

# Convention and Revolution

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Anna Iwaszkiewiczowa: Fear of Writing as a Fear of ...?

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phone +48 22 657 28 07, phone/fax +48 22 828 32 06  
e-mail: [redakcja@tekstydrugie.pl](mailto:redakcja@tekstydrugie.pl)  
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# Convention and Revolution

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## FOREWORD

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- 5 **ANNA NASIŁOWSKA** Documents and Women

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## MANIFESTO

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- 10 **MONIKA RUDAŚ-GRODZKA** In the Archives of Women's Writing

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## ESSAYS

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- 17 **JULIA LEWANDOWSKA** "Am I That Body?": Mystical Bodies and Polyphonic Bodies in the Early Modern Nuns' Spiritual Autobiographies
- 36 **MAGDALENA OŹARSKA** Frances Burney Gazes at Animals. Or Is It Women? Evidence from Her Life Writing
- 51 **NATALIIA VOLOSHKOVA** Aspiring to Freedom: Mary Hamilton's Life Writing
- 61 **ANNE Y. BRINTON** "One of the Large-Throated Frogs": Martha Foster and the Politics of Resistance and Accommodation in the Antebellum South
- 79 **ZSUZSA TÖRÖK** Manuscript Culture and Nineteenth-Century Women's Life Writing: The Diaries of Baroness Jozefa Wesselényi
- 90 **EMILIA KOLINKO** Cas-cou: a Strong Woman! The Divided "I" in Anna Moszyńska's *The Letters and Diaries* (1850)
- 109 **PHILIPPE LEJEUNE** The Personal Journal of Émilie Serpin (1863–1881)
- 124 **SVETLANA TOMIĆ** Rediscovering Serbian Women's Memoirs: Gendered Comparison in a Historical Context

140	<b>MONIKA RUDAŚ-GRODZKA</b>	Bronisława Waligórska Dreaming
164	<b>CYNTHIA HUFF</b>	Mind the Gaps: Victorian Women Writing Subversion Into the Archive
180	<b>NATALIJA JAKUBOVA</b>	Constructions of Parenthood in the Autobiographical Writings of Irena Solska (1875–1958)
191	<b>ANNA FRĄCZEK-CZAPLA</b>	Letters of Galician Rural Women to the Editors of the <i>Piast</i> During the First World War
201	<b>KAROLINA KRASUSKA</b>	Mina Loy and the Function of the Autobiographical: Revisiting the Long Poem “Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose”
216	<b>KATARZYNA NADANA-SOKOŁOWSKA</b>	Anna Iwaszkiewiczowa: Fear of Writing as Fear of...?
235	<b>GRACE PUNDYK</b>	Reading the Invisible: Letters Between the Living and the Dead
257	<b>ANNA DŻABAGINA</b>	The Mourning Diaries. Hanna Nałkowska’s Journal (1942–1945)
271	<b>MARIA PRUSSAK</b>	Anna Minkowska – A Duty to Remember
280	<b>ANDREA PETŐ</b>	Revisiting the Life Story of Júlia Rajk
292	<b>ANNA PAWLIK</b>	“The State Helps You, So You Help the State.” Illness and Recovery in a Memoir Written by Zofia J. for a State Sanctioned Creative Writing Competition
305	<b>KATARZYNA STAŃCZAK-WIŚLICZ</b>	The Autobiographical Self in the Service of History: Martial Law Period Diaries Written by Women, 1981–1983
322	<b>SIDONIE SMITH AND JULIA WATSON</b>	The Archives of Those Who Write Themselves: What and Where Are They?





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# Foreword

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Anna Nasiłowska

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## Documents and Women

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There is no equivalent term to “life writing” in Polish – a direct translation exists, but it refers specifically to the works of the bard and *poète maudit* Edward Stachura. Perhaps the closest phrase in terms of content is the somewhat long-winded “personal document literature,” used by Roman Zimand in a book interpreting the diary of Adam Czerniaków, the head of the *Judenrat* in the Warsaw Ghetto. In collaborating with the occupying powers, up to a certain point Czerniaków hoped that by doing his job he could limit the number of victims or delay the murderous plan, but the beginning of the *Grossaktion* liquidating the ghetto led him to commit suicide. His journal has evident value as a document, but its personal nature and the entire dramatic context in which it was written make it an existential testimony and psychological profile – something particularly important for documents of the Holocaust. One of the objectives of Zimand’s essay about Czerniaków was to create an interpretive framework for writings that often do not fit into “literature” defined in terms of belonging to strictly literary genres such as the novel, drama, or lyric poem. The merits of a broader perspective and abandoning narrow generic constraints are obvious for testimonies and diaries written under the pressure of dramatic circumstances.

When discussing works by women, the normative perspective also would exclude what for many reasons seems most

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### Anna Nasiłowska

– Professor at the Polish Academy of Sciences, Institute of Literary Research, also a poet and writer, since 2017 President of The Association of Polish Writers. She is a member of the research team Women Archive (Archiwum Kobiet) and the deputy editor of *Teksty Drugie*. Her recent publications include, among other books, a biography of Maria Pawlikowska-Jasnorzevska (2010), selected works by Stefania Zahorska (2010), a book of historical reportage titled *Wolny agent Umeda i druga Japonia* (Free agent Umeda and another Japan) (2013), *Dyskont słów* (Word discount store) (2016). Co-editor of *Encyklopedia gender* (Gender encyclopedia) (2014). In 2019 she published the one volume history of Polish literature *Historia literatury polskiej*.

interesting. The dividing line between the field of "literature" and the domain of personal documents has always been fluid and movable; for example, the diaries of Zofia Nałkowska and Maria Dąbrowska are part of the canon of twentieth-century Polish literature now, but this only happened after years, and also required enormous work from the editors, Hanna Kirchner and Tadeusz Drewnowski, spanning multiple stages. What else remains to be discovered? The Women's Archive, an interdisciplinary team based at the Institute of Literary Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences, is working on personal documents written by women, mostly in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Previously, the same team developed the *Gender Encyclopedia*,<sup>1</sup> a pioneering achievement in Poland, followed by a compendium of women in Polish literature.<sup>2</sup> The main reason for the turn towards archival work that took place after intensive study of gender theories and feminism was the realization of how much there was to do in this area. We examine diaries, letters, autobiographies, memoirs, various fragmentary notes or family archive collections created by women.

In November 2017, the Women's Archive team organized the international conference *Convention and Revolution* in Warsaw, to confront our theoretical output and findings with a broader, regional, and global perspective. The articles from this conference form the majority of this issue, which also features texts submitted later. We were able to invite reputed scholars; here we must emphasize that the work of Philippe Lejeune – both theoretical and the effects of his research on French women's diaries – was an inspiration for the Polish Women's Archive. In the end, Lejeune was unable to come to Warsaw, but he sent an essay about Émilie Serpin that was presented at the conference, published in Polish translation in issue 6/2018 of *Teksty Drugie*, and in English in this collection. Similarly inspiring for our research was American research on life writing, including Julia Watson and Sidonie Smith's influential reflections on the status of truth in texts treated as historical sources and on manifestations of emotion in such accounts. After reading Jacques Derrida and Hayden White, it is hard to read naively, but whereas these authors mostly sow doubt over whether many practices are right, the American female scholars suggest methods of interpretation.

At first glance, the title *Convention and Revolution* seems to emphasize opposition. After all, every revolution is based on rebellion against social conventions or

1 *Encyklopedia gender. Płeć w kulturze*, eds. Monika Rudaś-Grodzka, Katarzyna Nadana-Sokołowska, Agnieszka Mrozik, Kazimiera Szczuka, Katarzyna Czeczot, Barbara Smoleń, Anna Nasiłowska, Ewa Serafin, Agnieszka Wróbel (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Czarna Owca, 2014).

2 *...czterdzieści i cztery. Figury literackie. Nowy Kanon*, eds. Monika Rudaś-Grodzka, Barbara Smoleń, Katarzyna Nadana-Sokołowska, Agnieszka Mrozik, Katarzyna Czeczot, Anna Nasiłowska, Ewa Serafin-Prusator, Agnieszka Wróbel (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IBL PAN, 2016).

economic rules, and in literature, dramatic breakthroughs entail rejection of old conventions (and replacing them with new ones). On first reading, though, notes by women often appear if not conservative, then lacking rebellion, conciliatory, and far from any radicalism.

Monika Rudaś-Grodzka, the founder and head of the Women's Archive team, writes the following of her experiences as a researcher:

Long hours in the archives. Raise your hand if you have never yawned over letters or journals written by women of the centuries past. (No hands go up.) The thoughts creep in: this is so boring, so conventional, so predictable – and there's another pile of pages to read... Fighting sleep, we still entertain hopes of revolutionary finds, fantastic rebel women, unknown facts about those who gained fame, controversies hidden among the yellowing pages. Yet in adopting this attitude, we are missing out on a far greater point. The very gesture of writing, when made by a woman, constitutes rebellion, and the conventionality of the text should not obscure this fact. Anachronism is the greatest power of any revolution. Many women, locked (quite literally) in their homes, using a narrative that mirrored what they had learnt, dreamt of freedom for themselves and others, whether they were aware of it or not. When they sat down to write, they created a moment just for themselves, and in doing so, they carved out a space of their own freedom – small at first, but gradually expanding – where they created themselves. They wrote themselves. With time, they became the subject of writing by other women, their biographers. Discovering, documenting, and researching this chain of women's lives suddenly no longer seems boring.<sup>3</sup>

Rudaś-Grodzka is noting the fact that the very act of women speaking out, creating a female subject and telling their own story is crucial. And it would certainly be crucial to add to the collective memory many women's voices that are forgotten, and whose texts are left behind in archives, unable to contribute to ideas about the past, driven out by the power of the stereotype that it is only men who create history. Non-naïve reading must therefore take literary, rhetorical, and cultural conventions into account. Only by deciphering them can we often extract the author's gesture of hidden rebellion. The interpreters of writings of a religious nature take on the particularly complicated task of reconstructing their cultural background – this is the case with Julia Lewandowska's article about female Spanish mystics and Philippe Lejeune's analysis of the diary of the aforementioned nineteenth-century French teacher. In the women authors, there is a reinterpretation of the fundamental mo-

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3 "Convention and Revolution. Life Writing by Women in the 1800s and 1900s: Archives, Critiques and Methods," available at <https://biuletynpolonistyczny.pl/pl/events/international-conference-convention-and-revolution-life-writing-by-women-in-the-1800s-and-1900s-archives-critiques-and-methods,777/details>; accessed on 15.02.2020.

tives and deviation from the fundamental line, which for a moment allows us to see the writer's gesture of rebellion. The creation of conventional versions of the fate of women by religious institutions seems undeniable, just like – after the criticism of communism in the course of the transformations in Central Europe – the existence of stereotypes in revolutionary thought, starting from its nineteenth-century version. In the detailed analyses, political conventions and revolutions prove not to be opposites, but a pair in which revolution harnesses stereotypes for its own objectives, overwhelming an individual's ability to understand her own fate and make decisions about herself, regardless of the current political role – for or against. Writing as documenting one's own fate entails both a feeling of inexpressibility and difficulties with articulation, but also follows beaten paths, trodden by those who spoke out earlier, as they promise understanding, even if intimate documents are not about the readers, and what is at stake is understanding oneself as part of humanity.

Monika Rudaś-Grodzka outlined the main questions of this collection this way:

How is the female autobiographical subject constructed by the authors themselves as well as the researchers and the readers? What does the autobiographical "I" consist of? What tension is formed between the recognized political or social history and the individual fates of the women living in a given historical moment? Does the attempt to create oneself as a historical entity always require that intimate experiences be reduced to a minimum? What role do archives of female authors play in all this – what are they silent about, and what do they draw out? What significance does the autobiographers' gender have, and does it always? Finally: how do (generic, biographical) conventions arise? And where do the gaps emerge that allow the mold to be broken?

I also think that the diversity of these articles shows how much the experiences of women in various countries and periods have in common. From Spanish nuns to Serbian intellectuals, from Victorian ladies to Polish peasant women, from Polish revolutionaries to Hungarian aristocrats – such is the broad scope of this collection of essays.

*Translation: Benjamin Koschalka*

## Abstract

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**Anna Nasiłowska**

THE INSTITUTE OF LITERARY RESEARCH OF THE POLISH ACADEMY OF SCIENCES (WARSAW)

*Documents and Women*

In Polish research tradition, the term “personal document literature” is used, emphasizing both the documentary nature of various types of notes and their literary character. This dual perspective is especially significant in the case of autobiographical texts by women, which do not always belong to traditional literary genres, but may begin to be treated as fully fledged works. Women’s writing has many hurdles to overcome and the burden of social norms means that it often seems conservative; on the other hand, the authorship is a confirmation of the individual point of view. Conventionality and being revolutionary have a complicated relationship in women’s literature, and this subject appears throughout the collection of essays.

## Keywords

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convention, revolution, life writing, women writing, personal document, autobiography

# Manifesto

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Monika Rudaś-Grodzka

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## In the Archives of Women's Writing

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**A**rchival queries, although being the initial stage of research processes, should have exceptional status. The moment at which an original manuscript is picked up by a human hand should be seen as a turning point. The first bit of contact with a document – regardless of whether it be a court document, a diary signed by the author in a printed catalogue, or a letter found loose in some file by sheer accident – seems to be of greatest importance and to possess an existential character, being the experience of the presence of the departed. Even though it is found on the verge of the sacred sphere, it does not belong to any specific religion. Thanks to Adam Mickiewicz – who in Part II of his *Forefathers' Eve* described the act of contacting the ghosts of ancestors – coming into contact with the past became a feature of the paradigm of modern Polish culture.

In a place far from sublimity, the sacred, or even the attractive, we lean over weathered faded pages to celebrate our own version of forefathers' eve. Our contact with women who once wrote and have now fallen silent is a process of completing their lives – their voices were not heard to the very end, their lives either too short or too tragic in order for us to consider them fulfilled. The ghosts of these women, lost within the pages of memoirs,

**Monika Rudaś-Grodzka** – Associate Professor at the Institute of Literary Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences. She is interested in history of ideas, nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature. She leads the work of interdisciplinary research group Women's Archive and she is Head of Postgraduate Gender Studies at the Institute of Literary Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences. She has published, e.g., *Sfinks słowiański i mumia polska* (2013), *"Sprawić, aby idee śpiewały."* *Motywy platońskie w życiu i dziełach Adama Mickiewicza w okresie wileńsko-kowieńskim* (2003), the exhibition catalog *"Polka. Medium. Cień. Wyobrażenie"* (2005), and many articles in literary history and literary criticism.

dreams, and thoughts or recorded in words which once upon a time were a part of their existence, await for us to breathe life back into them. The traces they left behind are reminiscent of a scrap heap of things abandoned. And yet photographs, dried out leaves – ribbons, and strands of cut off hair, are all signs which represent their refusal to agree to things and beings passing away irrevocably. Physical objects, those which once belonged to female authors, along with their thoughts and ideas recorded in letters, mark out the realm of limbo wherein we can approach them and hear their voices. In our celebrations of forefathers' eve we are motivated not just by curiosity, but also a sense of obligation, passed down to us as those who follow.

Jules Michelet, a friend of Mickiewicz, was of the opinion that the past is fully alive in archives, and that "ink can speak."<sup>1</sup> In 1869, in a new introduction to his *History of France*, he confessed that during walks along the empty archive corridors he experienced a state of shock: he was visited by suffering souls which awaited liberation. He understood that his mission was to save from obscurity previously unknown shadows of the past. In those dark archive corridors the French historian became witness to the drama of the dead, whose greatest tragedy is not dying in itself, but the awareness that in a sense they did not get to live fully in the first place. This discovery affected his further fate as a writer and researcher.

We can find similar perceptions in Polish literature, for example in Maria Kuncewiczowa's *The Foreign Woman*. Róża, the heroine, asks her son despairingly how she is to die if she has not as yet truly lived... in 1841 Michelet references Caesar's famous dream in which he encountered the army of the dead, who then confessed that now they were sad and sorry that their lives had been suddenly interrupted, and it was only once they were dead that they understood they had never truly lived in the first place, and now were rueful about not having gotten to know themselves, which would have allowed them to accept their fates and return to their slumber. Michelet believed he was able to offer the dead – whom he treated as if they manifested as ghosts – a real form of life, and not just resurrection. According to Arthur Mitzman, Michelet saw the historian's task as calming the spirits of the dead, exorcising more painful fears from their lives and discovering some meaning within it.<sup>2</sup>

According to Michelet's way of thinking, echoed by Walter Benjamin, each existence is unhappy and incomplete, each waiting for its fulfilment in the future. Until this takes place, ghosts are condemned to wander the earth

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1 Carolyn Steedman, *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 70.

2 Ibid., 71.



alongside the living. Women writers do not merely belong to their own times, and for this reason they could not be understood in their own day and age, but instead they had to wait a long time in order to be read fully, to be remembered and saved – not only in the face of lack of fame or actual marginalization, but above all in terms of traditional forms of presentation, which belong to dominant historical narratives.

The way memory functions is reminiscent of exhumation, and the process of the past being rediscovered and transported into the present allows the establishing of a community of the living and the dead. And this is why in the pre-introductory work done by historians we are dealing not just with historical truths (with what really transpired) but, in line with Benjamin's way of thinking, also with the challenge of doing justice to the person whose life has fallen into our hands. This cannot be done properly without extensive efforts. We have to become aware of our own trivial styles of thinking and our ignorance of the past, living in a place which was once occupied by people who have since passed on, "breathing the very same air," touching the same things – and it is a rare moment when we feel that we perceive something gone by, something utterly formless, as we allow images of the past to pass us by.

In order to meet the challenge set before us and do right by the dead we must free ourselves from bad thought habits, and also forget all about the idea of progress and the linear nature of time. If we accept that a coherent and continuous presentation of history is a construct which simply bolsters dominant narratives, only then will we be able to perceive the inconsistency of events. Spending time among archives, we can see that each event has its own face and its own untold story. Sitting at a research desk, submerged in the elusive present, we surrender to that which is current and past, and in the process both we and the histories we read are actualized. This occurs to us when we exclude epic elements from histories, that which explodes its continuity, and at the same time rip the lives of women writers free from the reified scrapheap we call "history." We then have the chance to see how the past becomes filled with the present and vice-versa. Our contemporaneity is a piece of photographic film upon which we can register "a photo-sensitive image of that which is past," which vanishes as soon as we tie the strings of archived file folders. The irreversibility of the vanishing, which foretells of all passing, brings about a sense of melancholy, but it cannot, in a decisive context, get in the way of our encounter with the past, which, according to Benjamin, takes place "in a single flashpoint."<sup>3</sup>

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3 Walter Benjamin, "N [Re the Theory of Knowledge, Theory of Progress]," in *Benjamin: Philosophy, Aesthetics, History*, ed. Gary Smith (Chicago: Chicago University Press), 64.

In the way that the reanimating of the departed is of greatest importance for Michelet, for Benjamin a key aspect is in offering salvation to those who lost, who suffered defeats, belonging to an oppressed class, and who had no chance to speak in their own name. For hundreds of years, as we must by now be aware of, it was women who were victims of violence at the hands of victors. Although Benjamin does not refer to women directly in his essay *On the Concept of History*, one does feel empowered to include them in a messianic emancipatory discourse.<sup>4</sup>

Towards the end of his life, history became the main theme in Benjamin's work. He considered the work done by historians to be messianic in character. In order to complete his emancipatory project he drew inspiration from surrealistic experiences, Marxist and Jewish mysticism, using the category such as the "now-time" and the past as a revolutionary method of analyzing the present.<sup>5</sup> The key aspect here is the concept of reminding and offering salvation (described in thesis II). Benjamin situates them in both individual and collective spheres. Offering salvation to the past is nothing other than the fulfilment and repairing of dreams, projects, wishes, and so on, which in the past could not have been completed.<sup>6</sup> These processes of reminding and saving are based on providing justice to every single historical scenario in which its subjects find themselves:

The past carries with it a secret index by which it is referred to redemption. Doesn't a breath of the air that pervaded earlier days caress us as well? In the voices we hear, isn't there an echo of now silent ones? Don't the women we court have sisters they no longer recognize? If so, then there is a secret agreement between past generations and the present one. Then, our coming was expected on earth. Then, like every generation that preceded us, we have been endowed with a weak messianic power, a power on which the past has a claim.<sup>7</sup>

There can be no liberation if the ghosts of women who suffered are forgotten. History is in this case an appeals court – we call it into being in order to protest in their names (in the name of the past). The removal of historical

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4 Walter Benjamin, *On the Concept of History*, in *Benjamin: Selected Writings*, vol. 4: 1938–1940, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press), 2003.

5 Michael Löwy, *Fire Alarm. Reading Walter Benjamin's "On the Concept of History,"* trans. Chris Turner (London, New York: Verso, 2005), 2.

6 *Ibid.*, 30–34.

7 Benjamin, *On the Concept of History*, 390.

injustice in the name of historical awareness is the embodiment of the idea of *Aufhebung*,<sup>8</sup> which is fulfilled thanks to the theological quality of remembrance leading towards salvation and offering up justice to previous generations of mothers, daughters, and sisters.

Benjamin's concept of salvation should be understood in a dualistic sense: theological and secular. Salvation which is revolutionary and messianic is the task set before us, handed over to us by previous generations. Messiahs were not sent down from heaven, instead it is us who are messiahs and we are those, according to Benjamin, who are gifted with a subtle messianic power. Michael Löwy writes, that this relates to Buber's messianic heresy, but in the way it perceives things, God is not present. The only feasible messiah is collective, in the form of an oppressed and unhappy humanity. There is no point in waiting for a messiah nor trying to guess the date of his/her arrival. Salvation is all about saving the self. This idea can also be found in the thought of Karl Marx, who posited that human beings shape their own histories. The emancipation of women, much like the liberation of workers, peasants, and other marginalized groups from oppression should be the task set before them.<sup>9</sup>

Messianic power is not only a kind of contemplative gaze at the past locked up inside of an archive, but also a revolutionary challenge taking place in the present. It involves a battle against fierce enemies (capitalism, fascism, the neoliberalism of today). "Our arrival on Earth was expected," as our task is to protect those who were vanquished from being forgotten. It is us who are to continue their battle for emancipation and in this way bring it full circle. Meanwhile salvation demands we recall all events, regardless of whether they be large or small, without exalting those which served the cause of nations, cultures and/or governments. All women who were writers are deserving of our remembrance.

Looking after our women writers makes it necessary for us to declare war upon history understood in a traditional sense. Even though we are alive in the twenty-first century, Leopold von Ranke's objectivistic and positivist history still remains a history written by victors, those who were once kings, and are now popes and prime ministers. In line with Benjamin, we are of the opinion that we still have to question every victory won by the ruling classes, seeing as "there has never been a document of culture, which is not simultaneously one of barbarism."<sup>10</sup> For Benjamin the model of history which serves as his template is the sort which was practiced in medieval chronicles, when

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8 Löwy, *Fire Alarm*, 31.

9 Ibid., 33.

10 Benjamin, *On the Concept of History*, 392.

the chronicler in telling tales of events, without differentiating between the small or large, does justice to the truth. Nothing should ever be allowed to go to waste, and so our obligation, according to Benjamin, is to recognize this most subtle of changes.<sup>11</sup> History is a triumphant process, hence it is necessary to "brush history against the grain,"<sup>12</sup> by which we mean standing up to official versions of history propagated by the ruling classes, which have for centuries marginalized and hidden away women's histories.

This struggle against traditionally understood history also involves the criticism of the idea of progress and the hollow, abstract, and homogenous idea of time. In this context, time appears to be analogous with the mechanical, automatic, and always wholly-identical time as told by clocks. The discovery of abstract linearity follows the process of spending hours slaving over a manuscript. Archival time does not belong to the same category as clock time, but is inseparable from the contents of the manuscripts laid out before us. Part of our responsibility is to pause this hollow time and unleash a revolution against it:

The true image of the past flits by. The past can be seized only as an image that flashes up at the moment of its recognizability, and is never seen again. [...] For it is an irretrievable image of the past which threatens to disappear in any present that does not recognize itself as intended in that image.<sup>13</sup>

Therefore our duty as archivist messiahs involves the demolition of the historical continuum and going to the rescue of the phenomena of the past. We turn against false histories used to mask women's oppression, while also struggling against illusory representations of happiness emerging out of the idea of progress. The radical character of our work is meant to lead towards a smashing of false narratives and revealing the hell suffered by generations of women past.

*Translation: Marek Kazmierski*

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 390.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 392.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 390.

## Abstract

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**Monika Rudaś-Grodzka**

THE INSTITUTE OF LITERARY RESEARCH OF THE POLISH ACADEMY OF SCIENCES

*In the Archives of Women's Writing*

The paper "In the Archives of Women's Writing" is meant to be a manifesto of the team of the academic IBL PAN Women's Archive. It lays down the ethical and spiritual principles for studying the past. The patron of this approach is Walter Benjamin and his concept of history; the author believes his idea of salvaging past things is particularly relevant for practicing women's history in the spirit of life writing.

