self-made man, a man who is self-sufficient (in this kind of myth the “man” is not a man as such – a human being – but a figure with a predetermined gender), this is one of the most popular myths in all sport narratives that abound in “narrative devices, where [...] high on desolate mountain ranges only personal virtue can guarantee victory.”<sup>35</sup> In turn, a similarly prevalent theme of manly initiation appears in *The Berlin Boxing Club*, a fictional story of a young Berlin Jew, who is introduced to boxing by none other but Max Schmeling himself. The fascinating male homoeroticism of boxing matches, that features in the descriptions of Schmeling’s silhouette provided by the young narrator, can be also read between the lines of Hen’s aforementioned short story, where during the central fight the protagonist:

Rubbed his forehead against Kraft’s muscular back, his miserly chest clashed with the mighty, formidably muscular trunk of the other. This reminded him of something. Something pleasant, something he longed for. Oh, he remembered – uncle Stephen. As a child he stepped with his barren feet on his chest, just as broad and hairy, and then uncle Stephen would slowly, very slowly, raise him up into the air in his arms.<sup>36</sup>

30 Sim Kessel, *Pendu à Auschwitz* (Paris: Solar, 1970).

31 Alan Scott Haft, *Harry Haft. Auschwitz Survivor, Challenger of Rocky Marciano* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2006).

32 Robert Sharenow, *The Berlin Boxing Club* (New York: HarperTeen, 2011).

33 Reinhard Kleist, *Der Boxer. Die wahre Geschichte des Hertzko Haft: nach dem Buch Eines Tages werde ich alles erzählen von Alan Scott Haft* (Hamburg: Carlsen, 2012).

34 Jakubowska, *Gra ciałem*, 46.

35 Vigarello, “Stadiony. Widowisko sportowe,” 328.

36 Hen, “Bokser i śmierć,” 29–30.

### 5. The (Un)manliness of Weimar Sports

A certain previously unmentioned text deals with the question of masculinity entangled in a complex nexus of political, mythological, microsocial and other types of narratives of 1930s Europe in a way that allows at least a little distancing from the aforementioned conventionalisms (which in itself does not mean that it is able to escape all of them). The text that I am talking about is *Leg dich, Zigeuner*,<sup>37</sup> a double biography of German athletes – Otto “Tull” Harder and Johann “Rukeli” Trollmann. The first was a formidable German footballer, who after returning from the trenches of the First World War longed for the manly, soldierly brotherhood, and who therefore joined the NSDAP, and later the SS. The other was a talented boxer from Hanover, who due to the growing racism in the 1930s (he was a member of the Sinti community) was gradually barred from fighting, stripped of his titles and his boxing license, and finally deprived of his freedom – interned in the KL Neuengamme, and later, under a different name, surname, and number sent to the Wittenberge camp.

Both athletes probably never met, still their parallel lives are constructed by the author in such a manner that they portray a psychomachia of two mutually competing archetypes of manhood. The first of the two heroes relies on the Prussian drill instilled by his father who, in accordance with the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century opinion of the majority of German society, considers football, zealously practiced by his son, as an unmanly and Un-German sport:

German gymnastics teachers, who have monopoly for organizing physical exercise in the garrisons, consider ball-kicking to be futile, undignified, and Un-German. The English restlessly peddle football with monetary interest in mind, but the Germans have their classical gymnastics. (151)

Therefore, according to father, Otto should take up athletics instead. Shot put, long jump, running. On a practice track, where no one is looking. Old Harder would like that. But to kick a ball around, for everyone to see, for team glory [and not that of the individual – P.W.], what purpose is this supposed to serve? Study, work, earn money, bear a son, fight! These are the things worthy of a man. Sport for sport's sake is not one of them. (168)

Otto counters his father's ideal of manhood with another one that is equally mythologized – coerced by his father's beating to refrain from practicing

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37 Roger Reppinger, *Leg dich, Zigeuner: die Geschichte von Johann Trollmann und Tull Harder* (München: Piper, 2008, kindle edition). Further, I will refer to this volume by stating the page number in the text.