## Keywords

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archive, ghost, idea of salvation

# Essays

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Julia Lewandowska

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## "Am I That Body?": Mystical Bodies and Polyphonic Bodies in the Early Modern Nuns' Spiritual Autobiographies

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DOI: 10.18318/td.2020.en.1.3 | ORCID: 0000-0002-7230-2089

**F**or mystics, the act of writing means turning one's physical body into language and into the "surface of artistic expression."<sup>1</sup> At first glance, in the testimonies of the *vidas*<sup>2</sup>

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**Julia Lewandowska**

– PhD, Assistant Professor at the Faculty of "Artes Liberales" University, Warsaw. She has held long-term scholarships at the Spanish National Research Council in Madrid (CSIC) and ADHUC: Research Center for Theory, Gender, Sexuality at the Universitat de Barcelona. She was a scholarship holder of the Foundation for Polish Science (2010–2015). Areas of research interest: literary authority and authorship in early modern culture, history and anthropology of women's monasticism, affect and representation in religious discourses. Member of the European Society of Women for Theological Research, the Interdisciplinary Center PRO RHETORICA, IBL PAN, and the Women's Archive Project, IBL PAN. Contact: j.lewandowska@al.uw.edu.pl

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1 Françoise Collin, "El libro y el código. De Simone de Beauvoir a Teresa de Ávila," in *Praxis de la diferencia. Liberación y libertad*, ed. Marta Segarra (Barcelona: Icaria, 2006), 219. I further develop this topic by contrasting it with the martyrdom experience of Luisa de Carvajal y Mendoza (1566–1614), a tertiary nun, *beata*, and missionary who fought to spread Catholicism throughout England of James I Stuart, by preaching against Anglicanism in *Escritoras monjas. Autoridad y autoría en la escritura conventual femenina de los Siglos de Oro* (Madrid and Frankfurt: Iberoamericana–Vervuert, 2019). The question of bodily experience as textual argument in works of Teresa de Jesús María has also been a subject of reflection in my article "*Non est ad astra mollis e terris via*: la escritura, el cuerpo y la herida en Teresa de Jesús María (María de Pineda de Zurita)," in *Laberintos de Género. Muerte, sacrificio y dolor en la literatura española*, ed. Josefa Álvarez (Sevilla: Renacimiento, 2016), 33–56. Unless indicated otherwise, all translations of Spanish texts cited in this article are the work of Dustin Langan.

2 In this article, the term *vida* (life) is applied interchangeably with *autobiografía por mandato* (autobiography by mandate), which was coined by Sonja Herpoel in her PhD thesis in 1987. Sonia Her-

of mediaeval and early modern nuns, the female subject-author seems to lack the power of agency and is reduced to a “mere” corpus transmitting the discourses of others. Addressed in its strategic and metaphorical dimension, however, the somatization of writing<sup>3</sup> may be understood as a rhetorical construction applied to the text. Likewise, we can understand it as a way to legitimize female authorship when the female writer’s bodily experience gains the status of something that is possible to acknowledge. Aware that the substantial conception of the body, understood as a physical entity, carries the risk of an immobilization of identities,<sup>4</sup> for the needs of the present study I will evoke the body understood in a dual sense: as potentiality and as locatedness.<sup>5</sup> These two dimensions will enable me to ask questions about identity, materiality, and the desire to write which are crucial in the context of autobiographical and mystical writing. With this in mind, I will attempt to demonstrate that pronouncing a discourse “about” the body (about the body as a literary theme and subject matter) and “from” the body (from the experience of the body) could grant the female

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poel, *A la zaga de Santa Teresa: autobiografías por mandato* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1999). This approach was successfully adopted by cultural historians and historians of literature despite the controversies and simplifications to which the term “mandate” could lead.

- 3 I apply this term with all the precaution befitting its strategic and metaphorical use to accommodate the psychological, physiological, and philosophical dimensions of somatic writing coming from the mystical/ecstatic experience. I use the definition provided by Stefano Canali and Luca Pani, which describes somatization as “a process by which one perceives, interprets, and acts on the information coming from his or her own body” – *Emozioni e malattia. Dall’evoluzione biologica al tramonto del pensiero psicosomático* (Milano: Bruno Mondadori, 2003), 59, my translation. I also refer to the studies by Snyder and Brueggeman that develop “disability theory” applied to the humanities. For the critical application of this approach to late mediaeval texts by female authors, Encarnación Juárez’s study is especially enlightening. Encarnación Juárez “The Autobiography of the Acting Body in Teresa de Cartagena’s Arboleda de los Enfermos,” in *Disability Studies. Enabling the Humanities*, eds. Sharon L. Snyder et. al. (New York: Modern Language Association, 2002), 131–143. I also make use of the somatic critique developed by Adam Dziadek which takes advantage of the juxtaposition of the notions “soma” and “sema” to establish a more general rule regarding the representation of the bodily experience in and through the texts. Dziadek bases his critique on the search for equivalence between the physical body and the body of the text, meaning between somatism and semiotics, which build bridges between the general theory of signs and “symptomatology” as a specialized branch of medicine dedicated to the physical and psychic symptoms of diseases. Adam Dziadek, “Soma i sema – zarys krytyki somatycznej,” in *Literackie reprezentacje doświadczenia*, ed. Włodzimierz Bolecki et al. (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IBL PAN, 2007), 69–82.

4 Collin, “El libro,” 219.

5 Caroline Bynum, “Why All the Fuss about the Body? A Medievalist’s Perspective,” *Critical Inquiry* 22 (1995): 15.

writers of the early modern period the possibility of strategically using their own materiality to seek recognition for their authorship. For this purpose, the article will enquire into the meaning of the body and its factual and symbolic dimensions in the writings of Teresa de Jesús María (María de Pineda de Zurita, O.C.D., 1592–1642), specifically in her spiritual autobiography entitled *Tratado de una breve relación de su vida que cuenta una monja carmelita descalza* (Treatise of a brief relation of the life of a Barefoot Carmelite nun, as told by herself) and in other writings of hers like *Comentarios sobre algunos pasajes de la Sagrada Escritura* (Notes on some passages of sacred scripture), *Segundos comentarios sobre pasajes de la escritura* (Second notes on passages of sacred scripture), and *Explicación a lo místico de los Trenos de Jeremías* (Explanation for mystics of the Lamentations of Jeremiah).<sup>6</sup>

### The Lives of the Vida

Thanks to the enquiries formulated by feminist studies in recent decades, it was possible to acknowledge that within the crucible of the literary output of the Spanish Golden Ages, the *vidas* of the nuns and the testimonies of their mystical experiences constituted a staging of bodies that were transformed "into the essence of the story, woven by the ultimate meaning of fulfilling the program of *Imitatio Christi*."<sup>7</sup> In this way, they imposed new questions regarding notions such as the narrator, literary authorship(s) and authority addressed in relation to the empirical female authors and their concrete bodily experiences. Thus, to some extent they succeeded in overcoming the impasse of the postmodern relativization of the figure of the author.

Studies of the writing of religious women have shown that, as autobiographical testimony, the *vidas* of the nuns exceeded the frameworks of

6 The manuscripts of Teresa de Jesús María may be found in the National Library of Madrid under the catalogue numbers MSS/8482 and MSS/8476. Even though this article is based on study of the author's own manuscripts, throughout the article, for the commodity of the reader, I shall refer to the modern edition of her texts, published in one volume by Serrano y Sanz. Miguel Serrano y Sanz, *Las obras de la sublime escritora del amor divino Sor Teresa de Jesús María Carmelita Descalza del siglo XVII trasladadas de sus manuscritos originales y por primera vez impresas con estudio crítico* (Madrid: Gil Blas, 1921). Therefore the references to the cited sources are: "Tratado de una breve relación de su vida que cuenta una monja carmelita descalza," in Serrano y Sanz, *Las obras de la sublime*, 1–32; "Comentarios sobre algunos pasajes de la Sagrada Escritura," in Serrano y Sanz, *Las obras de la sublime*, 35–333; "Segundos comentarios sobre pasajes de la escritura," in Serrano y Sanz, *Las obras de la sublime*, 401–441, and "Explicación a lo místico de los Trenos de Jeremías," in Serrano y Sanz, *Las obras de la sublime*, 340–400.

7 Beatriz Ferrús Antón, *Heredar la palabra: Vida, escritura y cuerpo en América Latina* (Valencia: Universidad de Valencia, 2005), 9.



Philippe Lejeune's definition of "a retrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his [or her] own existence, where the focus is his [or her] individual life, in particular the history of his [or her] personality."<sup>8</sup> Far from anticipating modalities of autobiography in the Rousseauian sense, the autobiography by mandate can rather be defined as its opposite, since elements such as the reduction of the speaking subject, the omnipresence of divinity – presented as the origin of writing – and the individual existence motivated by the desire for imitation of a previous model prevail in the narration. From the standpoint of Church policy, the *vidas* of the nuns responded to a need to forge a model of piety and promote specific religious milieus (a certain order, cloister, saint, or confessor). They were written with the clear aim to influence a particular "social reader," in this case nuns, although instances of their spread beyond properly religious contexts and their hagiographic function were frequent:<sup>9</sup>

For many of the female autobiographers, [the autobiography by mandate] is a path of introspection and comforting self-knowledge, as well as a way out and a means to possibly influence outside the walls. For many confessors, it is a way to promote themselves as discoverers of new Saint Teresas, even when their penitents never would have aspired to such a lofty destiny.<sup>10</sup>

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8 Philippe Lejeune, *On Autobiography* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 4.

9 Obviously, the writings of Teresa de Ávila provide the most prominent example of the universal impact of the spiritual autobiography. These writings circulated widely in Europe and the colonies among male and female readers alike, even after being included in the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* of 1576: "Including the king, all the different social strata are delighted to enter into the meanderings of Teresa's particular thought [...] from noble ladies to the most anonymous maid, they find an exceptional spokeswoman in the founder of the Discalced Carmelites, who senses their problems while helping them to glimpse a possible way out" (Herpoel, *A la zaga de Santa Teresa*, 37). It is also evidenced by the resonance of the theological writings of Valentina Pinelo, the mystical work of María de Jesús de Ágreda and the theatrical and educational texts of Marcela de San Félix, Francisca de Santa Teresa, and other early modern Spanish nuns writers. Based on the circulation of their manuscripts and printed texts, female religious authors actively participated in and co-constructed the literary circles of the time, of which Juana Inés de la Cruz, María do Ceo, and Ana Francisca Abarca de Bolea provide the most striking examples. Cf. Nieves Baranda Leturio, *Cortejo a lo prohibido. Lectoras y escritoras en la España Moderna* (Madrid: Arco/Libros, 2005), 142–148; and Iris M. Zavala, *Lecturas y lectores del discurso narrativo dieciochesco* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1987), 7.

10 Fernando Durán López, *Un cielo abreviado. Introducción crítica a la autobiografía religiosa en España* (Madrid: Universidad Pontificia de Salamanca; Fundación Universitaria Española, 2007), 209.

At the turn of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the intense defense of the Catholic faith against the Protestant "heresy" intensified the publication of *vidas*, turning female voices into effective tools in favor of this cause. Brides of Christ, as nuns were called, occupied a vital place in the early modern society: "Besides the service they were considered to give the community with their prayers, counsel, and prophecies, they provided the laity and other religious with inspirational devotional texts [...] as both authors and subjects of books."<sup>11</sup> In this sense, the proliferation of autobiographical writings by religious women supposed both an individual affirmation of many nuns as models of piety and morality and avowal of the female conventual space as a place where reading and writing serve to self-designate the religious order in terms of an intellectual community. In this sense, as Kathleen A. Myers and Amanda Powell point out, the boom of female autobiographical writings – that came after the death, beatification, and canonization of Saint Teresa from Ávila (in 1582, 1614, and 1622 respectively) – left a mark not only on the pious literature but on the whole intellectual and religious culture of the time.<sup>12</sup>

We can situate the story of the *vida* of Teresa de Jesús María, written between 1624 and 1634, within the second stream of autobiographical testimonies by mandate, according to Herpoel's classification,<sup>13</sup> which are characterized as more intimate than narrative and as having a more developed literary framework. This text is a particular kind of testimony where the mystical, the everyday, the erudite, the real, and the wonderful are intertwined in a manifestation of a self, expressed from its bodily experience – a painful, complete, real and symbolic bodily experience that always claims someone else's identity to construct one's own.<sup>14</sup> By somatizing her writing, Teresa de Jesús María could construct an authorial position firm enough to be able to access a theological authority that was inaccessible to religious women in the context of orthodox Catholic spirituality, and especially after the Council of Trent (1545–1563). However, her authorship was clearly evident within the dominant ideological system and social order. "A victim at the same time as

11 Kathleen A. Myers and Amanda Powell (introduction, ed. and transl.), *A Wild Country Out in the Garden. The Spiritual Journals of a Colonial Mexican Nun* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), xviii–xix.

12 Ibid.

13 Herpoel, *A la zaga de Santa Teresa*, 37.

14 Cf. María-Milagros Rivera Garretas, "Nombrar el mundo en femenino: unos ejemplos del humanismo y del Renacimiento," in *La conjura del olvido*, ed. Nieves Ibeas et al. (Barcelona: Icaria, 1997), 89–106.

a heroine,"<sup>15</sup> she offers us a discourse that does not seek rebellion or "underground resistance."<sup>16</sup> Her construction of the author-function and her awareness of the female condition may be grasped if we understand that they were essentially developed within the bounds of orthodox Catholic spirituality. Such a construction of the authorial position allows for a perception of dissent intrinsic to contemplative Catholic spirituality through an opening of "the codes of the Church with its own rules of the game."<sup>17</sup> Thus it can be analyzed how Teresa de Jesús María managed to find her own declarative space "in the interstices of the discursive rigidity of the system that had her under its control as a woman and as a religious person."<sup>18</sup>

María de Pineda de Zurita was born in Toledo in 1592. Among the various documents that tell us about the foundation of the convent where she professed, the Discalced Carmelites of Cuerva, there is an interesting letter that clarifies the year of her death and shows the importance and possible circulation of her texts.<sup>19</sup> In her autobiographical testimony, María, whose second religious name was Teresa de Jesús María,<sup>20</sup> follows the key points of the hagiographic model, placing special emphasis on the following elements: her early religious vocation, a penchant for corporeal penance, the

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15 Durán López, *Un cielo abreviado*, 194.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid.

18 Herpoel, *A la zaga de Santa Teresa*, 212.

19 This letter, written by Manuela de la Madre de Dios, may now be found at the National Library of Spain under catalogue number MSS/18668/41. In this two-page document, which is addressed to the prelate and dated 3 October 1642 in Cuerva Sor, Manuela writes: "Concerning what you request of our venerable Mother Teresa de Jesús María, who recently died, the religious women will give their sworn testimonies and I will send your reverence a copy of her *vida*, which she wrote out of obedience. There are great papers of very lofty things that would require a book in themselves, to last a very long time."

20 María states that at the beginning of her novitiate, she took the name María del Cristo ("Mary of Christ") and later changed it to Teresa de Jesús María due to the devotion that her convent had for the Blessed Mother from Ávila (Teresa de Jesús María, "Breve relación," 9). This name was the reason for the confusion that arose between Teresa de Jesús from Ávila and Teresa de Jesús from Toledo and helped to obfuscate issues about the authorship of the latter's texts. As we shall see throughout her text, María explicitly expressed her desire for holiness, feeling herself chosen and touched by God (Teresa de Jesús María, "Breve relación," 14, 22, 25). In light of these ambitions, the adoption of this name can be understood not only as a symbolic gesture, but also as a strategic one that gave the author a broader framework of resonance and in some cases even ensured the legitimacy of her most daring theological interpretations.

little affection she had for her parents and siblings, and her rejection of earthly marriage. María's emotional austerity, fragile health, precociousness and inclination for study undoubtedly influenced her early spiritual calling. Throughout her service to religion, amounting to forty-one years in the cloister and thirty-three in profession, Teresa de Jesús María held various positions, including as a teacher and twice as prioress of the convent (in 1626 and 1633), a duty she performed with "great feeling and repugnance."<sup>21</sup> Through repeated affirmations of her otherness ("the rare and unusual gifts" of which she spoke), she granted herself the authority of "one of the greatest female saints ever in the Church of God."<sup>22</sup> However, Teresa's early mystical experiences did not make her profession or her subsequent life in religion easy. The ecclesiastical authorities created an air of suspicion and prejudice around her, and in fact her vows were not admitted until her first mystical experiences were put in writing and censored by the council of censors in Toledo (in 1609).<sup>23</sup> Hence, Teresa had to negotiate a rather ambiguous position from the beginning. On the one hand, she felt that she was favored by God, the only one able to understand the words that she wanted to externalize in privacy and isolation (the "longing for a solitude and silence that are impossible to reach"<sup>24</sup>). At the same time, she possessed admirable knowledge of Christian doctrine, from which sprang her yearning not only to receive, but also to comment on, explain and teach theological issues. Moreover, she quickly gained a position as a guide and a mentor to her sister nuns who wished to partake in her "holiness." Simultaneously, she had to confront the image of a "blessed fraud" ascribed to her by some hierarchs of the Church.

### Mystical Bodies/Polyphonic Bodies

At this point, I find it fitting to refer to the approach proposed by Judith Butler according to which woman's reduction to her corporeality had been the *sine qua non* of the emergence of the male subject since the Platonic cosmogony. The she-body enabled the constitution of the male subject as a being of reason "which requires that women and slaves, children and animals be the

21 Teresa de Jesús María, "Breve relación," 26: "grandísimo sentimiento y repugnancia."

22 Ibid., 25: "una de las mayores santas que hubiese en la Iglesia de Dios."

23 Ibid., 12.

24 Teresa de Jesús María, "Segundos comentarios," 403: "ansias de soledad y silencio imposible para alcanzar."

body, perform the bodily functions, that it will not perform.”<sup>25</sup> This reduction to corporeality deprived women of the possibility of identifying themselves with the notion of an “author,” established from an abstract idea of being “decorporalized,” defined by his ability to name and create, or to beget. However, by raising the concept of *corporeal writing*, the impossibility of authorship becomes, if not transgressed, at least questioned to a certain point. Obviously, claiming the body as the origin of creation strengthens the association of female creation with reproduction, which is maternal and seen as lacking in *ratio*, and therefore without authority. However, the claim “I am not an intellectual. I write with the body”<sup>26</sup> also has a different dimension. “By corporalizing authorship, we introduce to the concept everything related to finitude, vulnerability and the need of the other.”<sup>27</sup> This makes it possible for a female author to question the idea of the authorial subject abstracted from materiality and to legitimize her writing based on the logic of the living bodily experience.

On the other hand, the mystical state implied a total renunciation of materiality, “the conquest of the self to the most extreme point, which strips the spirit of matter.”<sup>28</sup> In this pull of mystical exaltation, when “the mystic stands before the Divine, she/he runs the risk of making it appear according to the desires of her/his individual imagination. In other words, she/he involuntarily, unconsciously risks separating herself/himself from the Word. More serious still is to make her/him believe that the revelation she/he has experienced is truer than the Word.”<sup>29</sup> Therefore, for a female mystic to be an author (or for a female author to be a mystic, which presupposes a framework of parallel approximation) involved reconciling these two contradictory motivations when composing a narrative from her position as an author – a function of the discourse – regarding the ineffable, experienced through her body as a mystic – a specific historical individual.

Throughout history, both male and female mystics have shared the religious conceptualization of their body, in its symbolic and factual aspects, as a necessary tool for the salvation of their soul. The redemption of the soul

25 Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 22.

26 Clarice Lispector, *La hora de estrella* (Madrid: Siruela, 2000), 18.

27 Aina Pérez Fontdevila, “Cuando dar cuerpo no es incorporar: Clarice Lispector y las resistencias a la autoría literaria,” in *Éste que ves, engaño colorido: Literaturas, culturas y sujetos alternos en América Latina*, eds. Chiara Bolognese et al. (Barcelona: Icaria, 2012), 402.

28 Margarita Nelken, *Las escritoras españolas* (Barcelona: Editorial Labor, 1930), 52.

29 Nelken, *Las escritoras*, 52.

was not possible via the annihilation of the body, but through its constant reuse and all-embracing presence (i n t e r n a l penitence like the experience of guilt and e x t e r n a l penitence like the mortification of the flesh, of which Ignatius of Loyola spoke).<sup>30</sup> "Augustine of Hippo, Catherine of Siena, Ignatius of Loyola, Teresa of Ávila, and John of the Cross, along with Rose of Lima, design a corporeal and sensorial technology and a code of action and of writing."<sup>31</sup> These corporeal technologies,<sup>32</sup> with a long list of authors, were rooted in the common heritage of Christianity that appealed to the Manichean sense of the body, understood as the origin of sin and the only redemptive path for the salvation of the soul at the same time.<sup>33</sup> Understanding the indissolubility of these two bodies, "the sublimated" and the "perverse," female mystical writers found their own places of annunciation "where symbolism interferes with [their] corporeality."<sup>34</sup> The legacy of mediaeval authors like Catherine of Siena, who developed a symbolism of the androgynous, anaemic, and exhausted body; the body as the locus of desire and the sweet fall of Mechthild of Magdeburg; and the disciplined/mutilated body of Luisa de Carvajal y Mendoza represent just a few points on the scale of polymorphous possibilities of voices and writings "about the body." Understood in this way, the mystical body ceases to be transparent and mute and becomes a powerful and dynamic tool in the emergence and consolidation of female authorship.

It is important to recall that in the medieval era and the early modern period, as well as in our own times, there was no single or uniform discourse on the body. For the theologians of the sixteenth century, the body was a structure of organs, quite unlike the mediaeval concepts of humours or fluids.<sup>35</sup> Perceived in this way, the "body of the theologians" consisted of several spheres, from the flesh to the sensitive soul and the intellect, or rather, the place of the "footprints left by God," as explained by Luis de Granada.<sup>36</sup> Starting in the late Middle Ages, theological discourses applied a triple categorization of human beings consisting of the body (*corpus*), the spirit (*animus*

30 Javier Moscoso, *Pain: A Cultural History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 47.

31 Ferrús Antón, *Heredar la palabra*, 11.

32 I use this term following the Foucauldian reflection on disciplinarity but placing it in the context of bodily religious practices and their relation to sex and gender.

33 Julia Kristeva, "Qui tollis pecata mundi," in *Poderes de la perversión. Ensayo sobre Luis-Ferdinand Céline* (México: Siglo XXI, 2005), 151.

34 Kristeva, "Qui tollis," 151.

35 Bynum, "Why All the Fuss," 12.

36 Luis de Granada, *Introducción del símbolo de la Fe* (Madrid: Cátedra, 1989), 483.

or *spiritus*), and the soul (*anima*).<sup>37</sup> However, social discourses about the body were polymorphous and not infrequently contradictory because they evoked other principles and uses of corporeality. Hence, though it is possible to encounter a generally common moral and ontological conception of the notion of the body in Christianity, it is necessary to take account of differences between theological (legal), devotional, and everyday discourses that called for a more heterogeneous use of it.

As previously stated, the following section shall focus on two dimensions of the body (as potentiality and as locatedness) to approach issues of identity, desire, and materiality in writing and to ask about the female author's body understood as a strategic position of discourse.<sup>38</sup> To paraphrase Denise Riley, this is a position that could be resumed in a *quasi*-mystical exclamation: "Am I that body?"<sup>39</sup> Distancing myself from the idea of a body/identity (essential bodylines), I shall be guided by the idea of the constructed body, which leads to the body of discourse and the discursive body, and enables to address a wide variety of narratives on the body in early modern times and to investigate their meaning in particular (mystical and narrative) literary texts.

### Textualizing the Body/Somatizing the Text

In her mystical experience, Teresa de Jesús María provides new dimensions to the concept of the body precisely by addressing it from the aforementioned binary Christian perspective. In this sense she inscribed herself in what Michel de Certeau calls "renewed mysticism" understood as "an approach that caressed, wounded, ascended the scale of perceptions, attained the ultimate point, which is transcended. [...] It was written in unreadable message on the body transformed into an emblem or a memorial engraved with the suffering love."<sup>40</sup> In her *vida*, interwoven with other theological and

37 Bynum, "Why All the Fuss," 15.

38 Ibid., 10–11.

39 I refer to Denise Riley, *Am I That Name? Feminism and the Category of "Women" in History* (London: Macmillan, 1988). This foundational text for the political verification of the categorization of the "woman" subject pointed out, among other things, that gender categories are historically unstable and inconsistent and intertwined with other changing categories (those of sex, race, class, and ethnic group), co-constructing the discursively established identity. Hence, she concluded that since it is impossible to separate gender from cultural, political, and historical contexts, it is also illusory to do the same with the category of the "body."