football, he decides that “he will fight pain like a man and like a man he will win that fight” (184). As a result, Otto becomes at the same time the witness and the subject of change, which German and world sport underwent at the time, as “football became something more than a kids’ game. Harder and his friends are the first generation to start playing as children and to keep on playing well into adulthood” (467). Onto this narrative of football and footballers’ maturing to social responsibility – that is to manliness – a war narrative is superimposed. The life of Otto Harder spans the tumultuous times between the Two World Wars; in both of them sport was for the first time in history used on such a grand scale for military purposes both as a tool of propaganda and for the practical development of fit recruits. Deutscher Fußball-Bund (the German Football Association) proclaimed in 1913 on the pages of its publication: “The Kaiser called to arms all capable men; the first and foremost of them are the members of our organization, who through many years of training prepared their bodies to be ready for action in cases of emergency.” And further: “Sport has prepared us for war, so march on the enemy, fear him not, fear nothing” (730). Otto himself already thinks of war in (highly somatic) sport categories:

This is it. [Otto] no longer exists as an individual body. He feels other bodies next to his, as if they were all one, common body. All bodies form a unity. All feel united within that single body, which they form together. He never felt such unity before. It is like the football team, only much stronger. (768)

After the war Harder will voice the frustration felt by the majority of German society: “Newspapers, the reds, Jews – they have destroyed the spirit of victory and have weakened the will. Berlin politicians have thrown in the towel, in contrast to the men fighting on the front. This one thing is certain” (828). This is frustration expressed in the categories of binary opposition between the feminine submissiveness exhibited by traitors of the homeland and the masculine perseverance of its defenders. The former consist of social groups which do not fulfill the ideal of social and national cohesion (“The Jews are responsible for all of this – certain papers would have us believe – and Harder sure believes it,” 853), and are therefore responsible for the destruction of the immanence of social roles: “Women adopt manly haircuts and short skirts. Women are lean, while men wear long, slick hair. Fashion changes, the prudery of the Kaiser-era is gone” (828).

War and sport become an antidote for this state of affairs. Another war is clearly in the making and “Tull” Harder is transferred to Waffen-SS seven days before it begins to be posted at KL Sachsenhausen. According

to the narrator, the camp is the place where he regains the lost feeling of manly, soldierly brotherhood, as the “members of the Totenkopf units consider themselves soldiers, the only thing is they fight in the camps. They are soldiers on «the home front»” (2706). The brotherhood of soldiers is strengthened by the brotherhood of sport: “Harder acts at Sachsenhausen as the coach of the SS football team, moreover, despite his 46 years, he plays for the camp’s football team” (2718). This does not change with his transfer to Neuengamme, in November 1939, where he acts as the superintendent of clothing warehouses in the rank of SS-Rottenführer (later he slowly rises in the ranks), organizing at the same time football matches, this time for the prisoners. He does this, as the narrator notes – quoting the testimony of a political prisoner, Herbert Schemmel – charging the prisoners a substantial fee for the privilege (2826).

### 6. Boxing’s Lost Femininity

Harder’s life story in Repplinger’s telling is therefore supposed to depict the era when sport gained the status of a manly, political activity – a status that was by no means obvious until that time. In the Third Reich militarization of certain sport disciplines, already under way during the Kaiser’s rule, has truly gained momentum only when the canonized manifest, *Mein Kampf*, elevated boxing and ju-jitsu above shooting drills in the educational hierarchy of National Socialist male youth. This entailed a substantial reevaluation in the ontology of sport at that time, and especially in the case of sport practiced by the boxer Rukeli, that is the second – unequivocally positive – protagonist of this book. Boxing, contrary to common perception and despite the often applied nickname “manly art,” does not possess such a straightforward gender attribution in its creation story – this is also true of many other disciplines. Georges Vigarello recalls the times when sport was not yet fully professional, that is an activity which – in contrast to its early non-systemic prefigurations<sup>38</sup> – became in certain ways distinguished from all other activities, but still remained something different from what contemporary sport became – functioning as a proto-industrial system of automatization and categorization. To illustrate this insight Vigarello paraphrases a newspaper account of the first French formally institutionalized football match:

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38 Pierre Ignace Chavatte, who plays the numerous sports known to seventeenth-century Lille “when he feels like it or when he has made a bet, without any regularity or discipline, acts in a disorganized and unpredictable way; his actions defy categorization, he does not think of them as something uniform that could make up a system.” Vigarello, “Ćwiczyć, grać,” 345.

The spectators almost intermix with the players in the first match between English and French secondary school students, held in the Bois de Boulogne on March 8th, 1890 – several dozen men in bowler hats, joined by two or three women.<sup>39</sup>

This intermingling of the sexes – it is hard to ascertain whether only among the spectators or also on the playing field – was even greater in boxing, which can seem improbable from a contemporary vantage point. Kasia Boddy mentions the eroticization of the image of fighting women in Ancient Greece (in the works of Ovid, Propertius, and others),<sup>40</sup> but these early poetic prefigurations are overshadowed by later developments, especially those from the birthplace of the systemic form of modern boxing – eighteenth-century England. An article in *The London Journal*, from August of 1723, which Boddy quotes, states that “scarce a week passes but we have a Boxing-Match at the Bear-Garden between women,” and then she reiterates newspaper announcements with boxing challenges issued by women:

#### CHALLENGE

I Elizabeth Wilkinson of Clerkenwell, having had some words with Hannah Hyfield, and requiring satisfaction, do invite her to meet me upon the stage, and box me for three guineas, each woman holding half a crown in each hand, and the first woman that drops the money to lose the battle.

#### ANSWER

I, Hannah Hyfield, of Newgate-market, hearing of the resoluteness of Elizabeth Wilkinson, will not fail, God willing, to give her more blows than words – desiring home blows, and from her no favour; she may expect a good thumping!<sup>41</sup>

It is evident that these early boxing matches between women did not yet possess the form of a rule-bound athletic contest – even though they conformed to socially accepted norms – but they nevertheless were above simple street brawls, which lack any universal and non-immediate context. Boddy refers to, for example, an anonymous print from 1766 (mezzotint on paper) entitled *Sal Dab Giving a Monsieur a Receipt in Full*, where the titular “Monsieur” stands for a Frenchman humiliated by a British boxer.<sup>42</sup> This

<sup>39</sup> Vigarello, “Stadiony. Widowisko sportowe,” 322.

<sup>40</sup> Boddy, *Boxing*, 24.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

image therefore has a political and nationalistic aspect, and the context in which Boddy places it (a gradual institutionalization of boxing occurring under the conditions of transformation of feudal society into a class-based society and the uncertain, in a way “suspended,” role of women in this process), suggests that, at first, boxing – though rooted in the obvious conditions of patriarchal society (“Most reports of women’s fighting [all are written by men] focused on the scanty dress rather than the skill of the participants”)<sup>43</sup> – was not exclusively a male domain, as was the norm in later times, up until the inclusion of female boxing among the recognized Olympic disciplines in 2012.<sup>44</sup> Summarizing things briefly, Sal Dab does not symbolize only an additional humiliation of “Monsieur” – as it is handed out by a woman – but it illustrates the relative gender egalitarianism of boxing in its pre-institutional and pre-capitalist faze.

On the other hand, the femininity of male boxers was not always and not everywhere depicted in a negative light, even in the 1930s when an important part of Roger Repplinger’s story of two German athletes is taking place. Two of the most notorious fights of Jack Dempsey were merchandized by contrasting two archetypes of masculinity. Both in his confrontation with Carpentier, who was depicted as a subtle representative of French culture,<sup>45</sup> and with Tunney, who was to be an embodiment of composed masculinity based on self-possession, Dempsey was described as an uninhibited, savage brute<sup>46</sup> (Dempsey had already played this part also in art: Bellows’s 1924 painting, *Dempsey and Firpo*, portrays Dempsey breathing with fury over knocked-out Firpo, waiting for him to get up only to knock him out again; in recent times this role was convincingly played by Mike Tyson). Nevertheless, this does not change the fact that history of boxing is rich in various versions of the myth of manliness attributed to boxers (a feminine perspective has had a substantial influence on the creation of these myths at the outset of the twentieth century, through the works of Rosamond Lehmann, Jane Bowles, Zelda Fitzgerald, and other female writers),<sup>47</sup> but it also notes such stages of its development when not only men were considered the possessors of boxing courage.

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43 Ibid.

44 Women’s boxing was included in the 1904 Olympic Games, but merely as a demonstration sport, which can be interpreted as a form of treating this sport as a curiosity event that is subjected in this way to the male gaze.

45 Vigarellò, “Ćwiczyć, grać,” 331.

46 Elliott J. Gorn, “The Manassa Mauler and the Fighting Marine: An Interpretation of the Dempsey-Tunney Fights,” *Journal of American Studies* 19 (1985): 27–47.