40 Michel de Certeau, *The Mystic Fable. The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 6.

exegetical texts of hers, she writes of her experience of bodily pain (sick, subjugated and suffering) and of bodily joy (loved, embraced and satisfied), depicting a body both triumphant and defeated at the same time. When she presents her body as a source of sin, she wants to see it and feel it with constant vigilance, like a body that never rests (following Saint Jerome),<sup>41</sup> an enemy,<sup>42</sup> or a corpse.<sup>43</sup> However, her desire to rid herself of her own materiality (the annihilated body),<sup>44</sup> evokes its most painful and palpable presence, which is perceived with each of the five traditional senses. Her mutilated and sacrificed body<sup>45</sup> is heard like a sobbing body, smelled like a stinking one,<sup>46</sup> seen as a bloody body or as a dark dungeon, tasted like something bitter and finally felt as empty and rough to the touch.<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, this chain of *corpore pecata* is overlaid with an elaborate set of visions of *corpore sanctorum*: deified and transmuted to the divine,<sup>48</sup> her body is a canvas and fertile soil,<sup>49</sup> a nourishing body<sup>50</sup> that finally becomes confused with Christ, becoming his temple and tabernacle.<sup>51</sup>

In his latest book *Pain: A Cultural History*, Javier Moscoso attempts to understand the pain experienced and expressed in the texts of male and female mediaeval and early modern mystics by taking a historical and philosophical approach that is somewhat generic, but no less convincing, under the common denominator of the "dramatization of suffering" and the theatrical use of pain in religion.<sup>52</sup> According to Moscoso, the pain of the nuns becomes a spectacle because in the context of the theater, the same purgative gestures, mortification of the flesh and ailments may be interpreted "as a necessity or

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41 Teresa de Jesús María, "Explicación a lo místico," 392.

42 Ibid., 242.

43 Teresa de Jesús María, "Comentarios," 148, 170, 249.

44 Ibid., 60, 68.

45 Ibid., 40–45, 328.

46 Ibid., 40.

47 Ibid.

48 Ibid., 37, 93–95.

49 Ibid., 57, 76.

50 Ibid., 97, 101.

51 Teresa de Jesús María, "Segundos comentarios," 411.

52 Moscoso, *Pain*, 33–54.



abuse, as a form of punishment or a way to salvation.”<sup>53</sup> However, unlike Moscoso, I believe that this “philopassianism” (a term borrowed by Moscoso from Esther Cohen<sup>54</sup>), that is, the search for pain as the most sublime instrument in the path of imitating Christ, has deeper nuances than those he suggests, whereby they are merely a copy or reproduction of the patterns of behavior forged from the literary models of medieval hagiographies.<sup>55</sup> I think that this analogy opens up possibilities of perceiving bodily exercises and the writing that is encouraged, originated, and carried out from a martyrdom of the flesh as a kind of rhetorical, literary, or socio-cultural strategy that places the mystic in a space where she is permitted to speak and exercise a certain type of authority (and autonomy). I agree with the Spanish researcher that the space of religious asceticism is an interstitial space of enunciation, a permeable space that is:

neither entirely public nor completely private; that is neither totally visible nor radically opaque; that is not marked by necessity, but rather by the iron will and unbreakable determination to live and feel the others. In this place that is at once real and fictitious, literary and extraliterary, neither things nor people are what they seem.<sup>56</sup>

However, it is precisely this ambiguity of the cloistral space that grants the nun writer an exceptional position from which her desire, her experience,

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>54</sup> Esther Cohen, “The Animated Pain of the Body,” *The American Historical Review* 105 (2000): 36–68.

<sup>55</sup> Moscoso, *Pain*, 45. Moscoso presents the nuns within categories of copying and reproduction: “They do not live; they copy. They do not feel; they imitate; they reproduce schemas and behaviors that they have learned from the pages of their bedside reading, either in hours of solitude or moments of group devotion” (Moscoso, *Pain*, 45). This statement only touches the surface of the phenomenon studied without entering into the rhetoric of the texts or the specific circumstances of mystical writing that enable us to understand it as innovative and original creation, as confirmed by the entire and increasingly prolific branch of studies dedicated to female writers in cloistral contexts, cf. the BIESES project; among others: Electa Arenal and Stacey Schlau, *Untold Sisters. Hispanic Nuns in Their Own Works* (Albuquerque: University of Mexico Press, 2010); Ángela Atienza López (ed.), *Mujeres entre el claustro y el siglo* (Madrid: Sílex, 2018); Jodi Bilinkoff, *Related Lives. Confessors and their Female Penitents, 1450–1750* (New York: Ithaca, 2005); Silvia Evangelisti, *Nuns. A History of Convent Life 1450–1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Julia Lewandowska, *Escritoras monjas. Autoridad y autoría en la escritura conventual femenina de los Siglos de Oro* (Madrid and Frankfurt: Iberoamericana–Vervuert, 2019).

<sup>56</sup> Moscoso, *Pain*, 45.

and her body gain the status of feasibility and become possible to be told. The mystical experience legitimizes the narration of the *vida*, a story not so much about any subjectivity or identity, but about a "body-self [that] links the episodes of the narration – seizes the text until pinning it down – and possesses it."<sup>57</sup>

### Sick Body/Joyful Flesh

At no point in her text does Teresa dispense with the materiality of her burdened and aching body, turning it into a discursive form of her mimesis of Christ. Thus, she is part of the tradition of the "brides of Christ," determined to imitate the pain of the Passion to the extreme point of transforming herself into the flesh and blood of Jesus, of which he was stripped once he was resurrected and ascended into Heaven. "The disciplines and cilices that she carried day and night"<sup>58</sup> enabled Teresa de Jesús María to become a dynamic prolongation of God that, by being disembodied, "cannot have sadness or pain."<sup>59</sup> Therefore, "like His heart and in His name,"<sup>60</sup> she would be the one to somatize "this death and passion of His only-begotten Son."<sup>61</sup>

However, this *Imitatio Cristi*, understood as a meditation and imitation of experience in the style of Ignatius, also has an important rhetorical and strategic textual dimension. By somatizing the Passion and transforming it into a "written body," female mystics found an effective way of penetrating theological language and speaking "by means of a corporeality transformed into particular semiotics."<sup>62</sup> As Ruth El Saffar points out: "In women visionaries the key to the mystic's encounter with Christ's image is surrender to the brokenness represented by his Passion, a masculine imaged as vulnerable rather than powerful."<sup>63</sup> At the same time, let us remember that Baroque art imagery was saturated with extreme visions of painful, suffering, sick, and dying bodies that reflected the vanity and finitude of human beings while

57 Ferrús Antón, *Hereder la palabra*, 11.

58 Teresa de Jesús María, "Breve relación,"<sup>14</sup>: "Las disciplinas y cilicios que traía de día y noche."

59 Ibid.: "no puede tener tristeza ni dolor."

60 Teresa de Jesús María, "Comentarios,"<sup>75</sup>: "como corazón suyo y en su nombre."

61 Ibid.: "sienta esta muerte y pasión por su Hijo unigénito."

62 Ferrús Antón, *Hereder la palabra*, 124.

63 Ruth El Saffar, *Rapture Encaged: The Suppression of the Feminine in Western Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 100.

also highlighting the extraordinary beauty of the ultimate sacrifice of God incarnate even more. According to the *Breviloquium* of Saint Bonaventure, the suffering of Christ on the cross reached a climax due precisely to his condition of a "more perfect body."<sup>64</sup> The radical physicality of Baroque religion provided an especially rewarding context for the continuation of somatic events like stigmata and *miraculous inedia* developed in the mediaeval period.<sup>65</sup> If we add the premise that only the male body was canonical in the seventeenth century, the strategic use of the mimesis of Christ in texts by female mystics is especially striking.

By understanding the humanity of God and the divinity of a body in sacrifice in this way, Teresa de Jesús María was able to establish a literary pact that allowed her to "experience" the imaginary body of Christ, imitating him in his suffering and thereby finding admissible spaces for exegetic and theological reflection. However, her approach went well beyond the self-punishment or consecration of disease begun by medieval mystics like Catherine of Siena and continued in the tradition of Teresa de Ávila. By identifying with the vulnerable Christ and referring to the vulnerability of her own body (extremely weak, sick, and thin), Teresa from Toledo raised an original argument that gave her access to the intellectual mysticism usually forbidden to female mystics, who practiced an emotional mysticism "from the heart," as Saint John of the Cross said. Teresa writes repeatedly of her raptures in purely intellectual terms, which, due to the fragility of her body, which "the Lord knows," are those that are "most pleasing to God."<sup>66</sup> Here God demands the mortification of Teresa's mind, and not of her flesh,<sup>67</sup> which is why she understands His mysteries "better than other creatures of the earth."<sup>68</sup> The way she translated the suffering of Christ onto the surface of her female body distanced her considerably from the language of Teresa de Ávila, a "mystical babble" where the strategic need to speak like a "little woman" forced her to forego theoretical channels and speak from "her ignorance." Though she continued Teresa de Ávila's tradition of authorizing her discourse through experience, she took care to support each and every ecstatic vision with Biblical quotations and extensive references to the teachings of the Church Fathers. Her discourse is

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64 San Buenaventura, "Dios y las criaturas," in *Obras de San Buenaventura*, ed. León Amorós et al. (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 2010), 292–294.

65 Bynum, "Why All the Fuss," 15, footnote 4.

66 Teresa de Jesús María, "Breve relación," 14: "el Señor conoce," "de mayor agrado a Dios."

67 Teresa de Jesús María, "Comentarios," 37.

68 Ibid.: "de un modo mejor que otras criaturas terrenales."

backed with quotations from paremiological literature, patristics and Biblical exegeses, demonstrating her knowledge of the orthodox repertoire and her interpretive abilities. The union with God that she achieved along the third path to perfection enabled her to understand "the mystery of the eternal generation of the Word"<sup>69</sup> and therefore to continue commenting on the Holy Scriptures, which, if presented separately, could at least be seen as brash and inappropriate for a female author.

It is interesting that Teresa's corporeal martyrdom was not limited to this "deliberate suffering." It is significant how differently she perceived pain coming from illness, a non-voluntary pain, and pain determined by her autonomous decision of sacrifice. From early childhood, Teresa suffered from chronic illnesses that shaped how she related to the world and her own body. In principle, she rejected illness as a superimposed reality unrelated to grace. However, over time she ended up understanding it as an immanent element of a mystical body and as a gateway to a whole long tradition of Biblical and hagiographic bodies in sickness (she speaks of her pains as greater than those experienced by Saint Mary Magdalene and Saint Job). According to what Susan Sontag has written about mysticism as the demystification of illness, by perceiving illness as a metaphor, Teresa could give transcendental meaning to her involuntary suffering like other religious women had, such as Teresa de Cartagena, Teresa de Ávila, and María Vela.<sup>70</sup> She also achieved a space of self-observation, or rather, a space of introspection fueled by a greater awareness of feeling her own body. Apart from the arthritic attacks, which she describes as "bumps on the limbs that become rigid, cold, and stiff, like a dead and frozen body"<sup>71</sup> and the migraines that "twisted the brain,"<sup>72</sup> around halfway through her life (around the year 1626), Teresa suffered from breast cancer, which she calls a *zaratán*,<sup>73</sup> and which became essential to her later mystical experiences. The *Diccionario de autoridades* (1739) defines the word *zaratán* as "a kind of cancer disease that affects women in the breasts and gnaws at them, consuming the flesh in such a way that they usually come to die of it." Although Teresa was cured of the disease, due to "the love of God" and the prayers of her friend,

69 Ibid., 127: "el misterio de la encarnación eterna del Verbo."

70 Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and Its Metaphors* (London: Penguin Modern Classics, 2009).

71 Teresa de Jesús María, "Breve relación," 16: "unos pasmos en los miembros que se ponían yertos, fríos y tiesos, como de un cuerpo muerto y helado."

72 Ibid.: "torcían los sesos."

73 Ibid., 29.

Sor Francisca de la Merced de Dios (Sister Frances of the Mercy of God), the experience left a mark in the way she constructed her subsequent mystical discourse, giving primacy to images related to female physiognomy that had barely been visible before. It is surprising how Teresa used the rhetoric of the lack and factual pain of her ill breast to insert herself in the long line of prayer books that personified Christ and the *ecclesia* in female terms. This tradition was shared by male and female mystics, though the figure of the nourishing Christ (claimed by the symbol in medieval bestiaries of Christ as a “good pelican”), “who eucharistically feeds the Christians with the liquid distilled from his breast [and] the blood shed on the cross”<sup>74</sup> could only reach its tangible manifestation through the materiality of women, since their flesh could do the same as the Christ: “nourish, bleed, beget, and die by giving their life for others.”<sup>75</sup> The supreme value of such an *imitatio* by identification granted Teresa the authority necessary to support her discourse and reflect on theological truths beyond the doxa of female intellectual and physical inferiority and symbolic muteness.

In her study on the female mysticism in the poetry of Spanish Golden Ages Gwyn Fox reminds us that in its framework “the body remains insistently present both as a canvas on which to paint Christ-like suffering and as a participant in the pleasure of physical union.”<sup>76</sup> Needless to say that the eagerness for union with God found its most tangible expression in the embodied mysticism of the Eucharist. However, within the Baroque thaumaturgic religiosity, and due to the change of perception on the body of Christ, to represent the hunger for the mystical union meant to merge the metaphors of *furor mysticus* with the imagery of *via crucis*. In the Eucharistic mysticism, as Carolyn Bynum has pointed out, “to eat God was to take into one’s self the suffering flesh on the cross. [...] That which one ate was the physicality of the God-man.”<sup>77</sup>

In the imagery developed by Teresa, the “immense and overflowing breasts” like “seas of wine of love” or “seas of milk and sweetness”<sup>78</sup> are attributes of a maternal God and stand in stark contrast to her own breasts:

74 Ferrús Antón, *Heredar la palabra*, 151.

75 Ibid.

76 Gwyn Fox, “Luisa de Carvajal. More Martha than Mary,” in *Subtle Subversions: Reading Golden Age Sonnets by Iberian Women* (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2008), 251.

77 Carolyn Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast. The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1987), 67.

78 Teresa de Jesús María, “Comentarios,” 133: “pechos derramados e inmensos,” “mares de vino de amor,” “mares de leche y dulzura.”

empty, sick, and a source of pain and anxiety.<sup>79</sup> Notably, even though this type of imagery was present in the writings of other nuns, like Catherine of Siena and Marcela de San Félix, for example, it was not common for female mystics at the time, who more frequently saw themselves turned into metaphorical mothers of the Baby Jesus than into creatures nourished by a maternal God. Teresa presents God as a "most loving mother"<sup>80</sup> who not only gives her breast to suckle, by which Teresa receives "divine perfections and properties,"<sup>81</sup> but also looks after her like a little girl, taking special care to bestow her with the intellectual gifts of the Holy Spirit: wisdom, understanding, science, and counsel: "Teresa, as long as you are in mortal flesh [...] I will look after you [...] you may well come to suckle my breast as I will do with you what mothers do with their small creatures, which is to chirp them on their knees, kiss them, and breastfeed them."<sup>82</sup> Once again, Teresa turns a specific corporeal experience (that of an exclusively female mortal illness) into the origin and justification of her authorship. However, unlike Saint Teresa, who "unfamiliar with the wisdom found in books, weaves her story with languages of experience,"<sup>83</sup> Teresa de Jesús María attains a different level of authority, that of the *magister mysticus*. Breast milk is a bodily liquid of continuum, a symbolic endorsement when teaching and interpreting. This endorsement allows Teresa to delve into biblical exegesis and evoke one of the darkest passages in the entire Psalter, opening new interpretive horizons: "When the Majesty said *ex utero ante luciferum genui te* [from the womb I have engendered you], [He/She] called [his/her] very divine essence a womb, from which and in which [he/she] begets [his/her] only begotten Son."<sup>84</sup> In this way, the author as a theologian points out the fissures of the dominant Christian paradigm in which the Transcendence has been perceived and thought of as Almighty and ruling, therefore masculine and

79 Teresa de Jesús María, "Breve relación," 29; "Comentarios," 327.

80 Teresa de Jesús María, "Comentarios," 97: "Madre amorosísima."

81 Ibid., 98: "divinas perfecciones y propiedades."

82 Ibid.: "Teresa, mientras estás en carne mortal [...] te miro [...] bien puedes venir a mamar de mis pechos, que yo haré contigo lo que las madres amorosísimas hacen con las criaturas pequeñas, que es gorgearlas sobre sus rodillas, besarlas y darles el pecho."

83 Ferrús Antón, *Heredar la palabra*, 119.

84 Teresa de Jesús María, "Comentarios," 76: "Cuando dijo Su Majestad *ex utero ante luciferum genui te*, llamó vientre a su misma esencia divina, de la cual y en la cual engendra a su unigénito Hijo," my translation. As the Spanish language has no gender-specific third person possessive pronoun I mark this in the translation by the "he/she" and "his/her" binomials.

self-sufficient. Instead she introduces into the scene of reflection a divinity implanted in the fabric of life, voluntarily dependent because loving.

## Conclusion

I hope that this brief attempt at spiritual autobiographies of early modern nuns has successfully shown how – through the rhetoric of bodily pain and bodily joy – the early modern female mystics opened their path to attain levels of literary authorship and symbolic authority *per aspera ad astra*. This authorship in becoming, seen in the light of the turbulent time of the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation, presents different ways in which these women inscribed themselves in the long mystical tradition of writing bodies. Within this framework they established their own narrative strategies and negotiated with the dominant politics of religious experience. At the same time, to re-evaluate these long-ignored or depreciated, essentially devotional voices from the past allows us to reconsider both the historical and literary canons along with the values and exclusions that have shaped them. Besides, to restore nun's texts to our cultural history calls upon the present time. It opens new ways of understanding how we came to omit most religious material and almost everything written by women of the early modern period within a masculinist and post-Enlightenment secularist paradigm of study.<sup>85</sup>

Teresa de Jesús María's physical body became the generator of any form of discourse. At the same time, by stating that "without a suffering body there is no story, because there is no language,"<sup>86</sup> her experience of a pained and morbid body opened a dialogical relationship with an entire series of intertexts: from the *Vida* of Teresa de Ávila, which consecrated illness and reformulated the language of experience after her mystical quest through Ignatian self-punishment and bodily training, to Catherine of Siena's language of bodily fluids. The act of writing enclosed the body in a narrative space where pain, that hypertrophy of seeing and feeling, reappeared as the ideal of holiness and the most accessible model of authorship. In her autobiography, Teresa de Jesús María articulates a body with organs,<sup>87</sup> complete and defiant. However,

85 I develop further this general remark in Julia Lewandowska, "*I była matką Dziewicy Maryi i babką Boga i człowieka: kobiece genealogie w interpretacjach źródeł wiary*," *Teksty Drukie* 6 (2018): 31–53.

86 Teresa de Jesús María, "Comentarios," 127.

87 Thus, opposed to the projections of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's "body without organs," cf. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Œdipus* (London – New York: Continuum, 2004). This interesting thread would require development that goes far beyond the scope of the article.

unlike in the text of the *Vida* of Teresa de Ávila, where mystical narration was central, it seems to have primarily performed a role of justifying the writing of the texts analyzed here. The mysticism of the nun from Toledo was highly symbolic and cataphatic, just like, we could say, the experience of her body. After one of her mystical raptures, Teresa said: "I realized that here was nothing left of me, nothing of mine, except for the body."<sup>88</sup> Yet that body, so ecstatically and painfully present, possessed enough potency to perform writing.

## Abstract

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**Julia Lewandowska**

UNIVERSITY OF WARSAW

*"Am I That Body?": Mystical Bodies and Polyphonic Bodies in the Early Modern Nuns' Spiritual Autobiographies*

The article argues that *argumentum ad experientiam* used by the female religious writers of early modernity within the frame of spiritual autobiographies allowed them to theorize their own corporality beyond the canonical gaze on the female body. The mystics, martyrs, nuns, and pious women referred to the extreme configuration of their materiality as a mean to open up, through pain but also joy of ecstatic experience, the potentiality of their agency and symbolic authority. With this in mind, the article attempts to demonstrate that pronouncing a discourse "about" the body – about the body as a literary theme and subject matter – and "from" the body – from the experience of the body – could grant the Spanish Carmelite nun Teresa de Jesús María (1592–1642), an author of spiritual autobiography entitled "Treatise of a brief relation of the life of a Barefoot Carmelite nun, as told by herself," the possibility of strategical usage of her own materiality to seek recognition for her authorship and theological authority.

## Keywords

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spiritual autobiography; mysticism; early modern nuns; rhetoric of body-text; affect in religious experience

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88 Teresa de Jesús María, "Breve relación," 42: "Entonces dióseme a entender que ya no había quedado cosa mía, si no era el cuerpo."



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Magdalena Ożarska

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## Frances Burney Gazes at Animals. Or Is It Women? Evidence from Her Life Writing

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DOI: 10.18318/td.2020.en.1.4 | ORCID: 0000-0001-8695-7513

Animals are born, are sentient and are mortal. In these things they resemble man. In their superficial anatomy – less in their deep anatomy – in their habits, in their time, in their physical capacities, they differ from man. They are both like and unlike.<sup>1</sup>

**A**nimals are both like and unlike men and, even more so, like and unlike women. In her journals and letters spanning her life since early adolescence until almost her death, English novelist and life writer Frances Burney<sup>2</sup> used the phrase “old cat” several times in its ancient figurative sense of “a spiteful or backbiting woman.”<sup>3</sup> One of her earliest uses of the expression comes from the year

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### Magdalena

**Ożarska** – PhD, is Associate Professor at Jan Kochanowski University in Kielce, Poland. Her research interests include eighteenth- and nineteenth-century English and Polish women's self writing, human-animal studies, critical plant studies, and food studies.

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- 1 John Berger, *About Looking* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 2.
  - 2 Frances (Fanny) d'Arblay née Burney (1752–1840) is considered a predecessor and inspiration for Jane Austen (1775–1817). She authored four novels: *Evelina, or a Young Lady's Entrance into the World* (1778), *Cecilia, or Memoirs of an Heiress* (1782), *Camilla, or a Picture of Youth* (1796), and *The Wanderer, or the Female Difficulties* (1814). In her novels, she tackles the problems faced by contemporary women in a patriarchal society.
  - 3 *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press; Rotterdam: AND Software BV, 1992) 1.02, CD-ROM.

1769, when the novelist-to-be was only seventeen years old. It is found in her account of a conversation which she had with the eccentric poet Christopher Smart, frequently quoted for the gallant gift of a fresh rose in September:

[? Mr. Smart said that he knew not if the] <horr>id old Cat – as he once politely called his wife, <be> dead yet or not. [...] She had really used him uncommonly ill, even <cruel>ly – nevertheless, it is extremely shocking to hear him mention a Wife in so unfeeling a manner. & yet, the genius, talents & great merit as is rather so generally allowed to Mr. Smart, incline me very much to believe his provocation authorizes his hatred – if, after all, any thing can.

He presented me with a Rose, which is uncommon in London at this time of the year – “It was given me, said he, by a fair lady – though not so fair as you!” (I E: 91)<sup>4</sup>

Young Burney is understandably appalled at the stark contrast between the ways in which Smart’s wife and herself are referred to. Yet her own disparaging use of generic names of an animal species, applied to a representative of her own gender, while not unusual in her day, soon gives way to individualized and personalized expressions of sympathy and fondness for a number of pets<sup>5</sup> which she was to bond with over her long lifespan.

4 Quotations from Frances Burney’s journals come from: Fanny Burney, *The Journals and Letters of Fanny Burney*, ed. Joyce Hemlow et al., 12 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972–1984) and will be denoted by volume and page numbers only. Quotations from Frances Burney’s early journals come from: Fanny Burney, *The Early Journals and Letters of Fanny Burney*, eds. Lars E. Troide and Stewart J. Cooke, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press; New York: Oxford University Press, 1987–1994). The Roman numerals denote volume numbers, with the letter “E” for “Early,” followed by the page number. In these editions, angular brackets denote uncertain readings, while square brackets denote text or information supplied by the editors.

5 The pethood of the dogs commemorated in Burney’s journals leaves no doubt. Human and animal studies (HAS) scholars list several conditions to be met in order for an animal to be classed as a pet, i.e., a non-human companion. As opposed to “meat” or, more generally speaking, “food” animals, pets are socially constructed in a way that underscores their relationship to humans. Leslie Irvine, “Pampered or Enslaved? The Moral Dilemmas of Pets,” *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy* 24 (2004): 5–17, accessed March 19, 2018, doi: 10.1108/01443330410790740. They must live in human homes, even though the term “home” may occasionally be extended to backyards or farm buildings. One of the most important aspects of being a pet is having a name: “one cannot be a pet and not have a name. Naming an animal incorporates him or her into the human social world and allows us to use their name as a term of address and a term of reference. We can speak to them as we do to our family and friends, and we can speak about them as we do about others that are important to us.” Margo DeMello, *Animals and Society: An Introduction to Human-Animal Studies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 148–149.

Burney's story of gazing at, and relating to, several non-human creatures is by all means typical of the period. She may indeed be viewed as a follower of contemporary trends in that respect, given that pet keeping was a relatively new phenomenon in the eighteenth century. As such, it continued to generate much public debate, particularly on issues of personal and social moral integrity and overall humanity,<sup>6</sup> not unlike another contemporary controversy – that which concerned slave-owning.<sup>7</sup> Just as it may be argued that “[Jane] Austen’s novels resonate with late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century discourses about animals as thinking, feeling beings and with discourses which connect the animal question to abolitionism and feminism,”<sup>8</sup> the same can be said for much of Frances Burney’s life writing. To her, the status of animals approximates the status of women, at times to the point of animals being substitutes for women in Burney’s autobiographical discourse.