47 Boddy, *Boxing*, 220.



## 7. Masculinity as a Boxing Spectacle

To a certain extent the Third Reich imaginary inherits these cultural narratives. This is evident, for example, when different types of manliness are attributed to both fighters in Max Schmeling's first fight with Joe Louis: the first is an exemplar of Nordic self-constraint,<sup>48</sup> while the second epitomizes the animalistic "instincts of a black panther."<sup>49</sup> The Nazi vision of boxing's role in the construction of social (as well as sexual) identities are based on another binary opposition that has been codified in 1936 by, among others, Ludwig Haymann – a boxer and the first editor of the NSDAP sports publication *Völkischer Beobachter*. This lawgiver of Nazi ontology of sport in his book *Deutscher Faustkampf nicht pricefight* considers the titular, truly German, fistfight to be the opposite – this is also expressed in the title – of commercialized Anglo-Saxon fighting. Boxing is supposed to prepare individuals for communal life and not to award – in the way of vying for awards ("prizefight"; misspelled in Haymann's work) – individuality (this distrust towards modernity, or rather its one-dimensional treatment by Nazism, as well as the assumption of communal immanence, was expressed by Harder's father in a previously quoted passage). At that, Haymann often turns to the notion of male courage, contrasting the Anglo-Saxon model of distance fighting – that is cowardly fighting – with the German way of direct, and therefore manly, exchange of punches. This principle compelling German fighters is expressed by the author of the story of Tull and Rukeli this way:

[German boxing style] comes down to fighting in lockstep, one body next to the other, a slaughter until the moment when one of the fighters falls, true butchering, without tricks, without bluffs – this is what "German boxing" is like. (2070)

Masculinity in this definition – unambiguous, on the face of it – is nevertheless an amalgam of almost all of its aforementioned models, and especially the combination of unrestrained brutality with the inhibition of the self-preservation instinct (and, what is noteworthy, this resounds with Mayweather's almost identical opinion mentioned previously). Only one model is excluded from their number: agility and cunning – those elements are considered excessive in light of the ideal of a bare fistfight.

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48 Lewis A. Erenberg, *The Greatest Fight of Our Generation: Louis vs. Schmeling* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 73.

49 Ibid., 86.

Johann Trollmann, the second protagonist of Repplinger's semi-biographical narrative, begins his boxing career before the ideological and aesthetic kitsch of the Third Reich managed to contaminate the forms of boxing by internalizing such social and gender roles. Nevertheless, boxing has already become a sensitive point of cultural – and gendered – identifications:

In the Weimar Republic one can encounter women with short hair, black, almost naked dancers, a more or less explicit homosexuality, abstract painting, jazz, cocaine, and divorcees. Suddenly people are allowed a lot, here. Part of the German bourgeoisie, which until recently looked up to the upper classes for cultural and social guidance, feels betrayed by its rapid modernization. They wish to return to the nineteenth century, or even to earlier times. They feel threatened, they fear “cultural bolshevism” and “bolshevism” in general. Boxing matches are a way of releasing the pressures building up in this feverish society, which needs to emotionally unburden itself from time to time. On the other hand, sport quite often intensifies emotions instead of calming them. (1086)

Emotions raised by Johann “Rukeli”<sup>50</sup> Trollmann – a figure in the public spotlight at least from 1928 – when at an unusually young age for those times he advanced from amateur to professional boxing,<sup>51</sup> become ever more vague in the circumstances. As a Sinti he is associated with rather unmanly – that is conniving and treacherous – peripheries of society (in line with the logic, which equates fluidity, changeability, deceptiveness with femininity – these preconceptions in relation to the Jewish community were analyzed by Eugenia Prokop-Janiec).<sup>52</sup> As a boxer he does not fit into the model of masculinity proposed by Haymann and other lawmakers of German sport: instead of engaging in a “masculine,” open fight:

Trollmann does not allow the other fighter to close the distance. He almost never confronts his enemy directly. Not of his own choosing anyway, only if the opponent forces him. This is unmanly, but the women

50 This nickname comes from the word “Ruk,” denoting a tree in the Sinte language. Its genesis is not clear – it might be associated with Johann Trollmann's extraordinary strength or with his equally uncommon looks. Cf. Yanko Weiss-Reinhardt, “*Rukelie*.” *Wer war Johann Wilhelm Trollmann?* (San José: Litho Offset, 2004).