Only a year after the above exchange with Christopher Smart, Frances Burney moves towards increasing compassion for non-human companions, clearly visible from those diary entries which document her encounters with acquaintances’ or relatives’ animals. One example is her “visit to 5 sisters, 2 married & 3 single, who all Live together” (I E: 135) and have “with them a child, not 3 years old, Grandson to one of them, who is the Idol of them All” (I E: 135). In her signature manner, sharp-witted, and singularly proto-feminist, Burney declares that “the poor child [bel]ongs to a sex sufficiently prone to cruelty: [is i]t for women thus early to encourage it?” (I E: 135). This question is prompted by the fact that:

They permit him to [a]muse himself at pleasure with all Insects – [F]lys, Butterflies – poor little Animals – the torture [he] gav[e] to one of the last really turned me so [sic]k <that> I could not recover myself the whole [?eve]ning – <Is not> humanity disgraced by this [bar]barity to the dumb creation? (I E: 135)

These words, written by Burney in 1770, seem to anticipate a more pronounced tendency among British women thinkers which did not become prominent until the 1790s. In 1790, Catharine Macaulay’s *Letters on Education*

6 Ingrid H. Tague, *Animal Companions: Pets and Social Change in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2015).

7 Theresa Braunschneider, “The Lady and the Lapdog. Mixed Ethnicity in Constantinople, Fashionable Pets in Britain” in *Humans and Other Animals in Eighteenth-Century British Culture: Representation, Hybridity, Ethics*, ed. Frank Palmeri (Aldershot, Hampshire; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006), 48.

8 Barbara K. Seeber, *Jane Austen and Animals* (Farnham, Surrey; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2013), 18.

appeared, followed in 1792 by Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Both texts advocated not only the gender equality, but also postulated putting an end to animal abuse.<sup>9</sup> As Barbara Seeber has it:

For Macaulay and Wollstonecraft, what came to be termed the Woman Question was connected to the Animal Question. Their arguments for gender equality and co-education, while emphasizing women's rational capacity, also proposed better treatment of animals. They recognized that the way animals were treated within patriarchy was connected to the way women were treated; to protest the oppression of women was to protest the other.<sup>10</sup>

While treatises on extremes such as vegetarianism, promoting animal emancipation and abolishing contemporary anthropocentrism, like George Nicholson's *On the Primeval Diet of Man: Arguments in Favour of Vegetable Food. On Man's Conduct to Animals* (1801), were yet to be written, it was Catherine Macaulay who championed early childhood education including the keeping of pets so that pupils can be "cured of prejudices founded on ignorance, and in the vanity and conceit of man."<sup>11</sup> A similar plea was raised by Wollstonecraft who believed that "humanity to animals should be particularly inculcated as a part of national education" because "habitual cruelty is first taught at school, where it is one of the rare sports of the boys to torment the miserable brutes that fall in their way. The transition, as they grow up, from barbarity to brutes to domestic tyranny over wives, children, and servants, is very easy."<sup>12</sup>

Burney early situated herself as a sympathizer with, and defender of, what we would today call animal rights, mainly on account of her self-declared sensibility, or perhaps due to a sense of affinity with non-human beings – subordinated, like women, to male humans. Over the many following years of journaling and corresponding, she would record numerous instances of her engaging with companion animals, mainly dogs. One such example comes from her *Teignmouth Journal* (August–September 1773), composed when Burney was staying at the household of her recently married stepsister Maria

9 For an in-depth discussion of these issues, see Adela Ramos, "Species Thinking: Animals, Women, and Literary Tropes in Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*" *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 37 (2018): 41–66, accessed June 2, 2018, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1353/tsw.2018.0002>.

10 Seeber, *Jane Austen*, 25.

11 Catharine Macaulay, *Letters on Education* (London: C. Dilly, 1790), 125.

12 Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Man; A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, An Historical View of the French Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 258.

Allen and the latter's husband, Martin Rishton. In one of her regular journal-letters to her sister Susanna, Burney writes:

The rest of our Family, consists of 4 Dogs, who are prodigious favourites: two of them are spaniels, Vigo & Trump, & who are very fine ones; the third is a New-foundland Dog, Excellent for Diving in the Water, & which always goes with Mr Rishton to swim or Bathe: – he is Named Ting Mouth: the fourth is most particularly for Mrs Rishton, it is called Romeo, & is a very faithful old Dog, – [...] Mr. R. gave 3 guineas for him. (I E: 279)

Burney's journal editors comment on her later mention of Romeo being a "Brown Pomeranian," an act praiseworthy in itself as an apparent attempt at narrative precision: even the color of the dog's hair matters to the diarist. The editors then proceed to say that Burney "was very fond of her animals, but the space she devotes to them in her letters reveals the poverty of her social life in the country" (I E: 279). Given that the complete edition of Burney's journals appeared between 1972 and 1994, their editors offer a predominantly pre-animal-turn view, and – by today's standards – not an entirely apt observation. In the countryside, admittedly, Burney might not find herself in a whirlwind of cultural and intellectual activity she had grown accustomed to in the city. Yet this does not necessarily mean that animals were to her mere substitutes for lacking human companionship, and their adventures or exploits – for those experienced by her human acquaintances, the celebrities she used to socialize with at her father's London home. In fact, Burney's reference to the four dogs as "the rest of our Family" sounds strikingly modern.

Burney's discomfort at a prospect of witnessing animal suffering is stressed repeatedly. More than that, she presents herself as deeply shaken when merely reporting on incidents involving violence against animals. In what appears a succinct account of objectively summarized incidents, Burney's choice of strong punctuation – the exclamation mark after the phrase "Romeo's Leg" – says it all:

Mr Rishton came Home in great haste, & perturbation; &, calling his Wife, told her that [h]e had broke Romeo's Leg! – this was occasioned by the [p]oor Dog's running after sheep, for which he has often been, in vain, very severely beat: but now, he & one of the spaniels got a poor sheep quite down, & began to tear her to Pieces: Mr R. rode up to them, & catching Romeo first, by the Leg, to prevent his biting, began to flog him violently, till he found that by the Twist, he had broke his Leg short off. – he was beyond measure concerned, & gave a man a Crown to carry him Home gently in his Arms: & the next morning he had a surgeon to set the poor animal's Leg. (I E: 285)

Even this act of medical assistance is too much for Burney to witness, and – with a female companion – she takes a long walk that morning. However, it must be noted that the calling in of a surgeon to attend to an injured dog is not very remarkable in the 1770s – as opposed to some six decades earlier, when Joseph Addison mocked a lady who sought the services of a physician to treat her dog.<sup>13</sup>

Nonetheless, Mr. Rishton comes across as a follower of René Descartes who believed animals to be automaton; that is, machines incapable of feeling pain or any kind of suffering for that matter. Burney, in contrast, represents herself as a progressive animal lover, who – in the manner of Richard Dean's *An Essay on the Future Life of Brutes. Introduced with Observations upon Evil, its Nature and Origin* (1768) – sets out to challenge “the Absurdity of the Doctrine, which teaches that Brutes are unintelligent Machines” by declaring that “dumb Animals are liable to Infelicity as well as Men: [...] they have their Pains and Sicknesses, suffer many Sorrows from internal Disorders, and many Pangs from external Injuries, and finally languish, decay, and die as he himself does.”<sup>14</sup> Another such petitioner for animal rights was Thomas Young (1772–1835), whose *An Essay on Humanity to Animals* (1798) claims that “animals are endued with a capability of perceiving pleasure and pain.”<sup>15</sup> No records exist, however, to prove that Burney actually read, or was otherwise familiar with, either of these two texts.

Another day at Teignmouth, following a successful fishing expedition, “a most delightful Walk up a high Hill, from whence the Prospects both by sea & Land, are inconceivably beautiful” (I E: 295), finds Burney unexpectedly faced with another dramatic incident in which one of the hosts' dogs is involved:

We had the 3 Dogs with us: poor Romeo is still Confined, & being an old Dog, I fear will never recover: we returned by the same Boat: the Dogs have always swum across – & they Jump'd into the Water as usual – but the Tide was very high; – & we were obliged to go a quarter of a mile about, before we could Land: Mr Rishton hallowed to the Dogs, & whistled, all the Way, to encourage them. – however, the Current was so strong at the Point where we Landed, that they could not stem it: – Mrs Western, R. & myself Walked Home, & left the Gentlemen to watch the Dogs – Ting Mouth, [the] Newfoundland Dog, [af]ter a hard struggle, by his excellence in swimming, at length got safe on shore: Trump, who is a ver<y c>unning Brute,

13 *The Tatler*, January 17, 1710, qtd. in Tague, *Animal Companions*, 179.

14 Qtd. in Seeber, *Jane Austen*, 17.

15 Qtd. in *ibid.*, 19.

found out a shorter Cut, & arrived safe; – his fellow Spaniel, Vigo, they could see nothing of – Mr Rishton sent after him – but he did not appear all night – & the next morning, we found that he was Drowned! This has been a great concern to us all – the Brace of spaniels cost Mr. R. 5 guineas.

The last sentence sounds grossly incongruous: is the narrator's concern really measured in Mr. R.'s guineas? If the final clause is taken as a summary of Mr. Rishton's utterance, the preceding one takes on new meaning: "a great concern" can be interpreted as irony on the part of the diarist; as a general statement of the commotion caused in the household due to the unfortunate accident; or – not entirely improbable – a projection of the diarist's own feelings onto the remaining members of the household. Equally feasible is the possibility that the concern was mainly Mr. Rishton's, lamenting the price paid for the pair of spaniels. After this incident, tellingly, the diarist is much less prone to count the dogs around her – as if that activity had come to signify a bad omen.

One more similar situation occurs when Burney is staying at the Thrales' household a few years later in 1779. She once again thoughtlessly indulges in counting her hosts' dogs, one of which faces punishment for scaring the sheep:

We then all Walked out, & had a very delightful stroll; but, in returning, one of the Dogs (we have 12, I believe, belonging to the House) was detected pursuing the sheep on the Common, – Miss Thrale sent one of the men after him, & he was siezed to be punished; – the poor Creatures Cries were so dreadful, that I took to my Feet, & ran away with the utmost swiftness in my power to the House, – but, to my great amazement, the tender S.S. stayed to look on during the whipping (III E: 307)

"The tender S.S." is another lady visitor to the Thrales' household, a Miss Sophie Streatfeild alias Streatfield, whose reputation rests on her ability to shed tears at will: "The Discourse turning, I know not how, upon Miss Streatfield's Tears, Mrs. Thrale said »Ay, I made her Cry once for Miss Burney as pretty as could be; – but nobody does cry so pretty as the S.S. – I'm sure when she cried for Seward, I never saw her look half so lovely«" (III E: 315). Apparently, this deliberate shedding of tears does not equal genuine compassion. Without shedding a tear, in contrast, Burney is found "guilty of affectation" when leaving the place before any punishment is inflicted on the non-human offender. Teasingly, Burney is offered "hartshorn," that is, smelling salts, after she admits that she "saw no necessity for giving myself pain officiously"; that is, watching the spectacle unduly (III E: 307–308). Upon which, her interlocutor – a "Captain Fuller" bursts out into a tirade

against “Ladies [who] should run away from all disagreeable sights; [...] if they are totally unused to them, whenever any accident happens, they are not only helpless, but worse, for they scream & rant, & get out of the way, when, if they were not so frightened, they might be of some service” (III E: 308). It is curious indeed that he should say that: after all, writers such as Dr. John Gregory in *A Father's Legacy to His Daughters* (1761) and Jean-Jacques Rousseau in his *Émile, or Treatise on Education* (1762) openly advocated that the fair sex be kept in a state of perpetual childhood, considered the natural state for women.

As we have seen, Burney's presentation of working dogs in their homely surroundings of a countryside household is largely realistic, while not devoid of evidence of the diarist's emotional responses to the animals' predicaments. But when Burney turns her attention towards the then fashionable lapdogs, she can hardly contain her bemusement and sarcasm, consistent with contemporary representations of lapdogs and their owners. One such example, Burney's 1775 lapdog anecdote, concerns Caterina Gabrielli (1730–1796), an Italian opera singer, who was very famous in London at the time:

I forget whether I told you of Gabrielli's Train as she quits the Opera House of a Saturday Night? Take it now, however, as Lady Edgumbe told it.

“First goes a running Foot man; then the sister, then the Gabrielli; then a page to hold up her Train; then a Foot man; & then a man out of Livery, with her Lap dog in her muff!”

“But, added Lord Edgumbe, to Lord Ashm – “last Night the Dog was Carried – only think how horrid! – by a woman, in a Handkerchief, instead of a Gentleman in his Hat! Now, my Lord, was not that enough to put any singer out of humour?” (II E: 184–188)

Tague has observed that “the idea of the servile and useless lapdog – the antithesis of a useful working dog – dominated much contemporary discourse around pet keeping, drawing not on the metaphor of happy imprisonment but on the corrupting effects of both civilization and slavery.”<sup>16</sup> It is then no surprise, Tague argues, that excessive affection lavished on this particular type of pet animals was consistently ridiculed as it embodied and magnified contemporary anxieties about luxury, fashion, and moral obligation to assist the less privileged. Finding justification for maintaining apparently useless lapdogs was problematic, and women, particularly unmarried ones, who showered their affection on these creatures were mocked and condemned for what was deemed a blatant waste. Their failure to stick to time-honored

<sup>16</sup> Tague, *Animal Companions*, 90.



boundaries between humans and non-humans was viewed as a transgression against social norms.<sup>17</sup>

It is two decades later that this ambivalent stance of conspicuous sensitivity and silly prattle with ironic undertones is dropped, and Burney – now Madame d'Arblay, settled with her own family and the mistress of her own household, continues to take note of domestic animals that come her way. In 1797, a mention is made of a small dog being sent as a gift to her young son (III: 324). Giving pets as gifts was not unusual: for instance, as testified to by Horace Walpole's correspondence.<sup>18</sup> Unsurprisingly, in the same year, in a letter to her sister Susanna Phillips, Burney mentions her husband's bringing

home a Dog, a young thing, [...] which had hit his fancy at Ewell, where he had been visiting M. Bourdois, & that we should educate for our new House Guard. It is a barbette, &, as it was not perfectly precise in cleanliness, it was destined to a Kitchen residence till it should be trained for the Parlour. (IV: 49)

This remark is symptomatic of late eighteenth-century attitudes towards pets, who were becoming "as much a spatial phenomenon as an emotional one."<sup>19</sup> Pets were increasingly being allowed into the home, this access coming to represent their privileged status and a foolproof sign of liberty, even if access was limited to certain chambers. Barbets are a rare French breed of gun dogs, about 50cm tall. The said specimen goes by the name of Muff, and an account follows of how Monsieur d'Arblay takes to washing the dog, "once white, but now of Jetty blackness," in "a certain Lake [...] nearly in front of our Bookham habitation, not very remarkable for its lucid purity, & there immersed poor Muff, & stood rubbing him Curl by Curl, till each particular one was completely bathed" (IV: 50). When d'Arblay is away the following January, she conscientiously reports to him on the conduct and wellbeing of their pets: "Muff sends his duty. He barks & behaves well. [...] & Puss has stolen some milk, & is in disgrace" (IV: 62). Afterwards, neither Muff – nor, for that matter, Puss – are heard of any more.

With the passing of time and with the d'Arblays growing more and more deeply into the rural soil, and with their increasingly farming lifestyle, their domestic animals acquire new significance. When Mme d'Arblay writes to her husband in October 1801, she shares with him the following news:

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 94–116.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 22.

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

I must not, I know, omit certain domestic details: your friends the Pigs are perfectly well; [...] & the Cat, & the Kitten, & the Rabbits, are all in good health – but! – Bully has again eloped! Nanny forgot his chain one morning, & off he marched, in search of some of his favorite fair females. A Dog of greater gallantry never existed. (V: 27)

Bully, we are told, is d'Arblay's new canine favorite.<sup>20</sup> Afterwards, Bully – like Muff before him – is never mentioned again. The reader is left wondering what became of these animals: did they run away, were they killed in some accident, or was it simply that the diarist lost her interest in them?

The dearest animal companion of Frances Burney d'Arblay is, undoubtedly, Diane, a small female dog of unspecified breed; the only one of the dogs immortalized by the writer by having been given a human name.<sup>21</sup> Of all the animals, Diane features in Burney's diaries most prominently, becoming a full-fledged character in Burney's *Ilfracombe Journal* (1817). This text narrates, in a dramatized manner, the diarist's hunt for gemstones in a cavern formed by the sea at the Ilfracombe beach, and her subsequent failure to leave the cavern due to the tidal wave. Exaggeratedly, Burney describes her alleged struggle with the elements: climbing as high as possible despite very untoward circumstances, and her resulting confinement within the cavern until her rescue comes in the form of her anxious son and a search party.<sup>22</sup> Significantly, as she enters the fateful cavern, the narrator is accompanied only by her female dog Diane. Preoccupied with her search for the stones, she does not notice the first warning sign of the impending danger: the visibly distressed dog pulling at her clothes. In the meantime, the water has risen too high for her to leave the cavern, and billows make it necessary to seek a higher spot in which to wait for the water to abate.

When her desperate endeavors to reach a drier place succeed after an agony of blood and tears, the reader learns that all that time, while claiming to be making her way around on all fours, losing her footwear in the process,

20 According to the *OED*, in the mid-eighteenth century, "bully" was a term of endearment similar to today's "sweetheart" or "darling."

21 For a discussion of eighteenth-century English pets' names from the evidence of pet elegies and epitaphs, see Ingrid H. Tague, "Dead Pets: Satire and Sentiment in British Elegies and Epitaphs for Animals," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 41 (2008): 289–306.

22 For the discrepancies between Burney's *Ilfracombe Journal* and other people's version of events, see Magdalena Ożarska, "Frances Burney's *Ilfracombe Journal*: An Old Wife's Tale?," in *From Queen Anne to Queen Victoria: Readings in 18th and 19th Century British Literature and Culture*, eds. Grażyna Bystydzieńska and Emma Harris (Warszawa: Ośrodek Studiów Brytyjskich Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2014), 421–428.

bruising her hands and knees, the narrator has been carrying not only her bag full of geological curiosities,<sup>23</sup> but also her umbrella, which she used to retrieve a lost shoe and assist the sinking Diane. With such imagery, Burney – “a proper, decorous heroine in ribboned shoes and parasol, complete with lapdog”<sup>24</sup> – herself makes a humorous sight, almost like the one which she herself had painted of the Italian opera singer before.

The pre-Ilfracombe mentions of Diane are trivial, but affectionate: “Diane behaved extremely well” (X: 535); “DIANE is well, et très Gentille” (X: 549); “DIANE est bien, et charmante” (X: 553); “I have a great deal to tell you of Diane – all est bien” (X: 572); or “Diane is daily more aimable” (X: 579). Diane’s praise is at its most complete in the following passage written by the diarist to her absent husband:

She is the most docile, intelligent, & winning little animal I ever knew, & delicately clean, discreet, & observant. She never attempts to enter our Chambers, which are imperiously forbidden her: & as we never feed her at our Table, she torments neither us nor herself by any importunity, but patiently waits for her own service. I could not withhold any longer this just éloge of your little Favourite – whom your absence, & the consciousness of your partiality, has now made mine. And she has attached herself to me in return in a manner almost touching. (X: 610)

Good manners, then, are what singles out a properly anthropomorphized pet dog from hordes of others. Virtues such as delicacy, cleanliness, discretion, patience, and unobtrusiveness, appreciated in human females, are likewise expected of dogs, if the latter are to be allowed to access a human household’s privacy. In fact, the entire Ilfracombe adventure is emblematic of Burney’s views on the female condition, which she is so wont to express in her fictional writings.

At the end of the Ilfracombe episode, Burney announces that “Diane here was far more to be pitied than myself; & I regretted she could not understand my lingo, as else, like the shipwrecked Mariners, I would have sought to wile away the pangs of famine by telling her some story” (X: 705). With this, there is no doubt as to Diane’s anthropomorphization: the only feature that disrupts the human-animal communication is the failure of language.<sup>25</sup> When the final

23 That much is not unfeasible, as bags of the reticule (a.k.a. ridicule) type, which the diarist mentions, were worn on top of the skirt.

24 Julia Epstein, *The Iron Pen: Frances Burney and the Politics of Women’s Writing* (Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 37.

25 Margo DeMello, *Animals and Society: An Introduction to Human-Animal Studies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 155–156.

rescue comes, Diane “justly claim[s] a share in our carresses as well as in our happiness” (X: 713). With this, the keeping of Diane as pet becomes fully justified: Diane’s conduct does justice to the claim that even the seemingly useless lapdogs could be assessed through the lens of utility and that they could find suitable ways to serve.<sup>26</sup>

Even though Diane is a female dog, which is repeatedly stressed from the earliest accounts of Burney’s relationship with her dog, on one occasion (in September 1821, when Burney goes to see a lawyer about some financial matter) Diane is, bizarrely, referred to as a gentleman, and the novelist herself – as his lady:

The moment I reached the stair case, which my Lawyer was already descending, out rushed Diane, bursting from the vainly controlling hands of Ramsay, who had in charge to keep her out of the way. Delighted to find me safe, in a strange place, where she had been, Ramsay says, in deep dismay at the separation, she now would not quit me. I therefore told Ramsay to come also, & down we all three followed Master Soliciter. – At the foot of the stair case, he had the courtesie to stop for me, & from thence to walk by my side, my rustic Damsel & my Canine Esquire obsequiously keeping behind – except that the latter, when not called to order by the Damsel, chose to Caper friskily round h i s mistress, or Bark. (XI: 269; emphasis mine)

Ramsay is the female servant’s surname, while “my Canine Esquire” refers to Diane, thus defining her role as the diarist’s page or armor bearer, an appellation traditionally applied to “a young man of gentle birth, who as an attendant aspirant to knighthood, attended upon a knight, carried his shield and rendered him other services.”<sup>27</sup> An interesting instance of gender switching in its own right.

In conclusion, let me review Frances Burney’s lifelong relationship with animals. Should we see her as a predecessor of our contemporary “dog mummy” or rather as an early defender of animals’ and women’s rights? The latter alternative might seem tempting, after analysis of some of the already discussed selections from her journal. But what do we do with passages like the following (dated 1817)?

The maxims & manners of the day, which uphold not alone the Rights of Man, & the Rights of Woman, but the Rights of Children – & will, ere long, in all

26 Cf. Tague, *Animal Companions*, 150.

27 OED.

probability, include the Rights of Cats, Dogs, & Mice – &c in so much, that Fish, Meat, & Cheese, will soon be regarded as common property, to whoever can first give them a claw (IX: 305).

In a footnote to this passage, Burney's journal editors explain that she "was perhaps unaware that *The Rights of Man* (pt. 1, 1791; pt. 2, 1792) by Thomas Paine (1737–1809) had evoked not only *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) by Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–1797) but also *A Vindication of the Rights of Brutes* (1792) by Thomas Taylor (1758–1835), the Platonist."<sup>28</sup> Ingrid Tague demonstrates that Taylor's mock treatise was indeed inspired by the sense that animal rights in itself were a ridiculous notion.<sup>29</sup> So, had Burney entirely dispensed with her youthful sensibility by 1817? Was she still the same person who, in her third novel *Camilla* (1796), took up the subject of cruelty to animals in connection to women's abuse?<sup>30</sup> Or the sensitive individual keen to relate stories of animals who were victimized – beaten or otherwise abused – to the merriment of gentlemen, in a way similar to that in which she may have felt women were treated? This would communicate a clearly critical view of the workings of a male-dominated society in which Burney happened to live. It is enough to remember the almost absolute power her father exerted over her in her youth, threatening for instance to expose her private writings in a marketplace (I E: 19–22), or how intimidated she felt when producing her first novel, *Evelina* (1778), in secret – writing by night, in disguised hand, so that her father would not discover what she was up to (II E: 231–232)? Or how, metaphorically, she referred to herself as Nobody (I E: 1–2), or her father's "spawn" (I E: 41) – the latter metaphor clearly inspired by the animal kingdom. All that is hardly surprising. After all,

historically, women, animals, and children have legally been defined as the property of males. [...] Reducing women and nonhumans to something less than civilized men of intellect has allowed men to exploit women, nonhuman animals, and nature. Objectification, ridicule, and control of reproduction are all linked

28 Burney, *Journals and Letters*, eds. Joyce Hemlow et al., 306.

29 Tague, *Animal Companions*, 266.

30 This novel features a keeper of trained monkeys and bullfinches who perform proficiently. When asked about his training methods, the man replies that "everything's the better for a little beating, as I tells my wife." Frances Burney, *Camilla or A Picture of Youth*, eds. Edward A. Bloom and Lillian D. Bloom (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 492. Seeber thus comments on this passage: "The parallel between the treatment of animals and women is made explicit, and the animal abuse sheds disturbing light on the heroine's painful education plot," Seeber, *Jane Austen*, 16.

to patriarchal denigration and exploitation of females – including human females – and nature.<sup>31</sup>

No wonder then that Burney feels particular affection for Diane and consistently treats her as a fully-fledged companion: at least she says so explicitly a number of times. Her previous encounters or relationships with dogs, even though the dogs meet pethood criteria, come across as somehow incomplete, lacking in true personal involvement. This is quite strange, given that Diane, despite her persistent anthropomorphization (whether as a mother figure or a page-boy) is after all a lapdog – the kind of a canine companion mercilessly ridiculed in eighteenth-century pamphlets.<sup>32</sup> “Because of women’s association with pets, and in particular with lap dogs, pets were seen as feminizing and symbolized women’s inferiority,”<sup>33</sup> but they were also viewed as emblems of women’s conspicuous consumption, useless but decorative items, or extravagant luxury goods.<sup>34</sup>

Yet Burney’s is not a satirical presentation, just as Lady Montagu’s 1718 brief discussion of her lapdog Diana is not.<sup>35</sup> Burney’s Diane is a true member of the family, given how often she is mentioned in Burney’s letters to her husband, in which she tells him that Diane is well or *charmante* as usual. The animal companion grows in importance as the human diarist ages, becomes widowed, and then increasingly estranged from her son. Diane thus comes to replace the decreasingly satisfactory relationships with the human world, which only confirms her crossing of the boundary between human and non-human species. At the same time, not only Diane but several other animals immortalized in Burney’s journals serve to epitomize the female condition, even if the novelist herself never openly approves of anything which comes close to “a vindication of the rights of women.” Yet it must be remembered that, in one way or another, each of her four novels tackles selected aspects of womanhood at the turn of the nineteenth century. In this sense, in her life

31 *Sister Species: Women, Animals and Social Justice*, ed. Lisa Kemmerer (Urbana, Chicago and Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2011), 16.

32 Braunschneider, “The Lady,” 31–48; Tague, *Animal Companions*, 91–137.

33 DeMello, *Animals and Society*, 152.

34 Braunschneider, “The Lady,” 31–48. Interestingly, as Braunschneider points out, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu had a lapdog called Diana, but the only piece of evidence of Burney’s reading Montagu (1815) concerns Montagu’s *Collected Letters* (Paris, 1800), and not *Turkish Embassy Letters* (1763) where her pet is actually mentioned. So, this is not evidence to suggest that Burney followed Montagu in the choice of her pet’s name.

35 Braunschneider, “The Lady,” 38.

writing, Burney relies on animals to substitute for women – something she does not do in her fictional writings.

## Abstract

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**Magdalena Ożarska**

JAN KOCHANOWSKI UNIVERSITY IN KIELCE

*Frances Burney Gazes at Animals. Or Is It Women? Evidence from Her Life Writing*

In her journals and letters spanning her life since early adolescence until almost her death, novelist Frances Burney (1752–1840) liked to use the phrase “old cat” in its ancient figurative sense of “a spiteful or backbiting woman” (OED). One of her earliest uses of this expression comes from the year 1769, when the future novelist was seventeen years old. Yet this tendency towards disparaging use of a generic name of an animal species soon gives way to personalized expressions of sympathy and fondness for a number of pet dogs with whom she was to bond in her long lifespan. Burney’s story of gazing at and relating to non-human creatures appears typical of the period in that it is indicative of her stance on the contemporary condition of English women. She follows contemporary trends in that respect, given that pet keeping was a relatively new eighteenth-century phenomenon. As such, it continued to generate much public debate concerning personal as well as social morality, integrity, and overall individual humanity (Tague 2015). Significantly, Burney’s interest lies primarily in abused and female animals. The former are observed and sympathized with in her youth; the latter are those to whom she forms the strongest, anthropomorphizing, attachments in her middle age and after. In this paper, I look at how the novelist’s life writing comments on the patriarchal society in which she lived, despite the fact that her autobiographical discourse avoids straightforward discussion of the position of women, instead providing ample discussion of animals – a topic more acceptable in eighteenth-century England.

## Keywords

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animal studies, Frances Burney, journals, eighteenth-century women

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Nataliia Voloshkova

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## Aspiring to Freedom: Mary Hamilton's Life Writing

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In one of many diaries produced by Mary Hamilton, later Dickenson (1756–1816) there is a passage copied from *The History of Ned Evans*, written by her distant relative Elizabeth Hervey:

He who runs in debt, parts with just so much of his liberty and peace of mind as he borrows, & must ever feel inferior to his creditor till he is paid: whereas he who owes nothing is always independent, &, tho[ugh] ever so poor, must feel and rejoice. His[to]ry Ned Evans.<sup>1</sup>

The novel *Ned Evans* was anonymously published by Harvey in 1796, the year when Mary Hamilton celebrated her fortieth anniversary. The passage bears no diarist's comment and is among a host of other literary quotes and sayings scattered throughout the diary. Why did the passage on liberty and benefits of living debt-free draw the attention of a woman who was at that time happily married to a country gentleman, had a daughter and was living a quiet life in the countryside? The answer is found

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**Nataliia Voloshkova** is an Assistant Professor in the Department of English Philology at the Dragomanov National Pedagogical University in Kyiv. She holds a PhD in History from the Donetsk National University. She has published on the Bluestocking circle and women's travel writing.

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<sup>1</sup> DDX/274/18, Dickenson Family of Birch Hall Papers, Lancashire Archives, Preston (cited subsequently as DDX/).



in Hamilton's diaries penned in the early 1780s when she was single and resided in Clarges Street in London. That was the period in Mary Hamilton's life when she fully engaged in the cosmopolitan salon life and befriended a galaxy of distinguished male and female intellectuals of the day,<sup>2</sup> maintained voluminous correspondence, and produced her diaries. That was the period in her life when she realized to what extent the word "liberty" was important to her and how it was possible to achieve personal freedom and independence.

This article focuses on life writing of Mary Hamilton, who belonged to a second generation of the Bluestockings, a group of eighteenth-century women, whose "public personae were built around intellectual accomplishment, female friendship, piety and social responsibility."<sup>3</sup> In her diaries, partially published to this day,<sup>4</sup> Hamilton recorded the intellectual and cultural life in late Georgian London in much detail. Apart from being a valuable historical source on salon sociability and intellectual pursuits of the Bluestockings, Hamilton's life writing is illustrative of how an accomplished young woman managed to articulate space for personal freedom and asserted her right to make a choice within the constraints of a patriarchal society. Hamilton's diaries also suggest that women intellectuals associated with the Bluestocking community preferred not to scandalize society but rather orchestrate public opinion in subtle ways. In doing so, they contributed to the process of modifying society's views on women's ability to make decisions and act independently, and they acted not only through print and conversation but through manuscript exchange as well.

### **"Employ'd Myself in Writing:" Hamilton's Diary-writing and Diary-exchanging Practices**

In her monograph *British Women's Life Writing, 1760–1840: Friendship, Community, and Collaboration*, Amy Culley has argued that eighteenth-century women envisaged their texts as an "extension of personal encounters and relationships," and such a perception helped "to create a sociable model

2 For Hamilton's friendship with Horace Walpole see Nataliia Voloshkova, "»My Friend Mr. H. Walpole« Mary Hamilton, Horace Walpole and the Art of Conversation," *Image [E] Narrative* 3 (2017): 94–106, accessed 18 July 2019, <http://www.imageandnarrative.be/index.php/imagenarrative/article/view/1600/1261>.

3 Betty A. Schellenberg, "The Bluestockings and the Genealogy of the Modern Novel," *University of Toronto Quarterly* 4 (2010): 1023.

4 Excerpts from Hamilton's diaries appear in Elizabeth Anson and Florence Anson, eds., *Mary Hamilton, afterwards Mrs. John Dickenson, at Court and at Home, from Letters and Diaries, 1756 to 1816* (London: John Murray, 1925).

of living and writing.”<sup>5</sup> Indeed, diary-writing was an integral part of Mary Hamilton's life in the early 1780s, and the young woman's self-narration offers evidence of her writing practices in general and diary-writing habits in particular. She constantly represented herself as an active and intellectually curious woman who tried not to be idle: “I am so happy as never to feel time hang heavy when I am alone for I can always occupy myself,”<sup>6</sup> she noted. Hamilton employed every spare minute in either reading a book or writing in her diary, making records in her manuscript books or producing a “journal letter” addressed to one of her numerous correspondents. The young woman practiced diary-writing at home – in her boudoir or drawing-room; she made records while visiting her friends in their country houses. There was no fixed time for writing. Hamilton “scribbled” in the morning before breakfast, during the daytime, or in the evening when she preferred staying at home to being socially engaged. For example, in a diary entry of 24 July 1784, she documented her habit of diary-writing during frequent time-consuming hairdressing sessions:

Read an affecting Story in les Veilees du Chateau whilst my Hair was dressing [...] as I read always, my hair dressing is never lost time, I most commonly also take part of that time to scribble in my Diary.<sup>7</sup>

Hamilton's self-narration is also revealing of both “public” and “private” character of her diaries. Not intended for formal publication, they were produced with a readership in mind as her diaries contain elusive passages, hints, and occasional name omissions. On the other side, a number of repeated explanatory notes concerning her relations and friends which are found in them also prove a point.

Moreover, there is considerable evidence of diaries dissemination, as parts of them were sent by post to her female friends Anne Litchfield, Charlotte Gunning, Catherine Herries, Margaret Cavendish Bentinck (more known as the Duchess of Portland), as well as to her future husband John Dickenson and her relation Francis Napier. In some cases, the diary exchange operated in both directions. For example, Hamilton noted in her diary: “I wrote to my friend Miss Litchfield & sent my last weeks diary,” or “wrote to my friend Miss

5 Amy Culley, *British Women's Life Writing, 1760–1840: Friendship, Community, and Collaboration* (New York, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 10.

6 Diary entry, 15 Jan 1785, Mary Hamilton Papers, GB 133 HAM/2/15, John Rylands University Library, University of Manchester (cited subsequently as HAM/).

7 HAM/2/12.

L. sent her my diary expected to have rec[eive]d from her.”<sup>8</sup> Hamilton’s correspondents valued her diaries which often took the form of “journal letters.” The Duchess of Portland wrote: “Your journals are to me of infinite value continue my dear I beseech You.”<sup>9</sup> Catherine Herries also praised Hamilton’s pen and felt privileged to receive her “accounts”:

It is an Image of your head and heart [...] I thank you for ye account of ye disposition of your time; I can now follow you in your different Employments & love & admire you in every one – the pleasures of intellectual Improvement. [...] It is not in any words to express how much I feel touched & allow me to say honoured with the intire [*sic*] Confidence with which you open your heart.<sup>10</sup>

Mary Hamilton was not among those intellectual women of her era who shocked society by their works in print, *mésalliance* or clamorous love affairs as, for example, Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Robinson, Elizabeth Craven, or Hester Lynch Thrale Piozzi. Nevertheless, the diaries disclose Hamilton’s strong personality, her desire and ability to chart an independent course and make autonomous decisions concerning her career at court and money control practices, as well as her choice of friends and husband. The article shows how Hamilton responded to certain challenges she faced and proved to be active, persistent, and vocal in dealing with them.

### **“Enjoying my Liberty”: Leaving Royal Court**

Mary Hamilton belonged to an old aristocratic family who gave the country statesmen and military men, courtiers and scientists; her most distinguished relation was her uncle Sir William Hamilton, the renowned antiquarian, volcanologist, and the British envoy to Naples. Mary Hamilton was a woman intellectual in her own right.<sup>11</sup> She spent five years in the royal household as a governess, engaged in the royal daughters’ education.<sup>12</sup> During the “court” period the young woman made acquaintance with the Bluestocking hostesses

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 2/7.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 2/14.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 1/17/61.

<sup>11</sup> For further details of her life see Anson and Anson, eds., *Mary Hamilton*.

<sup>12</sup> For Hamilton’s service at court see Anson and Anson, eds., *Mary Hamilton*; Janice Hadlow, *The Strangest Family: The Private Lives of George III, Queen Charlotte and the Hanoverians* (London: William Collins, 2014), 264–271.

Elizabeth Vesey, Elizabeth Montagu, and Frances Boscawen. She became life-long friends with the renowned women associated with the Bluestocking coterie such as Elizabeth Carter, Hannah More, Mary Delany, Margaret Cavendish Bentinck.

An energetic and charismatic young woman whose service in the royal nursery was valued by the royal couple, Hamilton could have married a courtier and had a bright career at court if she had not decided to resign from the post. It should be emphasized that making such a voluntary decision – thinly veiled by the pretext of suffering from ill health – was a bold step meaning loss of the royal protection, steady income, and other benefits her position gave. In fact, in Georgian Britain, it was a radical solution for a single aristocratic woman without siblings, whose parents had died and whose financial situation was precarious. It required much diplomacy, persistence, and the strength of convincing arguments. Notwithstanding her family and friends' recommendations to refrain from resigning, Hamilton persisted and finally received royal permission to leave the post. After leaving court in 1782, the young woman flung herself into the lively intellectual life of the capital and her diaries spoke of the relief she felt being far from the royal palaces with the "formal dullness reigned"<sup>13</sup> there. Yet, after leaving the court she continued to maintain her friendships and warm relations with many courtiers. The young woman cherished her freedom, writing, for example, in 1783: "[I] spent a tranquil day not envying the fine folks at the [Queen's] Birth day but enjoying my liberty."<sup>14</sup> Or, in 1785 she noted: "This is the Queens Birth day – O how happy did I feel that I was an independent being & not obliged to undergo my former fatigues of this day."<sup>15</sup> Hamilton's friends showed understanding and supported her during the "Clarges Street" period. In one of her letters to Hamilton, Herries acknowledged: "You have felt this [being a courtier] experimentally my friend & wisely preferred real comfort & enjoyment to a splendid Cage, as you properly term it."<sup>16</sup>

### **"I Am Obligated to Be Prudent:" Seeking Financial Independence**

After resignation, Hamilton took another unconventional step. In contrast to unmarried women of her class who in similar circumstances joined a male relation's household, she decided to live an independent life. To raise the

<sup>13</sup> HAM/2/14.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 2/7.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 2/15.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 1/17/76.

money she needed the young woman sold her collection of paintings and together with her friend Anna Maria Clarke and her sister Isabella rented a small house in Clarges Street. In her diaries, Hamilton made no secret of her modest state of affairs:

Recd a Note from lady Stormont to inform me that she met the Prince of Wales in the Morning who desired her to tell me that he hoped I would accompany her to Carlton House next Wed[nesday] to a Ball & supper wch his R[oyal] Highness was to give – I answered Ldy S[tormont's] – note & said I wish'd I could in a handsome way excuse myself. I have too small a fortune to enable me to bear the expence of dress – but in a quick moderate way & I have no ambition of being in the very first Circles.<sup>17</sup>

Hamilton's diaries of the "Clarges Street" period, which ended with her marriage to John Dickenson in June 1785, are revealing of the young woman's determination to maintain financial independence. In them, she articulated the importance of being careful in spending money: "Chair hire is expensive & I am obliged to be prudent."<sup>18</sup> She also made her money work by lending and earning interest. For example, Hamilton recorded how she resolved to lend to her friend, not to her uncle Frederick Hamilton: "I thought it most prudent to place the Money in Lord Dartreys Hands who has obligingly promised to allow me 5 pr Cent & to let me have it back whenever I choose."<sup>19</sup> The key argument for deciding in Dartrey's favor was "whenever I choose," because the young woman did not want to lose control of her money. Hamilton's diaries also offer glimpses on her financial self-discipline:

The Shoemaker brought home my Clops &c paid him. I hope I shall always keep the custom of paying for every thing the moment I have it. I have done so ever since I was transacted my own affairs, & I have found great advantage from it, for then one is never in any distress, – besides it is quite a principle with me never to be in any ones debt.<sup>20</sup>

Hamilton acknowledged that she strictly followed the rules set by her parents: "[...] it was my constant rule never to wear any thing till it was fairly my own property, & that I pay for every thing the moment I have it. I have done so ever since I transacted my own affairs, & had the example set by my

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17 Ibid., 2/8.

18 Ibid., 2/14.

19 Ibid., 2/15.

20 Ibid., 2/10.

Dear Parents.”<sup>21</sup> Moreover, Hamilton's diaries provide evidence of how she discussed her affairs with other financially independent women and readily got advice from them:

I went to Miss Black sat sometime with her. [...] Miss Black is always at home on Sunday Mornings to receive visits from her Scholars. She is the famous Drawing Mistress. [...] Miss Black sat on with me till 11 o'Clock – told me how she managed her Money transactions & advised me not to let the Banker recd the Interest of the Money in the Bank – but go myself ever [every] ½ year to receive it &c.<sup>22</sup>

**“Many Very Valuable & Most Amiable Friends:” Hamilton's Choice of Friends**

In their influential study of autobiography Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson have argued that autobiographical narrative presents a “historically situated practice of self-representation.”<sup>23</sup> Indeed, to Hamilton diary-writing was a means to document her friendships with outstanding women and men of the day, cherish her social connections, justify her intellectual pursuits, and on the whole chronicle her eventful life in the early 1780s. Not once the young woman mentioned her preferences in the selection of her friends: “In the choice of my friends I chiefly regarded sincerity & sensibility as I looked upon them as the foundation of other virtues.”<sup>24</sup>

In fact, Hamilton depicted a collective portrait of the vibrant Bluestocking community; and, in the process, she was discovering herself. Through diaries, Hamilton asserted her meaningful life, pertinence to the Bluestocking circle and privilege to be “bless'd[...] wth the sincere affection of many very valuable & most amiable Friends.”<sup>25</sup> For example, shortly after moving to Clarges Street the young woman proudly informed that Elizabeth Vesey's hospitable house, one of the major sites for the Bluestocking meetings in London, was always open to her:

I find it a very agreeable circumstance to live so near the Vesey's their House being exactly opposite & I have liberty to go to them whenever I choose – there one

21 DDX/274/18.

22 HAM/2/10.

23 Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 14.

24 Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 14.

25 HAM/2/15.

meets with a charming variety of society that suits any mood one may happen to be in – viz the Learned, the Witty, Old, and Young, – grave, gay, Wise & unwise, the fine bred man and part Coxcomb, The elegant Female, the chaste Matron, the severe prude and the pert Miss – but be it remembered that you run no risqué in Mrs Veseys parties of meeting with those who have no claim to respect, – as it too often the case in mixt assemblies in London.<sup>26</sup>

In this sense, the entries in which Hamilton described numerous Bluestocking gatherings with their “sensible & agreeable”<sup>27</sup> conversations which the young woman attended and sometimes organized remind of Hannah More’s “The Bas Bleu; or, Conversation,” “a manuscript poem, circulated among a small circle of friends from the summer of 1783 onwards, and also three years later, a published poem.”<sup>28</sup> Notably, “The Bas Bleu” – Hannah More’s hymn to Bluestocking ideals – was initially sent in manuscript to both Hamilton and William Pepys to be presented to their friends.

Hamilton’s diaries of the “Clarges Street” period suggest that being a part of the Bluestocking coterie gave a sense of purpose to her life. Her friends were the anchor that held Hamilton steady in storms of life and through them the young woman came to the understanding of herself.

### **“The Object of My Choice”: Hamilton’s Choice of Her Husband**

Another interesting aspect of Hamilton’s life revealed in her diaries of 1784–1785 is her strong wish for companionable marriage and freedom in making choice of her husband. Unsurprisingly, the attractive and communicable young woman had a number of suitors, but she did not consider them appropriate life partners. John Dickenson from Derbyshire, whom she had met at a young age, did not possess vast fortune or aristocratic origin, but he was the man she loved and who loved her. “I hardly know the two people so formed to delight & suit each other from similarity of taste, principle & ways of thinking as you & Mr. D[ickenson],”<sup>29</sup> acknowledged Catherine Herries in a letter of 7 July 1786.

It should be stressed that again in the key moment of her life Hamilton acted independently as she accepted Dickenson’s marriage proposal and only

<sup>26</sup> DDX/274/18.

<sup>27</sup> HAM/2/10.

<sup>28</sup> Moyra Haslett, “Becoming Bluestockings: Contextualising Hannah More’s »The Bas Bleu,«” *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 1 (2010): 89.

<sup>29</sup> HAM/1/17/76.

then informed her family and friends of it. She managed to find necessary arguments to carry her point to them and obtained their full support. For example, in a diary entry of 30 June 1784, she recorded the conversation with her influential cousin Louisa Stormont:

I had a long uninterrupted conversation wth Lady Stormont I communicated to her the whole story of Mr Dickensons attachment to me [...] – she advised me to inform my Aunt Warwick my Uncles & other near relations she said she was sure they had all so good an opinion of my judgment that they would be well satisfied wth the choice I made in a husband.<sup>30</sup>

Later she noted:

My U[n]cle Frederick told me he had seen his Brother Sir William Yesterday that they had talk'd very much abt me & Mr D[icken]son – from what I could find out it was all satisfactory. I must own I think I have been very successful in making all the folks approve of what I like.<sup>31</sup>

The other two illustrative passages found in her diaries recorded the way in which Hamilton presented her future husband to the world. For example, in a diary entry of 19 August 1784, she acknowledged: "I have the delight & happiness of having no reason to blush at the choice I have made therefore they can say nothing wch would grain me to hear, as my choice ought to be approv'd by all the Reasonable World."<sup>32</sup> Two days later the diarist wrote: "They [her relations] said a thousand friendly things & sent every kind wish for my happiness that they all hoped to be soon acquainted with the Object of my choice."<sup>33</sup> Obviously, through the repeated words and phrases: "my choice," "what I like," "the choice I made," Hamilton signaled her authority, self-reliance, and determination to take responsibility for her decisions.

Thus, Mary Hamilton's diaries kept with both public and private aims offer a detailed picture of what it was like to be a young well-educated woman in late Georgian London. They functioned not merely as a place for storing information about her life at a certain period of time; they were an effective and efficient instrument through which the young woman discovered herself. At the same time, Hamilton's diaries were a means to connect to her friends

30 Ibid., 2/11.

31 Ibid., 2/14.

32 Ibid., 2/14.

33 Ibid., 2/14.



through self-narration. Produced with manuscript circulation in mind and diffused within the set of her friends, Hamilton's diaries became a "public" document.

The idea of freedom is central to Hamilton's self-representation. Her personal narrative is a good display of how seeds of freedom sprouted and battled their way through the conventional gender expectations of the period. Her manuscript diaries invite us to reassess the role of eighteenth-century women intellectuals who, without opposing society directly, gradually and subtly altered the socially enforced norms of the day and prepared the soil for the forthcoming changes.

## Abstract

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**Nataliia Voloshkova**

DRAGOMANOV NATIONAL PEDAGOGICAL UNIVERSITY, KYIV

*Aspiring to Freedom: Mary Hamilton's Life Writing*

The article explores life writing of Mary Hamilton, a younger-generation Bluestocking. It shows how the young educated woman asserted both a space of personal freedom and her right to make a choice within the constraints of patriarchal society. The article argues that Hamilton's diaries were not merely a space for accumulating information about her life but served both as means of connecting with her friends and as an instrument through which the young woman discovered herself.

## Keywords

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Bluestockings, Mary Hamilton, life writing, eighteenth-century diaries, writing practices

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Anne Y. Brinton

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## **"One of the Large-Throated Frogs": Martha Foster and the Politics of Resistance and Accommodation in the Antebellum South**

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**"T**his world's all a frog pond," Martha Foster told her diary in the early spring of 1849. She was a student at a female academy in Eutaw, Alabama, almost twenty years old, using her own savings to complete the education that had been interrupted due to her father's insolvency. And, she continued, she was determined to be "one of [the] large-throated frogs" in the pond, one that was "capable of making a considerable noise while passing through." "Somehow," she mused, "I can't believe I am one of those persons destined to pass through life in retirement or obscure contentment."<sup>1</sup> Young women of the antebellum American South, it goes almost without saying, were not expected to be the "large-throated frogs" in the

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### **Anne Y. Brinton**

received her PhD in American History from The Pennsylvania State University in 2011. Since then she has worked and lived in multiple countries – including the US, China, Germany, the UK, Italy, and Kuwait. She is presently employed as an Assistant Collegiate Professor with the University of Maryland University College. Her research interests include the US Civil War, slavery and emancipation, American women in the nineteenth Century, and the western expatriate community in China in the nineteenth Century.