51 Weiss-Reinhardt, “*Rukelie*,” 6.

52 Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, “Ganz Andere? Żyd jako czarownica i czarownica jako Żyd w polskich i obcych źródłach etnograficznych, czyli jak czytać protokoły przesłuchań,” *Res Publica Nowa* 8 (2001).

who frequent his fights in ever greater numbers really like this. What Trollmann does, reminds them of dancing. (1210)

The German press, and *Box-Sport* in particular, gradually yielding to the pressures of National Socialist politics, uses the disrespectful term “Zigeunertanz” (“Gypsy dance”) to characterize Trollmann’s fighting style. This designation emphasizes the interrelation between the “unmanliness” of his fighting with the presupposed and disparaged femininity – “fluidity,” changeability – of minority populations. Trollmann’s “dance” is in fact a part of a broader rhetoric, used to deprive his fights of their manly status, in the Nazi sense of the word. His fights are described as spectacles. Repplinger quotes relevant passages from *Box-Sport*, which analyze Rukeli’s style (e.g. “This was a typical spectacle in Trollmann’s style, where the gong after the tenth round sounds like the gong of a theater performance,” 2416), summarizing them this way:

Trollmann is handsome. He is the “Latin-lover” type, epitomized at the time by Hollywood actor Rudolph Valentino. This draws women to the ring. Some worship him. He sends kisses to the audience during the fight. [...] Watching Trollmann is a real joy (1711).<sup>53</sup>

In the essay *Masculinity as Spectacle* Steve Neale demands a revalorization of masculine perspective in cinema, the interpretation of which is dominated by feminist exegesis.<sup>54</sup> In Repplinger’s narrative the theatrical gestures of Trollmann, and the evident feminine context ascribed to them serve – paradoxically – as a way of constructing masculinity as lavishness (more about this in a moment), which is accomplished through a specific form of visual excessiveness. The sad pinnacle of Trollmann’s professional boxing career comes when, dispirited by racist discrimination (also in the form of unfair scoring),

53 What is interesting is that Rudolph Valentino became a hero of a story involving, as was in Trollmann’s case, both the subject of masculinity and boxing. Valentino, the symbol of masculinity in its ambivalent incarnation (the film parts of a dancer and sheikh – figures considered feminine by Western culture – reinforced the rumors of his homosexuality), turned to boxing as a symbol of unquestionable manliness, when he decided to challenge to a boxing match a *Chicago Tribune* journalist who called him a “pink powder puff,” after the actor appeared in a powder commercial. Later that year the Everlast company, present on the market until this day, published an advertisement proclaiming: “Many a «Powder Puff» boxer developed a «kick like a mule’s» that changed him to a «knockout artist» through the use of the Everlast Training Bag,” Boddy, *Boxing*, 223.

54 Steve Neale, “Masculinity as Spectacle: Reflections on Men and Mainstream Cinema,” in *Screening The Male. Exploring Masculinity in Hollywood Cinema*, ed. Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hark (London: Routledge, 1993).

he stands to fight Gustav Eder, in July 1933 in Berlin, with his face powdered in white, and, what is more, he completely changes his fighting style: instead of sways and fast footwork (“Gypsy dance”) he decides on a direct, devastating exchange of punches (and in effect loses the fight; 2320). In short: he performs the kind of masculinity which was designed by the German system.

### 8. Masculinity as Impasse, Masculinity as Excess

In the analyzed book, the ethos of masculine sportsmanship in the Third Reich manifests itself most clearly – and in a somewhat banal way – in its final parts, where the reader is introduced to Rukeli’s camp story and Harder’s post-war experiences. The latter is plainly a negative presence within the narrative, even though the narrator meticulously documents the prisoners’ testimonies that attest to his relatively proper behavior in the camps (e.g. “When it comes to the Commandant [Harder – P.W.] himself, there was a consensus in the camp that – according to Szyj Lajzerowicz – «he was a very decent man. It seemed as if he did not mind the prisoners at all [...]»). Lajzerowicz also says that Harder never hit anyone, Fajlowicz has also «never seen him beating or mistreating anyone»,” 3010). This negativity is constructed through manipulating the themes concerning sports, among other things. Harder’s profit-seeking is very prominently featured (e.g. in the previously quoted fragment in which he charges the prisoners on the side for participating in a football match, 2826) alongside his supposedly stellar belief in the Third Reich’s sports system, which sought to remake sport as a purely amateur domain, and therefore a human activity devoid of any monetary compensation (2145). Nevertheless, in the context of deliberations on the subject of masculinity there are other more important circumstances that underpin the negativity of this persona. His sport *andreaia*, in contrast to Trollmann’s case, is constructed upon the principle of deficiency, and therefore is closer to the previously described destructive Nazi ontology. Harder follows the ethos of male–soldier–sportsman to the extent in which (in Repplinger’s narrative) he is lacking something. Finally, reassessing his service in the SS (in the background of this narrative revision the actual post-war process of war criminals, based on court proceedings, is taking place), the narrator concludes that despite lack of direct acts of violence towards the prisoners Harder is nevertheless guilty of the sin of soldierly unmanliness, because of the unevenness in the game he plays (sic!):