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1 Entry 13 Mar. 1849, Martha Foster Crawford Diary, 1846–1850 and 1867, Martha Foster Crawford diaries, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University, [https://library.duke.edu/rubenstein/findingaids/crawfordmarthafoster/#aspace\\_ref10\\_ju4](https://library.duke.edu/rubenstein/findingaids/crawfordmarthafoster/#aspace_ref10_ju4), accessed April 29, 2019. Hereafter cited as MFC Diary 1846–1850, 1867. Detail about funding source of education from Wayne Flint and Gerald W. Berkley, *Taking Christianity to China: Alabama Missionaries in the Middle Kingdom, 1850-1950* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1997), 49.

frog pond. Little girls might play rambunctiously and embark on outdoor, as well as indoor, adventures. Teenagers away at boarding school enjoyed intellectual competition in the classroom and mischief in the dormitory, away from watchful parental eyes.<sup>2</sup> And the years of (privileged, white) unmarried young womanhood – courtship years, the years of being a “belle” – were empowering to many girls.<sup>3</sup> But marriage, culturally and economically obligatory for nearly all women, would bring an end to girlish liberty with adult responsibility, domestic seclusion, repeated childbirth, and often an early death.<sup>4</sup>

Scholarship on white southern female youth prior to the American Civil War is surprisingly scant. At present, the primary book-length treatment of the subject remains Anya Jabour's *Scarlett's Sisters: Young Women in the Old South*. Jabour draws from the insights of political scientist James C. Scott's work in peasant studies<sup>5</sup> and from “revisionist” historians of slavery to complicate the notion that girls resigned themselves to lifelong subordination and to explore the ways in which they took part in a “culture of resistance” against the more onerous legal and social restrictions laid on their gender.<sup>6</sup> Setting aside for now the potential impropriety of using insights from slavery and peasant studies to explore the lives of the powerless but undeniably privileged daughters of the slaveholding classes, more recent scholars of slavery – primarily Anthony E. Kaye and Stephanie M.H. Camp – have urged a reconceptualization of resistance. Rather than thinking of resistance as part of either a dichotomy, with accommodation at its obverse, or more fluidly as part of a spectrum of physical and cultural survival options, they look for sites of everyday, often private, struggle and conflict – whether the body and

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2 Anya Jabour, *Scarlett's Sisters: Young Women in the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007; Kindle edition), 20; 63–70. See also Christie Ann Farnham, *The Education of the Southern Belle: Higher Education and Student Socialization in the Antebellum South* (New York: New York University Press, 1994).

3 Historian Catherine Clinton describes this phase as “brief yet bright,” and “the closest most women came to freedom,” *The Plantation Mistress: Woman's World in the Old South* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982), 61–62. In addition to freedom, it brought social power, and many girls relished the ability to attract and reject suitors while maximizing their own fun and dodging unbreakable commitments. Jabour, *Scarlett's Sisters*, 128–134.

4 See Catherine Clinton *Plantation Mistress*, 139–140, for specific figures on southern mortality rates due to disease and childbirth, see *Plantation Mistress*, 139–140.

5 See James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985) and *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

6 Jabour, *Scarlett's Sisters*, 2–9.

its pleasures, say, or the neighborhood brush arbor – in order to explore the day-to-day intentions of the oppressed.<sup>7</sup>

The conflicts explored in Martha's journal are largely internal. If she struggled with stern or overbearing parents, she gives little sign. Rather, she grappled with the sometimes deep disconnect between the norms of her culture, her own dreams of romantic happiness, and her growing conviction that she was not destined for the ordinary life of a wife and mother. I have identified three primary moments of struggle or crisis in the diaries Martha kept during the late 1840s when she was between the ages of sixteen and twenty: her engagement to William Davis, a young attorney; her engagement to Robert Foster, her first cousin and friend since childhood; and her decision, following a period of very poor health, to become a foreign missionary. At each moment, Foster both passionately embraced and rejected convention. Focusing on these three moments allows us to better understand the limits of resistance for a young woman of the antebellum South, the conditions under which it might flourish, and the powerful draw of accommodation. Her choices at these moments suggest that the impulse to defy oppressive social norms may be strongest at moments of seeming acquiescence – but also reveal the hard limits within which that defiance could occur.

Martha began her diary in the spring of 1846. Its first entries are written in a large and careful calligraphic hand, the tone self-aware, almost affected. The impetus, her return from two years away at school, and the first topic of any substance, her attendance at a Baptist revival meeting, where she believed that she had been saved<sup>8</sup>. Very quickly her style – of both penmanship and rhetoric – relaxed into something much more natural. She tracked her reading – much of it recommended by her erstwhile headmaster. She speculated about the young men of her acquaintance, evaluating their looks

7 See Anthony E. Kaye, *Joining Places: Slave Neighborhoods in the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), and Stephanie M.H. Camp, *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

8 Entry 3 Mar. 1846, MFC Diary 1846–1850, 1867. Martha's religious convictions and doubts, as well as her intellectual interests in matters theological, were a guiding theme of her life, but must await fuller exploration in a later project. For recent work on the history of evangelical faith in the American South, see Christine Leigh Heyrman, *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997). For evangelical faith and southern women, see Jean E. Friedman, *The Enclosed Garden: Women and Community in the Evangelical South, 1830–1900* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1985). For Martha's future life as a missionary in China, see Flynt and Berkley, *Taking Christianity to China*, among others.

and characters, and declaring herself alternately in love and out of it. She wondered how to cope with her craving for the recognition of her talents, and how to manage the envy she believed other people felt towards her. Healthy ego aside, she did not refrain from self-criticism. She knew that she was moody, “yielding too easily to despair” and anger, intensely competitive, conversationally awkward, and “too impulsive – entirely carried away by present feelings.”<sup>9</sup>

This early record of a bookish, sociable, mostly happy life, written by a devout, intelligent, introspective girl gives few hints of conflict beyond the natural disagreements and misunderstandings that transpire among friends and sweethearts. The first crisis came as a result of her first adult commitment to another human being. In September of 1847 she met a young law student named William Davis. They courted largely by letter, and became swiftly engaged.<sup>10</sup> The reality of betrothal was a bracing realization to be sure, quite unlike the romantic fantasies in which she had indulged not so very long before. “The picture is filled out,” she wrote. “I am to marry a poor lawyer, perhaps settle in Texas or some other new country.”<sup>11</sup> The stakes were tremendously high. As she observed after a friend’s wedding, a girl left behind “friends, home, all,” when she married, “yield[ing] her freedom, her gay, joyous maidenhood, parents, all.” What a dreadful bargain if the man turned out to be disagreeable.<sup>12</sup> Her passion for William Davis was laced with terrible fear, and she reached for a metaphor of original sin and sexual awakening when she explained that

9 Multiple entries, 3 Mar. 1846 – 14 Mar. 1846, MFC Diary 1846–1850, 1867. Diaries begun for one purpose often came to serve another. Southern girls, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese observes, were encouraged to write in order to “fashion identities in conformity with the expectations of their near kin,” and as they matured, kept doing so “as a means of coming to terms with their female identities within a particular society” (*Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* [Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988; Kindle edition], 266–272, loc. 4768–4865 of 12716). Jane H. Hunter concurs, but identifies an element of nascent rebellion among girls across the nation. Guided by parents, teachers, and didactic literature, most girls, she observes, “began their diaries in the dogged spirit of accountants of the soul,” but sometimes expanded their use of the private space of the diary in order to explore and develop the individual self (*How Young Ladies Became Girls: The Victorian Origins of American Girlhood* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002], 46–47).

10 Entries 1 Sept. 1847 and 8 Nov. 1847, MFC Diary 1846–1850, 1867. For a nuanced exploration of the role of correspondence in facilitating romantic love across geographical distance, see Karen Lystra, *Searching the Heart: Women, Men, and Romantic Love in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

11 Entry 8 Nov. 1847, MFC Diary 1846–1850, 1867.

12 Entry 22 Jan. 1848, MFC Diary 1846–1850, 1867. Emphasis added.

sometimes, when she thought about him, "he seem[ed] like a serpent a fiend intruding upon me."<sup>13</sup>

Young women of the South often compared notes on the unsatisfactory husbands in their social circles,<sup>14</sup> and Martha was no different. Her own family's example offered a range of possibilities. Her mother had warned her that "few men" loved their wives at all, a claim which Martha took with a decided grain of salt. After all, she had seen for herself that her father was "the kindest of husbands" and her mother often "oversensitive" and prone to lashing out "when she [thought] herself neglected."<sup>15</sup> But nothing could temper the stark example presented by her sister's experience of childbirth. While her sister struggled in labor, "her husband, who is the most affectionate of that class of persons," was off "enjoying himself elsewhere." This unpleasant scene left her "half inclined never to place myself in a similar situation."<sup>16</sup>

And there were yet worse things with which to grapple. Marriage encapsulated women's social and legal disadvantages. American law was based on British Parliamentary precedent and on English common law as interpreted by Sir William Blackstone. In that tradition, as one historian writes, "marriage ended a woman's legal identity, for upon saying »I do« she ceased to have property rights, a right to the money she earned, [or] the right to have custody of her children in case of divorce..."<sup>17</sup> Unlike other forms of contract, another scholar explains, marriage, with a handful of carve-outs for specific situations, "incorporated the wife's person into that of her husband, making them one at law, suspending her legal existence."<sup>18</sup> Like many girls of her class and caste, Martha contemplated it with deep ambivalence. Little systemic critique of southern society or gender relations appears in her diary before this point, but here, engaged for not quite two months, it all poured out, triggered, perhaps,

13 Entry 24 Dec. 1847, MFC Diary 1846–1850, 1867.

14 Jabour, *Scarlett's Sisters*, 89–92, loc. 1804–1878 of 8537.

15 Entry early Jan. 1848, MFC Diary 1846–1850, 1867.

16 Ibid.

17 David T. Morgan, *Southern Baptist Sisters: In Search of Status, 1845–2000* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2003), 12.

18 Amy Dru Stanley, *From Bondage to Contract: Wage Labor, Marriage and the Market in the Age of Slave Emancipation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 10–11. Alabama, beginning in the 1840s, permitted an abandoned wife to petition for the right to operate as *feme sole*, protected the property a woman had brought to her marriage or acquired afterwards from seizure for her husband's debts, and allowed a wife's income to accrue to her separate estate (Richard H. Chused, "Married Women's Property Law: 1800–1850," *Georgetown Law Journal*, no. 71 [1982–1983], 1359.)

by the intervention of one of her brothers, who helpfully reminded her that “a husband has a right to inflict corporeal [*sic*] punishment on his wife!” and left her furious.<sup>19</sup> “Oh how I revolt at the thought of being in subordination to a fellow creature to know too that nature has formed me so,” she raged, almost too angry to punctuate. “To be called inferior! Inferior!” She felt like a “chained animal” who could “forget his chains” long enough to “sport in joyousness,” only to “writhe in agony and use every effort to extricate himself” when reminded of the predicament he could not escape.<sup>20</sup>

There was no escape from these chains. She could rage all she liked, but she could not deny what she understood to be the law of nature – although she would only grant it so much. Her mind at least was equal, she insisted, even if her “physical ability” was not. And she could not seem to sustain her fury for long. Within the same entry she came full circle to a sort of acquiescence. Was there not an almost masochistic appeal in accepting what she could not change? “Why not be proud to be called a woman?” she asked herself. “Why not bear with patience and pride the many ills of woman’s lot?”<sup>21</sup> Like other Southern women, she chafed – often – at the strictures which governed her life and at the blatant unfairness of white men’s much greater autonomy. But also like many other Southern women, she accepted the fundamental gender bargain that lay at the heart of Southern life: that inequality – between male and female, black and white – was the self-evident truth of the human condition.<sup>22</sup>

Perhaps Martha’s ambivalence about marriage in general and about William Davis in particular was greater even than she knew. Even as she seemed to accept the subordinate position of the wife she would soon become, she also dallied with a cousin of hers, a young man named Robert Foster. Davis offered an intensity of feeling – both fear and desire – not to be matched. Foster offered familial comfort and long-standing friendship. Somehow she became engaged, simultaneously, to both. She cursed herself when her duplicity was discovered: “Perfidious wretch! demon incarnate! fiend! traitor!!!”<sup>23</sup> What had evidently begun as a flirtatious game carried out via the post, playing the two boys against each other, had become very serious indeed. She had led Foster to believe her engagement to Davis was “in jest,” and Foster had taken her at

19 Entry 24 Dec. 1847, MFC Diary 1846–1850, 1867.

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid.

22 Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 199, loc. 3860 of 12716.

23 Entry 16 Apr. 1848, MFC Diary 1846–1850, 1867.

her word, clarifying on a visit home that he expected in due time to become her bridegroom. "What have I done?" she asked. "I shudder to think of it."<sup>24</sup>

Letters to Davis and Foster clarified all, and extracted Martha from both of her commitments.<sup>25</sup> As she continued to weather the aftermath of her escapade, only the latest in the series of "love scrapes" that had distracted and entertained her at least since the age of sixteen, Martha learned more about William Davis's character – information which left her both mortified and somehow consoled. She had seen marriage to a future attorney as a step up the social ladder, but her family and friends, including both Davis's brother and her own, had viewed him as beneath her. "How that stings!" she exclaimed.<sup>26</sup> But it soon became clear that she had indeed dodged a bullet. Davis was a "mighty slippery fellow," his own brother admitted ruefully, equally as unfaithful, at least emotionally, to Martha as she had been to him.<sup>27</sup> And Martha's brother had never liked the fellow to begin with, largely due, as he tersely put it, to "his utter want of the elements of success as a lawyer and consequently as a man."<sup>28</sup>

But in August, Davis returned. Once again they courted, and once again they agreed to wed. Martha's diary is silent about what else may have transpired between them at this time, but by September he was gone again, and once safely removed, he again ended what remained of their love affair. His feelings, he declared, had changed. He did not love Martha. He did not love anyone at all. Their engagement was over. Martha was left almost wordless with exasperation, scrawling in her diary: "Ha! Ha!! Ha!!! William Davis!"<sup>29</sup> The diary entries that follow shift rapidly from self-condemnation (Martha believed herself intolerably ambitious while at the same time too poor to be a suitable helpmeet for a man on the rise) to fantasies in which she confronted her former love ("Ah! my dear sir, you have mistaken your road – you have seen only a small part of the picture of Martha Foster") to sensible resignation ("One thing though is certain. I won't die of the blues").<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Entries 16 Apr. 1848 and 21 Apr. 1848, MFC Diary 1846–1850, 1867.

<sup>26</sup> Entry 24 June 1848, MFC Diary 1846–1850, 1867.

<sup>27</sup> Entry 12 Nov. 1848, MFC Diary 1846–1850, 1867.

<sup>28</sup> Entry 11 May 1848, MFC Diary 1846–1850, 1867.

<sup>29</sup> Entry 28 Sept. 1848, MFC Diary 1846–1850, 1867.

<sup>30</sup> Entries 30 Sept. 1848 and 5 Dec. 1848, MFC Diary 1846–1850, 1867.



Martha's second moment of decision came only months later. Here too she moved – emotionally and physically – both towards marriage and away from it. Before the turn of the New Year, she was engaged again (this time, it seems, in earnest) to her cousin Robert Foster. Foster himself had his doubts. “Rob has but little faith in me,” she confided to her journal, “thinks it very doubtful whether I will hold out.” But as for herself, despite all that had transpired, she had “supreme confidence” both in his devotion and in her own “constancy.”<sup>31</sup> This new sense of commitment, however, coupled with her self-funded return to formal education, raised new doubts about her future. She believed she loved Foster; she truly did. His presence scattered doubts from her mind “as the sun, the mists of morning,” and she daydreamed about what it might be like “to spend a life with him – to use all my influence in promoting his happiness – to lessen his sorrows – to share his fortune whatever it may be.” At times she was content for this to be her “sole ambition.”<sup>32</sup>

But marriage remained such a daunting choice. One by one, her young women friends married off and left her behind. Martha did not like being left behind, nor did she much relish becoming part of someone's past rather than their present. For some women of her generation, the introduction of a suitor or even a husband caused scarcely a ripple in the current of emotionally intense female relationships.<sup>33</sup> But in what may, after all, have been the more typical pattern, Martha had found that friendships were never the same once one of the girls got married. “She will think of me sometimes,” she lamented of her cousin Lou, “I know with feelings of pleasure.” But rather than a daily reality, their friendship would be “thrown amongst those bright past dreams which so often rise and sometimes require second thought to find whether it were real or imaginary.”<sup>34</sup> Lou had been her confidant through considerable strife, and Martha loved her dearly. It was hard to lose her not only to marriage but to moving away. If only they could live nearer each other; then she believed her “ardent confiding love” for her cousin could fade naturally into

31 Entry 6 Jan. 1849, MFC Diary 1846–1850, 1867.

32 Entry 5 Aug. 1849, MFC Diary 1846–1850, 1867.

33 Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, “The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations Between Women in Nineteenth-Century America” (1975), reprinted in Miriam Forman-Brunell and Leslie Paris, eds. *The Girls' History and Culture Reader: The Nineteenth Century* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 166–167.

34 Entry 25 Jul. 1849, MFC Diary 1846–1850, 1867. Karen Lystra warns that “a too-rigid view of separate spheres has led to a sense of male-female emotional segregation and distance [...] that must be modified.” Sisterhood, she argues convincingly, was no barrier to intensely satisfying and “profoundly intimate” relationships between women and men (*Searching the Heart*, 11).

a comfortable adult acquaintanceship.<sup>35</sup> Lou also issued an ominous warning about the particular nature of marriage itself – that “marrying is not the thing it’s cracked up to be.” Martha wasn’t sure that two months’ wifely experience was enough to warrant such a pronouncement. Nonetheless, she was forced to conclude that “there must be some horrible something to be found out after marriage,” something that she didn’t yet “dream of” and which Lou apparently wouldn’t clarify. It all left her a little unsettled.<sup>36</sup>

Given the perils of matrimony, spinsterhood must have seemed blissfully free of complication, and Martha returned to the topic again and again in her diary. She was not alone in this. Many girls dabbled with the notion of spinsterhood as a means of preserving what little autonomy they had. Ultimately, however, dream though they might of a life of “single blessedness,” few could afford, financially or socially, to actually live one. Most Southern women faced “constant pressure” to marry.<sup>37</sup> Indeed, although some spinsters, usually in urban centers like Charleston, South Carolina, or Savannah, Georgia, found a way to forge interesting, satisfying lives for themselves, to remain single, whether by choice or happenstance generally left a woman dependent in a different way, living with family throughout their lives and taking an active part in care work among the extended clan.<sup>38</sup> In the end, although they worked hard to ensure that marriage met their own ends, prioritizing their experience of romantic love over their parents’ more practical concerns and delaying the wedding long enough to thoroughly test their fiancés’ devotion, most girls and young women resigned themselves to the cultural and economic necessity of wedlock.<sup>39</sup>

What set Martha apart, and what made marriage less of an imperative and more of an unconstrained choice – to the extent that any choice is unconstrained – is that she had not only a job but a career. She was a teacher. It was both her profession and her calling. Teaching was one among the very few

35 Entry 9 Sept. 1849, MFC Diary 1846–1850, 1867.

36 Entry 18 Oct. 1849, MFC Diary 1846–1850, 1867.

37 Morgan, *Southern Baptist Sisters*, 13.

38 Christine Jacobson Carter’s assessment of the spinster’s fate in *Southern Single Blessedness: Unmarried Women in the Urban South, 1800–1865* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006) is markedly cheerier than that of scholars such as Catherine Clinton (*Plantation Mistress*), but both agree that unmarried women generally were compelled to remain within the bosom of their families; they differ in whether this situation was a secure platform for a rewarding life of service and personal fulfilment, or simply another form of gendered oppression.

39 Jabour, *Scarlett’s Sisters*, 94–95, loc. 1923–1935 of 8537.

professional opportunities available to Southern women before the Civil War, and even as such, it was not without controversy. As Elizabeth Fox-Genovese observes, unlike the bourgeois North, the slave-based antebellum southern social order did not require an expanding number of underpaid female teachers to prepare children to “take their places in a capitalist economy,” and the planter aristocracy generally regarded teaching as the last resort of a desperate woman, not as “a fit occupation for a lady.”<sup>40</sup> Nonetheless, unlike most of her peers, Martha not only imagined an alternative future; she had the means to make it a reality. Spinsterhood would bring problems of its own, of course. People looked down on women who never married, and Martha, intensely conscious of her social standing, dreaded being “despised and called an o l d M a i d .” It was a terrible thing, she observed, to be as proud a girl as she was. As she exclaimed, “O mine is a fearful spirit to be possessed by a woman!”<sup>41</sup> She was astute enough to recognize that the social opprobrium which attended spinsterhood was artificial. There was nothing truly so bad about being single. “An o l d m a i d ! what so repugnant in that name?” And anyhow, nobody could be harder on her than she was on herself. “What lip,” she asked, “can express deeper scorn than my own?”<sup>42</sup>

During the autumn of 1849 new cracks appeared in Foster and Martha’s courtship. Martha repeatedly sought to persuade herself that Foster still loved her; that her own feelings were true and deep; that her marriage would not be an inescapable disaster. For his part, Foster’s affections seemed to flag. By the autumn of 1849 his love, expressed in letters, had become “clouded with reserve and stiffness.” “Logical reasoning” and “mathematics” alone, rather than emotion, told her that love remained.<sup>43</sup> Thoughts of the dreadful William Davis helped her to recommit herself to Foster. Davis, she knew, would “never be able to get another lady, my equal, who will be fool enough to say »yes«.” She “would have made him an excellent wife,” far better than he deserved, but having “been so fortunate as to escape,” she would “prepare to make Rob even a better one.”<sup>44</sup> She reminded herself that Foster was clever and endearing, and that he loved her and she him. She would

40 Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 51, loc. 980 of 12716.

41 Entry 24 June 1848, MFC Diary 1846–1850, 1867.

42 Entry 12 May 1848, MFC Diary 1846–1850, 1867. “The stereotype of the »old maid«,” Catherine Clinton observes, “was explicitly negative in southern ante-bellum culture” (*Plantation Mistress*, 85).

43 Entry 9 Sept. 1849, MFC Diary 1846–1850, 1867.

44 Entry 29 Sept. 1849, MFC Diary 1846–1850, 1867.

proceed towards marriage with her eyes more or less having been opened by her mother, her sister, and her cousin Lou, and with the knowledge that viable alternatives remained. "It's only a choice between two evils – wedlock and old maidendom," she remarked stoically. "The first appears the most contented and useful, and is oftener tried." She would follow suit, and if she discovered "anything dreadful after marriage," well, she had made her choice and sworn her vows and "must »grin and endure it« – as others of my unfortunate sex have done." She would have only herself to curse, "for being a consummate blockhead."<sup>45</sup>

Martha would never marry Robert Foster. Her third moment of decision came in the late autumn of 1849, following a lingering bout of illness and a spiritual crisis in the course of which she became overwhelmed with the conviction that she was destined to become a missionary.<sup>46</sup> Explaining everything in a letter, she left the decision in Foster's hands: one way or another, she was going overseas; he could come or not, as he chose. Slightly more than a month later, she had her answer: "Cousin Rob does not think he was destined ever to become a missionary." "How can I endure," she moaned. "The last remaining spark of earthly hope is gone."<sup>47</sup> Their courtship continued for a while, despite this fundamental incompatibility in goals. When Foster visited her at her parents' home, they kissed and cuddled, their conversation "tender and loving."<sup>48</sup> Foster evidently hoped that they could work out their different plans for the future and remain together, but already Martha had begun to torment herself with visions of her own suffering and martyrdom.

Having recently turned twenty, she believed that her life was more than two-thirds spent. The examples of other women missionaries, among them Ann Judson (dead at the age of 38 in Burma) and Harriet Newell (dead at 19 in Mauritius), did not console her.<sup>49</sup> Foster would almost certainly love again, she felt. Would his new sweetheart and future bride love him as she did? She thought not. But whoever she was, this imaginary other girl would enjoy all

45 Entry 18 Oct. 1849, MFC Diary 1846–1850, 1867.

46 Entry 20 Nov. 1849, MFC Diary 1846–1850, 1867.

47 Entries 24 Dec. 1849, 23 Jan. 1850, and 29 Jan. 1850, MFC Diary 1846–1850, 1867.

48 Undated entry Feb. 1850, MFC Diary 1846–1850, 1867.

49 Both of these martyred women were well known in American Protestant communities, with numerous biographies written about them, and several editions of their memoirs and journals in steady circulation. Dana L. Robert, "The Influence of American Missionary Women on the World Back Home," *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation*, 1 (2002): 61–64.

the ordinary human happiness that she herself must surrender. In a painful reverie, she wondered whether her memory would “elicit only a passing thought or sigh”:

Insupportable thought! I imagine myself toiling in loneliness beneath the burning sun of the Torrid zone – while perhaps in a moment of leisure my mind wanders to my own native land – to a happy home where a young bride watches with impatience for the step of her husband: she hears it, she bounds to meet him – it is my Rob.<sup>50</sup>

Martha's new and painful conviction that she would never wed (although she ultimately did), and that she would spend her life in the mission field (which she also did, passing away in China late in the first decade of the twentieth century) marked a turning point, and she began to actively test the limits of her place in society. She defied convention more openly than before, both in the pages of her diary and with her outward behavior. The defiance of convention, whether by remaining unmarried or by insisting on a particular style of worship or by (thinking about) flouting fashionable dress standards, had a certain inherent appeal. But it also seems likely that she was trying to prepare herself mentally for what was to come: a life wherein few people would share her values and where she might confront serious opposition, even life-threatening violence.

She justified each of her attempts to resist convention, some of which were quite attention-getting, as a matter of conscience. On one occasion, for example, she made a point of kneeling, in the Baptist style, during a Presbyterian church service. “It was very revolting to my pride,” she observed, “and that was one reason why I did it.”<sup>51</sup> And she mused extensively about abandoning conventional women's fashions – including the restrictive corset and “tight-waist dresses.” The fashionable “look” of the 1840s, based on vertical lines, muted colors, few if any accessories, and a high, simple collar (at least for day wear; evening gowns featured a more revealing cut) was meant to communicate simplicity and modest sincerity even while it exaggerated the body's natural shape. Martha proposed instead that she should “boldly assume a loose, flowing robe.” No doubt it would be better for her health and a positive example for other young women, saving them all “from a complication of diseases.” She imagined future accusations of eccentricity, “sneers, scorn, false imputations cast by all about me,” but surely

<sup>50</sup> Entry 2 Feb. 1850, MFC Diary.

<sup>51</sup> Entry 25 Aug. 1850, MFC Diary 1846–1850, 1867.

such things should count for nothing in the face of the many benefits she might bestow.<sup>52</sup>

She cast a more critical eye on the workings of the society around her. The two great injustices of southern life, of course, were the enslavement of people of African descent, and the suppression of women, no matter how wealthy. Martha criticized both – but with heavy caveats. Attendance at what she termed a “negro meeting” inspired a short meditation on the profundity of the soul, as reflected by an “old lady a native of Africa,” and the throwaway remark that “slavery is certainly a national evil.” But if it was an evil, she clarified, it was an evil that had paradoxically rescued untold numbers of “poor souls” “from heathenish darkness.” No abolitionist she. Martha nonetheless urged “Christian masters” to uphold their tremendous responsibility in looking after the spiritual welfare of their human property, and determined to write an essay upon the subject forthwith to be submitted for a prize. “Of myself, I know I should fail,” she observed piously. But she also knew that God would help her to win and would save her from pride when she did.<sup>53</sup>

She continued to cast a critical eye on the deeply troublesome relationships between men and women. She grieved that women were “so trampled upon, abused, denied many advantages and rightful privileges.” It was the means of redress chosen by Yankee feminists that disturbed her. She was appalled by Northern women’s rights activists who held conventions and passed resolutions, working, as they had since 1848, towards the ultimate goal of the vote. They went “against the laws of nature,” she insisted, made her “blush for [her] sex,” and were likely a sign of a culture, or of individuals, gone badly off the rails.<sup>54</sup> Her own goals were more modest, and her timeline gradual. Her only formal demand, the only “petition to legislators” she could justify making, would be for education. Greater learning opportunities for girls and young women was the key to raising women’s status organically, rather than through the tools of electoral politics. “I believe our sex is not yet raised to its place,” she mused, “its duties and privileges not yet defined; but let it be gradual. [Let] advancing learning draw the line = grant us clear heads

52 21 June 1850, MFC Diary 1846–1850, 1867; Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830–1870* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 75–83.

53 Entry 14 Apr. 1850, MFC Diary 1846–1850, 1867. See Heyrman’s *Southern Cross*, especially chapter 5, for an exploration of the complicated intersections of slavery, slave owning, and evangelical religion (Kindle edition, loc. 4078–4997 of 7087).

54 Entry 27 May 1850, MFC Diary 1846–1850, 1867; Ellen Carol DuBois, *Feminism & Suffrage: The Emergence of an Independent Women’s Movement in America, 1848–1869* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978; 1999), 15.

and right hearts, and my word for it you shall not have reason to complain. Ah! I expect such a day as confidently as I expect the millennium” – the revelatory moment when would transpire, in the words of historian Daniel Walker Howe, “a thousand-year Kingdom of Christ on earth, after which all the dead will be resurrected, Satan defeated, a final judgment passed, and the world replaced by a new creation.”<sup>55</sup>

The end of the summer of 1850 brought new opportunities, new experiences, and new challenges. Martha left her parental home and moved to Clinton, Alabama, to take up another teaching position, one offered to her by a former teacher of her own.<sup>56</sup> It was, she understood, the end of her childhood.<sup>57</sup> She had taught before, living with her family and working with the children of the surrounding community. But now she was truly independent, boarding in a hotel and navigating public life in an unfamiliar town. “Prospects not overflattering,” she observed. “Nor yet very discouraging.” She liked the hotel keepers with whom she stayed. They were, reassuringly, Baptists like her, although some of the men who also lived there were “wild chaps.”<sup>58</sup> There was already another woman teacher in the town. She was Presbyterian and popular, with nearly forty enrolled students while Martha had only eleven, and the presence of this potential rival provoked introspection and heightened her determination to teach well.<sup>59</sup>

Martha’s days were full. There was her day school with its eleven girls. “What a responsible station I occupy!” she exclaimed. “How difficult its duties!”<sup>60</sup> She found some of the girls to be “dull” and slow to learn, but she promised to do her best to reach them. Another, actually a former academy classmate of hers, proved “rather affected – rather above my other dear plain girls.”<sup>61</sup> There was

55 Entry 27 May 1850, MFC Diary 1846–1850, 1867; Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815–1848* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007; Kindle edition), 285–287, loc. 4923–4965 of 22160.

56 Flynt and Berkley, *Taking Christianity to China*, 49.

57 Entry 1 Aug. 1850, MFC Diary 1846–1850, 1867.

58 Entry 14 Aug. 1850, MFC Diary 1846–1850, 1867.

59 Entries 14 Aug. 1850 and 21 Aug. 1850, MFC Diary 1846–1850, 1867.

60 Entry 19 Aug. 1850, MFC Diary 1846–1850, 1867.

61 Entry 28 Aug. 1850, MFC Diary 1846–1850, 1867, and entry 10 Sept. 1850, Martha Foster Crawford Diary 1850–1853, 1878, Martha Foster Crawford diaries, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University, [https://library.duke.edu/rubenstein/findingaids/crawfordmarthafoster/#aspace\\_ref10\\_ju4](https://library.duke.edu/rubenstein/findingaids/crawfordmarthafoster/#aspace_ref10_ju4), accessed April 29, 2019. Hereafter cited as MFC Diary 1850–1853, 1878.

a professional and theological conflict with one of the girls' fathers, a Deist, who had enrolled his daughter in school under the express condition that Martha "teach her none of [Martha's] tenets." He went so far as to scratch out a reference to the Bible in the girl's textbook. Noticing the marked-out content, Martha asked what had happened. The girl responded that she did not know, that her Pa was responsible, and that she "reckoned it was some bad words." Far from it. "From the context and faint traces," Martha explained, "I found it was *The Bible*." She was aghast. It posed a moral and professional conundrum. To keep the girl enrolled she must suppress all references to her own evangelical faith, and yet, her belief that the girl "received no light at home" in her areligious household only heightened her own sense of responsibility for the child's soul.<sup>62</sup>

There were more frivolous diversions as well. An impossibly elderly bachelor ("very nearly forty" and as "ill as a cat") showed marked interest in Martha's considerable charms.<sup>63</sup> Rumor had it that a local pastor and teacher was "making a fool of himself to get married." His intended was one of his own students, and he had adopted a flashy style of dress complete with "a ring – a gold chain, &c." to catch the girl's eye, and had taken her on jaunts in a rented buggy. Martha was embarrassed on his behalf.<sup>64</sup> She herself became briefly infatuated with a dissipated physician. The man had gone on a drinking spree even after his religious awakening, he continued to consume such beverages as egg nog, and he was a notorious flirt. "All of these taken together are rather too much," she concluded. She knew she could never marry such a man "even were he to propose," but worried that she was "almost beginning to love him." The whole mess was humiliating. She must try to ignore him despite the fascination of his company.<sup>65</sup> Despite an initial reluctance, she listened to fiddle music, played by one of her neighbors in the hotel. "Such music has such a strange influence over me: it leads my heart astray," she discovered, "and fills me with a wild painful rapture."<sup>66</sup>

She attended edifying lectures, and collaborated with another young woman to found a Sunday school. Unkind gossip made its way back to her

62 Entries 21 Aug. 1850 and 23 Aug. 1850, MFC Diary 1846–1850, 1867. The girl was eventually withdrawn (entry 21 Jan. 1851, MFC Diary 1850–1853, 1878).

63 Entry 25 Aug. 1850, MFC Diary 1846–1850, 1867.

64 Entry 27 Nov. 1850, MFC Diary 1846–1850, 1867.

65 Entry 9 Dec. 1850, MFC Diary 1850–1853, 1878. An undated margin note adds, "Nothing but enjoyment of his society – don't know why I should call it love."

66 Entry 23 Jan. 1851, MFC Diary 1850–1853, 1878.



via her extensive network of friends. Her students took and, after some anxiety, passed their exams, reflecting well on Martha's tutelage.<sup>67</sup> A short-term guest of the hotel had what may have been a seizure at the supper table: "He appeared uneasy and before he was half through eating he gave a convulsive start, pushed his chair a little back, quivered all over, and uttered one of the most hideous groans I ever heard." The man recovered quickly and kept eating, but Martha was rattled and declared that she would "never forget it."<sup>68</sup> There was a bit of trouble with a scurrilous tailor, another of her neighbors in the hotel. The man "has a wife who can't live with him, and is a scamp," she reported. He had been caught standing on tiptoe to peep at her through her front window as she dressed for church with "the door shut & curtains drawn." Nor was that the first time he had demonstrated an inappropriate interest in ladies in their *deéshabillé*. The landlord caught him at it, scolded him roundly, and threw him out of the house. "Just such men," Martha snapped, "bah!"<sup>69</sup>

In November, in the midst of all of this bustle and interest, Robert Foster released her from their engagement. It was painful. He did not expect to be able to support a family for seven years or more, and could not in all kindness ask her to wait so long. "I love him – O I do love him!" she lamented. But at the same time was it not "providential"? She decided to take it as a sign that "some more useful place" and role than simple marriage awaited her. Despite her ongoing feelings for her cousin, she believed it wrong to prioritize her "own personal present happiness" over and above what she understood to be her duty to the world: "Perishing Burmah, China, Africa, reproach my selfishness."<sup>70</sup> In December her pastor and employer sent a message on her behalf to the Southern Baptist Board of Foreign Missions inquiring as to the possibility, and propriety, of her being sent abroad. By the following February, she had her answer.<sup>71</sup>

When Martha Foster finally decided to marry, she did so with whirlwind swiftness, and she did so in order to acquire the male headship and protection

67 Entries 4 Sept. 1850, 7 Sept. 1850, 25 Sept. 1850, and 28 Sept. 1850, MFC Diary 1850–1853, 1878.

68 Entry 30 Sept 1850 MFC Diary 1850–1853, 1878.

69 Entry 25 Aug. 1850, MFC Diary 1846–1850, 1867.

70 Entry 2 Nov. 1850, MFC Diary 1850–1853, 1878.

71 Entries 14 Dec. 1850 and 18 Feb. 1851, MFC Diary 1850–1853, 1878; Flynt and Berkley, *Taking Christianity to China*, 50.

that was the prerequisite for a life in the mission field.<sup>72</sup> An agent for the mission board, himself en route to China – one Mr. Tarleton P. Crawford – called at her hotel on the 18 February 1851, carrying the board's reply to her inquiry. He too had felt the call to missionary service. Bachelor missionaries were generally discouraged, however, given the rigors and loneliness of missionary life, and he had been urged to wed prior to departure ... and then shown Martha's glowing personal references. As one historian writes, "Crawford saw all this as an intervention by the divine hand," and accordingly he had made his way "by train, horse, and foot" to pay her a visit. On the 19th, she wrote that she liked him "better than ever: a self-made, easy, everyday kind of fellow." They had made no promises yet, but she thought they were tentatively pleased with one another. Both experienced moments of deep doubt and hesitation, as marriage was a lifelong commitment and they did not feel the stirrings of romantic passion. But on 12 March, they were wed. And in November, they sailed out of New York Harbor en route for the Far East.<sup>73</sup> As it turned out, marriage did not bury Martha, isolating her on the southwestern frontier or in a lonesome plantation manor. It launched her into the great adventure of her life. She would become a "large-throated frog" in the frog pond after all. Would her life be typical of other southern women of her generation? Absolutely not. But her own account of her youth and early adulthood offers important insights into how and why young women of the antebellum South chose to defy or embrace social convention, and the conditions under which they were able to do so – or not.

72 The Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board maintained a policy of not sending unaccompanied women abroad. In 1849 an experiment had been made: Miss Harriet Baker had been permitted to voyage to China as a spinster in order to open schools for girls in Canton and then Shanghai. But Baker's experience was not a positive one, and she would return home by the end of 1853. "Her unfortunate, short-lived experience in China prompted the FMB to discontinue sending single women missionaries for nearly twenty years." (Morgan, *Southern Baptist Sisters*, 87–88). See also Flynt and Berkley, *Taking Christianity to China*, 198.

73 Entries 15 Feb. 1851, 19 Feb. 1851, 11 Mar. 1851, and undated entry late 1851, MFC Diary 1850–1853, 1878; Flynt and Berkley, *Taking Christianity to China*, 50; Irwin T. Hyatt, Jr., *Our Ordered Lives Confess: Three Nineteenth-Century American Missionaries in East Shantung* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), 6–7.

## Abstract

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**Anne Y. Brinton**

NORTHWEST FLORIDA STATE COLLEGE

*"One of the Large-Throated Frogs": Martha Foster and the Politics of Resistance and Accommodation in the Antebellum South*

This paper explores the ways in which white adolescent girls of the antebellum American South either resisted or accommodated gender-based oppression and restrictive social conventions. Using the late-1840s diary of Miss Martha Foster, a teenaged Alabama schoolteacher, as a case study, I apply insights from recent works in slavery and peasant studies to identify and evaluate moments or sites of conflict or struggle. For Foster, three such moments appear: the first, her engagement to a young attorney; the second, her engagement to a male cousin; and the third, her spiritual crisis and deepening conviction that she must forego marriage in order to become a foreign missionary. At each moment, Foster both passionately embraced and rejected convention. Her situation suggests that accommodation and resistance are not always discreet actions, and that the impulse to resist oppressive social norms may be strongest at moments of seeming acquiescence, but also reveals the hard limits within which any resistance might occur.

## Keywords

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Martha Foster Crawford, education, courtship, feminism, missionaries

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Zsuzsa Török

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## Manuscript Culture and Nineteenth-Century Women's Life Writing: The Diaries of Baroness Jozefa Wesselényi

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DOI: 10.18318/td.2020.en.1.7 | ORCID: 0000-0002-3275-6342

**M**ichelle Levy in her article titled *Jane Austen's Manuscripts and the Publicity of Print* formulated a poignant observation about the complexity of the uses of script and print media during the Romantic period:

The assumption that the late-eighteenth century print avalanche destroyed and supplanted earlier forms of literary dissemination is considerably weakened once we look closely at the period's authors – even the most canonical, like Austen, working in the most commercial of genres, like the novel – and find them using traditional scriptural practices. Indeed, the complex economy of script and print permeated Romantic literary culture, even if, thanks to the greater publicity of print, it remains largely unexplored.<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, scholarship on nineteenth-century women's writing concentrates primarily on women's literary careers that emerge in an ever expanding culture of printed materials: books, magazines, and newspapers. Certainly, periodical publication played a crucial role in

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**Zsuzsa Török** –

PhD, is a Research Fellow at the Research Centre for the Humanities, Institute for Literary Studies, Budapest. Her research interests include periodical studies and women's writing in the nineteenth century. Her recently published articles in English: "Transnational Scissors-and-Paste Journalism: Victorian Women Writers in the Hungarian Szépirodalmi Figyelő" (2018); "Notorious Beyond Any Other European Woman of Her Generation": The Case of Count(ess) Sarolta/Sándor Vay" (2018).

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<sup>1</sup> Michelle Levy, "Austen's Manuscripts and the Publicity of Print," *ELH* 4 (2010): 1016.

the development of both men's and women's literary careers during the nineteenth century. Consequently, print technology, as argued by Margaret Ezell, became a metaphor for the "professional" authorship and "advanced" market economies, while manuscript authorship had been relegated to the outdated, the primitive, and the "amateur."<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, Ezell also made a relevant distinction regarding the usage of notions such as "public" and "private," meaning "published" as opposed to "personal." Still, manuscripts were often not private in the sense that their readership was restricted to the author him/herself, but were permeated by "public" moments, when the texts circulated among family members, friends, close acquaintances, and were read or even copied by them.<sup>3</sup> As demonstrated by Michelle Levy, a number of the late eighteenth-century female writers, including Jane Austen and Maria Edgeworth, initially composed their novels with a specific familial audience in mind. Thus, their writings were first shared with and read for family members, and even stalled in this phase of domestic publication for many years, as happened with all of Austen's early manuscripts.<sup>4</sup> It appears that the practice of communal manuscript circulation persisted even during the mid-Victorian period. As shown by Rachael Scarborough King in her article on Elizabeth Grant, instead of pursuing print publication, while writing her memoirs, Grant also composed a two-volume fair copy of the account that was circulated among friends, relatives, and members of her Highland community. Ultimately, the memoirs were only published in 1898, more than a decade after her death.<sup>5</sup> As a consequence, Ezell argued that this circulation of texts attests to their social function, and she called their author the "social author."<sup>6</sup>

In addition, the theory and practice of life writing, influenced and inspired by recent findings of manuscript studies, has also seen a shift away "from an exclusive focus on the autonomous individual towards considerations of relational selfhood, communal identities, and collective and dialogic forms of self-representation."<sup>7</sup> Cynthia Huff and Margaret Ezell have both stressed

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2 Margaret J.M. Ezell, *Social Authorship and the Advent of Print* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 9.

3 Ibid., 38.

4 Levy, "Austen's Manuscripts," 1017.

5 Rachael Scarborough King, "Letters from the Highlands: Scribal Publication and Media Shift in Victorian Scotland," *Book History* 17 (2014): 298–320.

6 Ezell, *Social Authorship*, 21–44.

7 Amy Culley, *British Women's Life Writing, 1760–1840: Friendship, Community, and Collaboration* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 11.

the importance of understanding the specific historical moments and cultural contexts in which manuscripts were conceived.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, Ezell also asserted that studying life writing as part of an extant manuscript culture shifts emphasis from the writer's emotions and the events described to the situation of the creation of the texts, its formatting and physical presentation, and how this information might affect its reading.<sup>9</sup> In a similar manner, Amy Culley claimed that "approaching life writing as an expression of personal feeling by a single author has tended to obscure its importance as an articulation of relationships and communal identities or as a contribution to the history of a family, community, or nation."<sup>10</sup>

Having surveyed the dominant trends of the scholarship, this article proposes to investigate the diaries of the Hungarian Baroness Jozefa Wesselényi in the context of manuscript culture, an eligible alternative for women who wrote (but were not necessarily professional writers) during the nineteenth century. Through the examination of her journals in the context of manuscript texts, this article reveals that they were intended for circulation inside the immediate family circle, and designed specifically for entertainment and instruction of family members. Baroness Jozefa Wesselényi's diaries appear to have been her legacy to her children and grandchildren, and they also attest to the ways women's writing played a crucial role in shaping the family history of the nobility during the nineteenth century.

Jozefa Wesselényi was born in 1812 in Aranyosgyéres (Câmpia Turzii, Romania), as the daughter of one of the greatest noble families of Transylvania. When her diary started in 1848, the Principality of Transylvania was an Austrian crownland, and after 1867, as a result of the Austro-Hungarian Compromise, became part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Finally, after World War I, it was annexed to Romania. The baroness married Baron János Bánffy in 1834, who was the son of another prominent family of the Transylvanian nobility. The newlyweds settled down in their mansion-house in Beresztelke (Breaza), a small village near the town of Szászrégen (Reghin), and spent most of their lives there. They also lived for shorter periods of time in Budapest while the baron, a member of parliament, undertook certain political assignments. János Bánffy died in 1873, at the age of sixty-four and the widowed

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8 Cynthia A. Huff, "Reading as Re-Vision: Approaches to Reading Manuscript Diaries," *Biography* 23 (2000): 506; Margaret J.M. Ezell, "Domestic Papers: Manuscript Culture and Early Modern Women's Life Writing," in *Genre and Women's Life Writing in Early Modern England*, eds. Michelle M. Dowd and Julie A. Eckerle (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 33.

9 Ezell, "Domestic Papers," 33.

10 Culley, *British Women's Life Writing*, 2.

Baroness Wesselényi moved to Kolozsvár (Cluj-Napoca) towards the end of her life, where she died on 6 January 1899, aged eighty-six.

Aristocratic literacy and writing habits such as correspondence, diary writing, and the translation of foreign authors or even production of original pieces of literature had long been strongly interrelated before the nineteenth century. Accordingly, the Wesselényis also engaged themselves in active, regular, and various writing practices. Unfortunately, only small fragments of their presumably consistent corpus of manuscripts have been preserved to the present day. Moreover, the surviving texts, mostly unpublished items, are quite unknown even to Hungarian historians, and literary historians as well. Fortunately, there are some exceptions to this. For instance, the travelogue giving an account of her travels to Italy and Switzerland written by Polixéna Wesselényi, who was the baroness's sister, has gained more attention when published in 1842.<sup>11</sup> Polixéna Wesselényi embarked on her journey to Italy at the age of thirty-four with her ten-year-old daughter and her daughter's governess, her marriage with Count László Bánffy having been on the rocks. As a matter of fact, she met her second husband, the Englishman John Paget, himself on the Grand Tour of Europe at this time, during these travels. Eventually, Polixéna divorced Count Bánffy in 1836, and married Paget the following year. Paget, a diarist and writer, is best known for his book on Hungary titled *Hungary and Transylvania* and published in London in 1839.<sup>12</sup> After marrying the Hungarian Polixéna Wesselényi, Paget lived in Transylvania till the end of his life. He is buried in the Házsongárd Cemetery in Kolozsvár (Cluj-Napoca). As a consequence of their romantic encounter influencing their courses of lives, the reception of their travelogues as well became inseparable in the eyes of the interpreters. Additionally, Polixéna Wesselényi also came to be regarded as the first female travelogue writer in Hungarian literary history.

Thus, when Jozefa Wesselényi started her diary, she followed an extant practice that had long been familiar to the Wesselényis. When reaching the decision to start a daily account of her life, she might have been influenced by the writing practices of her sister and brother-in-law, and following a well-established family tradition of writing and keeping a journal. For the baroness also frequently alluded in her diaries to her grandparents' letters and journals that had been read out loud for the children by her mother on a regular basis. Moreover, it is not an irrelevant fact that the baroness's husband also kept

11 Paget Jánosné Wesselényi Polyxena, *Olaszhoni és schweizi utazás* (Travels to Italy and Switzerland), (Kolozsvár: A' kir. lyceum betűivel, 1842).

12 John Paget, *Hungary and Transylvania: With Remarks on Their Condition, Social, Political, and Economical* (London: John Murray, 1839).

a diary, according to Lajos Kelemen, the editor of her memoirs.<sup>13</sup> Regrettably, the manuscript of the baron's journal, though examined by Kelemen at the beginning of the twentieth century, has gone missing.

The autograph diary of Baroness Jozefa Wesselényi, commenced in 1848, was written until the end of her life in January 1899. Her journals cover a period of some fifty years. The first entry dates from 1 November 1848 and was recorded in Marosvásárhely (Târgu-Mureş). At that time the baroness was on the run with her children, their home in Beresztelke (Breaza) being turned upside down in the turmoil of the Hungarian Revolution and War of Independence. The journal starts *in medias res* with events already underway, and without introductory remarks concerning the diarist's aims and motivations for giving a daily account of her life: "Today's battle between Urbán and the Szeklers might be crucial concerning our destinies."<sup>14</sup> Due to this narrative that opens in the midst of action one may assume that the passages relating the events of the Revolution of 1848 are sequels to a previously commenced diary. However, as there is no evidence to support such a theory, the assumption that the baroness might have commenced her journal previous to 1848 remains largely speculative.

Besides the journal begun in 1848, after thirty-three years Jozefa Wesselényi started another diary in December 1881. The latter became a more personal account of family events and domestic matters, while the former one remained a rather "objective" narrative of social and political affairs of the time. Due to Baroness Wesselényi's extensive writing, a considerable body of unpublished manuscripts has been preserved – five bound journal volumes and an additional 1400 pages of the second, domestic diary written on separate sheets of paper.

Not only did the baroness keep different types of journals, but she also started to write her memoirs in 1857. The reminiscences were first published in 1931<sup>15</sup> by Lajos Kelemen, and were recently republished in 2014.<sup>16</sup>

13 Kelemen Lajos Benczur Gyulánénak, Kolozsvár, 1922. szeptember 4. (Lajos Kelemen to Mrs. Benczur, Cluj-Napoca, September 4, 1922) in Kálnoki Kis Tamás, "Kelemen Lajos II," *Levéltári Szemle* 25 (1975): 417–418.

14 Losonczy Bárá Bánffy Jánosné Hadadi Bárá Wesselényi Jozefa naplója, 1848–1862 (Baroness Jozefa Wesselényi's Diary, 1848–1862), vol. I, Biblioteca Academiei Române, Cluj-Napoca, shelf-mark number: Mss A 86/I, 1r.

15 Bárá Bánffy Jánosné Wesselényi Jozéfa bárónő emlékirata 1848–1849-es élményeiről (Baroness Jozefa Wesselényi's Memoirs of Her Experiences During 1848–1849), ed. Kelemen Lajos (Cluj-Kolozsvár: Minerva Irodalmi és Nyomdai Műintézet Részvénytársaság, 1931).

16 Bánffy Jánosné Wesselényi Jozefa, *Emlékirat* (Memoirs), ed. Kelemen Lajos, Utószó (Afterword) Sas Péter (Kolozsvár: Kriterion Könyvkiadó, 2014).