In the camp the SS soldiers had no enemies, there were only victims, who could be killed with a single powerful punch. There is no glory in the fight against such an opponent, because there is no risk. [...] *Untermenschen* have no dignity, they do not command respect. Therefore he who treats

them disrespectfully cannot lose glory, which he therefore does not possess. (4365)

The narrator in this summary of the heroes (un)manliness does not, contrary to expectations, refer to the arguments known from Eichmann's trial about the lack of direct involvement in the acts of murdering people; but instead decides to determine his culpability on the basis of the ethos of manliness that is constructed by sport (therefore adopting, as if unwittingly, a Nazi perspective). In other words, the narrator utilizes the logic presented in the classical essay on the semiotics of the notion of fear and shame by Yuri Lotman, who, in turn, considers both of the concepts to be complimentary systems.<sup>55</sup> Sport is based on the transgression against the commands of the fear system with a concurrent respect for the system of shame. The logic of the narrator of the book in question finds fault with Harder as he reverses these transgressions: he behaves "shamelessly," even though he is bound by the topos of sport manliness (which he at the same time adopts as his line of defense: "Harder from the playing field is the genuine Harder. That is how he was. That is how he was also in the camp," 4771) which should incline him to the opposite transgression, that is "fearlessness." This state of affairs was in fact previously noted within the narrative in a curiously corporeal and already quoted description of the comfort Harder experienced in the manly-sports company ("[Otto] no longer exists as an individual body. He feels other bodies next to his, as if they were all one, common body. All bodies form a unity. All feel united within that single body, which they form together. He never felt such unity before. It is like the football team, only much stronger"). Harder's masculinity is realized through an internalization within a homosocial community, and therefore through the loss of the perception of difference, which results in the inability of identification.

In contrast to Harder the manliness of Rukeli, symbolized by sport, exhibits in a manner which I attempted to extract previously from the fascinating analyses of Ollivier Pourriol. Rukeli's *andreaia* is pure lavishness, a hiatus transcending other social distinctions. This lavishness is not only exhibited as spectacle (most clearly at the time he "played the Aryan" when fighting Eger with a powdered face), but even becomes impossible to conceal. Western culture is familiar with the topos of the recognition of the hero (e.g. Odysseus returning to Ithaca), also

55 Jurij Lotman, "O semiotyce pojęć «wstyd» i «strach» w mechanizmie kultury," trans. Jerzy Faryno, in *Semiotyka kultury*, ed. Maria Renata Mayenowa and Elżbieta Janus (Warszawa: PIW, 1975), 204. The researcher relies on the example of eighteenth-century aristocratic culture in his analysis of the notions of fear and shame, whereas I transplant these notions into the context of 20th-century ethics of sport, which they elucidate with no less aptitude.

in the context of manliness (Achilles' *andrea* is so powerful that, despite being disguised as a woman, he is instantly recognized by Odysseus and Diomedes), but the reading of Holocaust boxing narratives leads to the conviction that this topos gains a distinctive status in this genre, which is striving for autonomy.<sup>56</sup> In fact all boxer protagonists of these narratives attempt to conceal the (supposedly manly) stigmas indicating their boxing past, as they know that revealing them will lead to involuntary participation in fights, which alongside better treatment pose the risk of unending challenges – also beyond the ring – as well as death, if for some reason they fail to satisfy the organizers. For example, the plot of the previously mentioned story by Hen begins with the identification of the hero (Janusz Kominek) by the Commandant (Walter Kraft) of an unnamed camp, as the boxer's flattened nose is a telltale sign of his profession. In Replinger's narrative Rukeli at first "does not know if the SS soldiers recognized him. Of course, he thinks, it would be much better if they didn't" (3663), in the end "Luetkemeyer [Commandant of KL Neuengamme – P.W.] stared at him for a long time. Not the way he normally looked at prisoners. He recognized a boxer in him. Trollmann knew this at once" (3980). This moment of boxing lavishness, excessiveness of corporeality, that is impossible to conceal, is also the moment when a gradual dissolution of his life story begins, ending with the death at the hands of a kapo. The climax of this story occurs at the moment of the eruption of lavishness, accumulated in sport in which various ideals of masculinity intersect. Both of these strongly mythologized narratives – of sport and of masculinity – draw from the "imaginary of extremeness, overcoming successive boundaries; this is that «struggle for more»."<sup>57</sup>

## 9. Conclusions

In 1933, to celebrate the upcoming Olympic Games in Berlin (that were, by the way, the first event since Baron de Coubertin revived the Olympic ideal, to have the torch lit from a flame burning in Greece, the cradle of civilization – a cultural connection which the Third Reich wanted to emphasize) Polish Ministerstwo Wyznań Religijnych i Oświecenia Publicznego [The Ministry of Religious Affairs and Public Enlightenment] held a contest as a result of which Stanisław Zaleski's<sup>58</sup> sport short stories were published in a collection entitled *Największe*

56 I explore this problem in greater detail in Paweł Wolski, "Zagadywanie katastrofy. O literaturoznawstwie Holocaustu," *Poznańskie Studia Polonistyczne* 24 (2015).

57 Vigarello, "Stadiony. Widowisko sportowe," 325.

58 Stanisław Wincenty Zaleski, *Największe zwycięstwo: opowiadania sportowe* (Warszawa: Główna Księgarnia Wojskowa, 1933).

*zwycięstwo* [The Greatest Victory]. The titular greatest victory is achieved by a boxer – and over a woman, at that. Moreover, he achieves it together with his manager, and in league with his athletic adversary, who, just like him, is manipulated by a common lover. The hero, Jerzy Trzon, introduced in the first paragraphs as a symbol of enduring and solid masculinity, is an emigrant who falls in love with Anna, who, in turn, turns out to be a malicious, greedy, and unfaithful woman, taking advantage of his sport and financial successes and falling into the arms of his rival the moment his fortune turns. Nevertheless, the masculine fraternity is unwavering in this narrative; it is enough to say that beyond this short story a figure of an honest and caring manager (not a coach or sparring partner) is practically unheard of in boxing literature. Therefore, if the main protagonist and his manager (customarily depicted as a purely profit-seeking individual), and even the protagonist's rival all support each other, this means we are dealing with a perfect community. This kind of community is a Greek ideal, to which the “new” Germany aspired during the 1930s and 1940s. It is homogenous (also in the sexual sense), transparent, and consists only of Penelopes, never Xanthippes. Today this narrative elicits only amusement, but it might deserve a closer reading, without undue conceit. For what reason is this straightforward story – free of any irritating irregularities except for womanhood, which is, by the way, removed (in an absolute sense) in the final paragraphs of this happy-end narrative – not recognized in contemporary sport narratives? The answer is simple, contemporary stories feed on the principle of lavishness, on physical overabundance. Harmony, which was supposed to be the objective of sport *kalokagathia* was subverted precisely by this pursuit of homogeneity, by an attempt to internalize human categories, predominantly those related to the body, by Nazi axiology. This absolutization tipped the scales and from then on masculinity, femininity, and other contingent categorizations became examples of excessiveness in contemporary sport narratives. And precisely for this reason, paradoxically, the powdered face of a “dancing Gypsy,” Johann “Rukeli” Trollmann – immortalized in the Berlin Kreuzberg in the form of a small memorial – can be a symbol of masculinity until this day. In turn, Mayweather's machismo, described in the initial part of this text, can only be apprehended in the terms of a profit-oriented performance of contingent roles, among which masculinity seems to be the least credible.<sup>59</sup>

*Translation: Rafał Pawluk*

59 A separate, interesting direction of enquiry would involve exposing the orientalism of the hip-hop, “gangsta” pose and its attributes, such as lavishness and the retaining of a harem, in the context of the feminization of Oriental men performed by Western civilization (of course taking into consideration that this phenomenon was conceived within the framework of that civilization).

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