This memoir is one of the few existing accounts of the Revolution and War of Independence of 1848–1849 from a woman's perspective. Apart from the uniqueness of the historical insight, it stands out as a most valuable source of women's writing that surely enhances our knowledge concerning the uses of writing in the nineteenth century among the nobility.

Baroness Jozefa Wesselényi might have experimented with different writing practices, for Lajos Kelemen also mentioned a thirty-two-page-long unfinished romance in his introduction to the memoir published in 1931. As reported by Kelemen, the fragment featured the same protagonists under pseudonyms, and narrated similar events to those chronicled in the memoir.<sup>17</sup> Unfortunately, the manuscript of this narrative extant in the 1930s has not survived.

After the diarist's death in 1899, Jozefa Wesselényi's journals and memoirs came into the possession of her eldest daughter (Baroness Polixéna Bánffy, wife of Baron Kálmán Kemény). Later, one of the baroness's grandsons, Baron János Bánffy inherited the more objective journals relating to social and political events, initially written on loose sheets of paper and subsequently bound together in five different volumes.<sup>18</sup> Finally, the manuscripts were acquired by the archive of the Transylvanian Museum Society in Kolozsvár (Cluj-Napoca). After the Society had been dissolved under the communist regime in 1949, its holdings were redistributed among three institutions: the Special Collections of the Lucian Blaga University Library, the National Archives, and the Special Collections of the Romanian Academy's Library in Cluj-Napoca, Romania. Today, the journals and the memoirs are kept in the latter.<sup>19</sup>

Jozefa Wesselényi wrote her diary entries and her memoirs on separate sheets of paper of different sizes and colors. She initially started her journal with continuous prose from margin to margin. Yet, just after a few pages, she changed the page layout of her diary to a left-hand column, and continued as such till her last entry. This page layout obviously served practical reasons as she repeatedly reread her diary entries and her memoirs, and added brief

17 Kelemen Lajos, "Br. Bánffy Jánosné, Wesselényi Józéfa bárónő élete és emlékirata" (Baroness Jozefa Wesselényi's Life and Memoirs) in *Báró Bánffy Jánosné Wesselényi Józéfa bárónő emlékirata*, 9.

18 Ibid., 10.

19 Losonczi Báró Bánffy Jánosné Hadadi Báró Wesselényi Jozefa naplói (Baroness Jozefa Wesselényi's Diaries), 1848–1899, vol. I–V; Báró Bánffy Jánosné Báró Wesselényi Jozefa, *Szabadságharc alatti élményeim* (Baroness Jozefa Wesselényi's Memoirs of Her Experiences During 1848–1849); Özv. báró Bánffy Jánosné báró Wesselényi Jozefa házi naplója (Baroness Jozefa Wesselényi's Domestic Diary), 1881–1899, Biblioteca Academiei Române, Cluj-Napoca, shelf-mark numbers: Mss A 86/I–V, Mss A 85, Mss A 87.

or even longer corrections on the margins. The right-hand blank columns permitted the rewriting of the past at any time, and displayed a characteristic typical of manuscript texts, as observed by Ezell: a layering of time, continuous self-analysis and reworking.<sup>20</sup> Yet, rarely did the baroness write more than two or three columns, and there were periods during which she could not put down a single entry for weeks. Consequently, her narrative appears to be spasmodic at times, with occasional reiterations.

Baroness Wesselényi's journals reflect on various social and political events of the second half of the nineteenth century. For instance, in its first volume written between 1848 and 1862, the baroness is constantly preoccupied with the events of the Hungarian Revolution and War of Independence of 1848–1849 and the aftermath of the Revolution, regarding the establishment of the Habsburg absolutism. She writes about house searches, imprisonments, executions, and about the loosely organized Austrian government. Her account covers those events that affected her immediate environment and her family's life, including the life of the Transylvanian and Hungarian nobility. Her second, more personal diary started in 1881, describes her everyday life as the routine of an old woman living in Kolozsvár (Cluj-Napoca). She seems to spend her days visiting her children and relatives, attending church services, or various family events.

After having married Baron János Bánffy in Kolozsvár (Cluj-Napoca) in 1834, Jozefa Wesselényi lived a comfortable and relatively secure life in the small village of Beresztelke (Breaza) near the town of Szászrégen (Reghin). They lived quietly engaged in everyday activities, as the baron was preoccupied with the management of his estate and his political assignments, while the baroness dedicated her time to the running of the household and child-rearing. Occasionally they visited relatives or close acquaintances, and usually kept themselves up-to-date with current social and political events through reading newspapers. Nevertheless, the events of the Revolution and War of Independence of 1848 brought about a radical change in their lives. The mansion they lived in for over a decade and their farmyard was completely destroyed by an unscrupulous mob from neighboring villages. The crowd chased away their herd of cattle and horses, damaged the furnishing of the house, and robbed the family off their clothes and bed linens. The couple saw a decade's worth of their life and work totally ravaged overnight. As a consequence, they had to flee their home and returned only in September 1850, after almost two years of forced displacement.

It is possible to assume that the traumatic experiences of 1848 might have triggered the baroness's urge to write, and motivated her in narrating

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20 Ezell, "Domestic Papers," 46.

subsequent life events. Though neither her diaries nor her memoirs were meant for publication, Jozefa Wesselényi apparently wrote with a specific audience in mind. She often talked to her grandchildren in her diaries, and she also addressed them at the beginning of her memoirs. It was her greatest concern to write a personal account, a sort of *petite histoire* of the social and political events of 1848–1849 and the following decades, a narrative that would help her grandchildren better understand their own family history.<sup>21</sup> Therefore, she commenced her memoirs accordingly:

I have got married in 1834. The days of my marriage were almost similar for the last 23 years spent here in Beresztelke, as I lived an uneventful family life raising several children in average conditions. He who learnt my daily routine would easily guess my hourly activities altered only by the arrival of unexpected guests or my husband's divertissement. A yearly trip that could last couple of days to my mother, as long as she lived, and later on to my brothers or mother-in-law constituted the major events of this family life including the birth of my children recurring nearly every eighteenth months. Yet, this quiet life was to be stormily disrupted by the events of the revolution. It is this story of the revolution, my dear grandchildren, I intend to give an account of.

Do not expect historical writing from me, for I lack the learning, thus I do not attempt anything of the sort; I only share with you what I and my family have experienced as it could be of interest for you. Your parents, grandparents, relatives, or at least people with familiar names to you will occur in it. These minor details of the great drama will help you understand those times. For they are the minor components of the great whole, something like the secondary characters rendered to the great heroes immortalized on canvas.<sup>22</sup>

In a similar manner, when she decided to engage in the writing of another, more private diary in 1881, she again referred to her descendants as implied audience of her writings in its introductory lines:

I have been writing my diary rather objectively so far. However, I remember that we used to listen to our mother with great interest while she was reading out loud from our grandparents' letters and journals. Therefore, I thought, my children and

21 Domestic memoirs often originated in a desire to pass on a personal or family history to succeeding generations. Linda H. Peterson's example for a typical pattern with its conventional features of such documents is Ann, Lady Fanshawe's *Memoirs* (1829), in Linda H. Peterson, *Traditions of Victorian Women's Autobiography: The Poetics and Politics of Life Writing* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999), 17.

22 Bárá Bánffy Jánosné Wesselényi Jozéfa bárónő emlékirata, 1.

grandchildren would also be interested in my private life, and decided to write about trivialities as well.<sup>23</sup>

According to these confessions, Jozefa Wesselényi's diaries and memoirs do not appear to be private documents written for the author herself in order to contemplate her own life. For these manuscripts were not private in the sense that their readership was restricted exclusively to their author. They were available to the members of the family who constituted the implied readership for her writings. The baroness's personal life entangled in the social and political events of the second half of the nineteenth century, and narrated in her first diary and her memoirs, might have been instructive for her children and grandchildren. Additionally, the trivialities narrated in her second diary might have served more entertaining purposes.

Moreover, the first diary later proved to be a reliable source of information on past events – regarding family, Transylvanian nobility, and the nation – not only for other family members, but for the diarist herself. It appears that when Jozefa Wesselényi ulteriorly decided to write another narrative, her memoirs of the Revolution and War of Independence of 1848–1849, she surely constructed her account based on her former diary entries that functioned as *avant-textes* to her reminiscences.<sup>24</sup> It is quite possible that when writing her memoirs, Baroness Wesselényi might have thought of their publication, as well. As mentioned above, her sister, Polixéna Wesselényi, and her brother-in-law, John Paget, had already been published authors. Still, there is no allusion to such an intention in her memoirs.

Yet, even without print publication during her life, Jozefa Wesselényi composed a narrative that apparently circulated among family members, other relatives, and friends, who constituted a semi-public audience. Furthermore, it seems that the manuscripts had continuously been read among family members. After the baroness's death, the texts even became subjects of basic editing and restructuring. Her offspring not only read her diaries and memoirs but obviously contributed to the construction of the manuscripts. As mentioned before, Baron János Bánffy, Jozefa Wesselényi's grandson, had these manuscripts bound together in six different volumes. Prior to the binding of the diary's separate sheets, he even completed the volumes with

23 Özv. báró Bánffy Jánosné báró Wesselényi Jozefa házi naplója, Kolozsvár (Cluj-Napoca), December 1, 1881, 1r.

24 The term is used by Philippe Lejeune in his genetic study on autobiographies: Philippe Lejeune, "Auto-Genesis: Genetic Studies of Autobiographical Texts," in Philippe Lejeune, *On Diary*, ed. Jeremy D. Popkin and Julie Rak (Honolulu: The University Of Hawai'i Press, 2009), 213–235.

additional title pages including the author's name, a title, volume number, and the time period covered in the respective tome. He also intended to add indexes at the end of each volume, but he eventually did not manage to finish the task, and the pages following the title of the index remained blank.

The baroness's diary entry from 1 December 1881 quoted above also situates her writings in the context of an existing family tradition. Her extensive life writing and her disparate writing practices appear to hold to the conventions of the milieu she was raised in. For families of high nobility, from which many women diarists originated during the nineteenth century, had not only sufficient wealth, stability, and social standing to preserve these texts and later to give them to public archives,<sup>25</sup> but above all they had the necessary education to produce these texts, and later transform them into literary heritage. Jozefa Wesselényi's texts were also conceived to reinforce the idea that the mandate of the Hungarian nobility is to contribute to the construction of the nation. This is a conviction equally shared by the baroness in her oeuvre and by her offspring. A relevant example illustrating this attitude is János Bánffy's preoccupation to paste the *ex libris* of the Bánffy family inside the volumes of the diaries, a custom typically followed by the noble families of the time.

All in all, Jozefa Wesselényi's various writing practices remind us of the complexities of women's affiliations when confronted with gendered identifications that may interact with other forms of belonging, such as family, class, and nation. Her oeuvre offers a valuable site for reconsidering the persistent status of manuscript as an alternative and attractive form of audience-oriented publication for many women who wrote during the nineteenth century. For women not only wrote for print publication at that time. Keeping an extensive correspondence or a diary for private and familial use appears to be a persistent and frequently employed set of writing practices throughout the century. Consequently, these sources also reveal an unexpectedly large scale of communicative options available in particular historical periods. In the light of this conclusion one can establish that the study of manuscript cultures constitutes a historically valid alternative to the simplified perception of the nineteenth-century literacy envisaged as a progressive march toward print culture.

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25 As stressed by Cynthia A. Huff, class played a major role in the survival and archiving of these manuscripts: Huff, "Reading as Re-Vision," 509.

## Abstract

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### Zsuzsa Török

RESEARCH CENTRE FOR THE HUMANITIES, INSTITUTE FOR LITERARY STUDIES, BUDAPEST

*Manuscript Culture and Nineteenth-Century Women's Life Writing: The Diaries of Baroness Jozefa Wesselényi*

The paper focuses on writing as cultural practice relying on the study of the diaries of the Hungarian Baroness Jozefa Wesselényi. By examining her journals, it attempts to clarify the process by which manuscript culture shaped and influenced the Baroness's writing habits. For despite the fact that print lost most of its "stigma" and women entered the literary marketplace, manuscript cultures continued to thrive in the form of diary and letter writing during the nineteenth century. Baroness Jozefa Wesselényi wrote extensively throughout her life. She commenced her diary in 1848, and continued to write it until the end of her life in 1899. In addition to the journal begun in 1848, she started another diary in December 1881. The latter became a more personal account of family events and domestic matters, while the former remained a rather objective narrative of social and political affairs of the time. In addition to her diaries, Jozefa Wesselényi also wrote her memoirs of the Revolution and War of Independence of 1848–1849 in 1857. Her manuscripts, mostly unpublished items, were preserved by her family, and later donated to public archives. By examining her diaries in the context of a thriving manuscript culture, the paper reveals that they were intended for circulation inside the immediate family circle, and designed specifically for entertainment and instruction of family members. Baroness Jozefa Wesselényi's diaries appear to have been her legacy to her children and grandchildren, and also attest that women's writing played a crucial role in shaping the family history of the nobility during the nineteenth century.

### Keywords

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nineteenth-century manuscript culture, journal writing, memoir writing, nobility, family history

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 Emilia Kolinko
 

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## **Cas-cou: a Strong Woman! The Divided "I" in Anna Moszyńska's *The Letters and Diaries* (1850)**

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**1 + 1 = 1**Andrzej Tarkowski, *Nostalgia*, 1983

**A**нна Moszyńska celebrated her thirtieth birthday (20 February 1850) in a mental asylum in Pirna. She spent the winter of 1849/1850 with her family – husband Piotr and five small children – in Dresden, about an hour's ride on the train from Pirna. Her psychological condition, which had not been stable for four years, ever since her closest friend Eleonora Karwicka died in 1846, deteriorated so much in the winter of 1850 that Piotr Moszyński was forced to finally decide to move his wife away from those dearest to her, moving her into a psychiatric asylum far from their family home in Krakow. This isolation would last for another two decades.

The diaries and correspondence penned by Moszyńska is unique, in that the voices of those suffering psychological disorders are not often heard in the annals of Polish nineteenth-century psychiatry, nor in the Polish history of discourses (literary, medical, legal) on the subject of

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**Emilia Kolinko** – PhD, holds a research position with the Women's Archive at the Institute of Literary Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences. She has edited two volumes of nineteenth-century women's "ego-documents": Helena z Wolskich Krukowiecka, *Dziennik 1831–1833* (2016); Anna Moszyńska, *Listy z Pirny 1850* (2018). Her interests lie in women's diaries and writers' archives.

psychiatric disorders in that century.<sup>1</sup> Moszyńska has humbly contributed to the history of Polish literature as the author of a book titled *Uczucia i widzenia Polki w roku 1846* (A Polish woman's feelings and perceptions in the year 1846) – inspired by authentic letters relating her experience of the Krakow Uprising of 1846. Her archive is a small part of the much larger legacy left behind by her husband, Piotr Moszyński, stored at the National Library in Warsaw. Her medical history, charting her illness and stay in secure establishments, has survived by accident, having been discovered in a paper recycling plant in Krakow. The correspondence she sent from Pirna in 1850, along with the diaries she wrote in the form of journal-letters, has been stored in the family archives as autobiographical testimony, but also as documents which were used during her life to evidence her “madness.”

Anna Moszyńska, née Malinowska, was born on 22 February 1820 in Weremijówka, Volhynia (currently in the Khmelnytskyi region of Ukraine, near Ploskirov), to a noble family. Her father was Kajetan Malinowski (c. 1778–1834), her mother Eufrozyna née Mikoszeńska (d. 1836). She had five siblings: brothers Tytus (1814–1868), Stanisław (1817–1904), and Eustachy (1821–after 1860) and elder sisters Idalia (died after 1845), and Klotylda (before 1820–1880). The family lived in impoverished circumstances, due to the father's illness. In 1833, even though their estate was confiscated, Tytus stayed in place with his wife Klementyna and their children, as did the ill, unmarried Idalia. Anna was home schooled, learning drawing and – as the only one among the siblings – music. She spent the first sixteen years of her life in Weremijówka, of which little is known (Moszyńska mentions these times in her letters and diaries from Pirna). She lost her father in 1834, and when her mother passed two years later, she was taken into the care of her relatives. Dorota Kołyszko, a relative in charge of the Malinowski sisters, took Anna and Idalia in 1836 to visit Róża and Ludwik Sobański's Ładyżyno estate, which was located near Kremenets in Volhynia. There they met Józefa Moszyńska, the daughter of Piotr (1800–1879), who would later become Anna's husband. Józefa came to stay with her guardians, the Sobańskis, in order to return with a chaperone to Czernihowo, where she lived with her father, sentenced in 1827 to ten years of banishment for conspiratorial activities. I have reconstructed the ensuing fates suffered by Malinowska in a brief biography,

<sup>1</sup> Most recently, two key works have been published in Polish on the subject of nineteenth-century madness and psychiatric treatments in the first half of the century: Katarzyna Czebot, *Praktyki psychiatrii* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IBL, 2018); Mira Marcinów, *Historia polskiego szaleństwa*, vol. 1: *Słońce wśród czarnego nieba. Studium melancholii* (Gdańsk: słowo obraz/terytoria, 2017).



which precedes the publication of her Pirna papers:<sup>2</sup> in May 1837 she moved to Czernihowo, where she set up home with the Moszyńskis. She married Piotr in Kiev on 28 November 1839 (five children were born of this marriage). When a few months later Moszyński was pardoned, the family settled in Dolsko and then, in 1843, the Moszyńskis moved to Krakow. Here, Anna engaged in charitable works organized by a local philanthropic association, and she witnessed the revolutionary fighting of 1846. She left Krakow in 1849 on a journey that would take her through Cologne, Interlaken, Marienbad, and Dresden to Pirna, where she found herself as a result of a nervous breakdown and unsuccessful water cure.

Moszyńska spent six months in 1850 in Pirna (from February to July). The first period of psychiatric treatment resulted in her penning sixty letters, mostly to Piotr and the children. From these letters I have been able to extract fragments of her personal diaries, hidden in the correspondence and mistakenly classified by archivists as “letters” – an understandable misreading as everything that Moszyńska wrote was, in essence, an obsessive form of confession to Piotr, and the fact that the same writing paper was used for writing both letters and diaries did not help. (Likewise, her family correspondence shows that she kept a personal diary before she ended up in Pirna). This Pirna period also produced medical documentation (dated notes covering her treatment, Pienitz’s correspondence with Moszyński, a record of illness) and Piotr Moszyński’s letters to his wife. The whole of this private legacy, along with medical documentation, led to the publication of *Listy z Pirny 1850* (Letters from Pirna 1850).

My presentation takes into account the performative character of the letters and diaries written by Anna Moszyńska. The letters and diaries show the author moving towards individually perceived personal freedom, which is one way of reading their meaning. The aim of corresponding – aside from the pragmatic need to maintain contact with her husband, children, and friends – and keeping diaries can be seen in the numerous and varied attempts she makes at establishing a dialogue with Piotr, trying to restore a lost connection with him. The evidencing ratio of such testimonies, in which the author tries a range of persuasive forms in order to convince her husband to accept the

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<sup>2</sup> Anna Moszyńska, *Listy z Pirny 1850*, ed. Emilia Kolinko (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IBL, 2018), the volume comprises Anna Moszyńska’s diaries and letters by Piotr Moszyński. Quotes from this edition are designated throughout the text by page number in parentheses. In line with the assumptions of the editorial series Women’s Archives (“Archiwum Kobiet”), which attempts to establish modern rules in terms of scientific methods in relation to previously unpublished “ego-documents,” the style of the autographs has not been modernized in line with the demands of contemporary Polish publishing standards.

truth of her personal emancipation,<sup>3</sup> the desire for freedom, and her female polyphonic subjection. This content was rarely expressed by Moszyńska in an orderly fashion, rhetorically adjusted to the power of her emancipatory desires. Letters to her children, in which she comes across as a concerned mother, contain neither the markers of fragmentation of the speaking person nor the senses that were present in the monologues directed exclusively at Piotr. These fragments – containing private recollections, making use of metaphors, but also of a range of stylistic devices, such as Ukrainian ditties or Biblical references – show her desire to integrate herself with the microcosm of her family and social life on her own terms.

Anna Moszyńska did not aspire for her voice to be included in the public discourse. Her direction was the opposite of that – reflected in certain contemporary theories on the subject of society. The Spring of Nations movement rolling through Europe at the time exposed Moszyńska first to the events of the Krakow Revolution of 1846, which she viewed from her window, and then to the aftermath of the May Dresden revolution, when she arrived with her family in the capital of Saxony in the winter of 1849. But because the private sphere was also a source of her narrative (as well as its object), the selection of symbolic devices and various paradigms, or else logical structures, could be freer and more creative; confronting the norms of the time with critiques of them, based on allusions, biographical and literary asides, and metaphors.

### War is Over

Moszyńska's emancipation was her individual transformation of discourses on the theme of femininity and gender equality which, with little actual intensity, appeared in the 1840s in Polish journalism. In a broader context – representing elements of utopian and socialist narratives – it can be perceived as a personal project, unfolding in the confrontation between representatives of two generations: Piotr Moszyński, born in the final year of the eighteenth century, and Anna who was twenty years his junior, one of the first generation of Polish women striving towards emancipation. The

3 I refer to this understanding of emancipation even though women's history in Poland generally used this term to define social and political movements demanding equal rights, access to higher education, and representation in the public sphere, politics, etc., for women. It seems that the journalists writing on the subject of gender equality in the 1840s for *Tygodnik Literacki* or *Przegląd Naukowy*, both publications with a definite philosophical bent, allow us to perceive this period as a time when philosophical foundations for gender equality were formed, already forecasting the activities of women involved in the emancipation movement of the second half of the nineteenth century.

epistolographic and diarist subject appeared in several incarnations, related partly to the functions Moszyńska played in public life (charity work) and her family home (mother, wife, sister, daughter). To these configurations, which related to social and civic realities, she added more figures from a symbolic sphere – more personas: a hermaphrodite that self-fertilizes, a temptress or else a “madwoman” – that fit in with her transgressive project. Her aim, however, was not to abolish gender structures or socio-familial hierarchies, in which the author functioned, but to define her own identity based on arguments about gender equality.

Telling in this context is a fragment of a letter to her husband sent in the first month of her stay in Pirna, filled with the air of submissiveness. Anna wrote on 27 February 1850:

Submission hence is a grand word, as I understand it; I am obedient and wish to be for all time, following the ten commandments: to you, my Dear, I promised before God obedience and marital felicity, and with His help I aim to hold to this until death, so help me God! But beware, Piotr, that this is married obedience, and not the unlimited sort which women swear to their husbands when taking marriage Vows; this is not a denial of my personal will, which is a sort of unspoken happiness, when a shared sort of love and pouring together of the most precious feelings brings it into being! (92)

Moszyńska, in talking about being faithful to her husband and obedient to God's will, agreed indeed to a traditional arrangement in terms of married hierarchies, sanctioned by religious law. And yet she symptomatically mentioned here her own will, which is shaped in a romantic married relationship. It is possible to surrender one's own free will, on the condition that it would be shared between both sides of the married union – the quoted fragment has this sort of meaning. In this married union, almost transgressive, we are dealing with a de-subjectification which allows liberation from traditional hierarchies of superior and subject while simultaneously creating a new order – family, gender – in which this hierarchy no longer exists.

Love is the foundation of this equality. This is an interesting element of the argumentation applied by Moszyńska, for feelings could drive her overactive, sickly imagination – serving after all as an argument for norms represented by Moszyński. In one of the diary entries, Moszyńska answered the accusations he levelled at her in a letter, arguing that her feelings were “real,” legitimizing them also through religious standards: “Even this most recent letter, which I ripped from »neath my own heart,« is not as you think the fruit of an imagination aroused by illness, but real feeling, which I am ready to act upon as you wish, so help me God!” (8; *Dziennik*, 8 March). She

also identified her feelings as roles: real and emotional, such as she found in marriage: “Your Sister, Mother, Daughter, Wife you want? All these feelings you will find in the heart of your An” (175; letter to Piotr Moszyński, 15–22 March 1850).

Piotr defined these feelings as erroneous straight away: “Please remember that I am only called Piotr and am only your husband, that I know you as named Anna and as my wife, the mother of my children, the other persons or names which you give yourself is something I must put down to your own personal weakness” (23; letter to Anna Moszyńska, 24 March 1850). The husband played the same role as August Hedenus, a doctor from Dresden, and so a representative of medical authority and scientific knowledge who read – as Moszyńska suspected – her letters to other members of the family: “and counts the clicks of my fingers, and beating of my heart, based on the feelings to be found in them” (109; letter to Piotr Moszyński, 5 March 1850).

These fragments, referring to a paradigm of equality in human relations, in addition characterized – aside from marriage – with visions of egalitarian societies united by a shared Christian religion, bring to mind utopian beliefs. One of the elements of this utopian emancipatory project was in perceiving the disadvantaged situation women found themselves in within society and family structures. Therefore, a conceptualization was sought which would be sensitive to social context and take it into account, formulating at the same time ideological frameworks for talking about equality between women and men in all the fields of their activities, while retaining the uniqueness of both genders.<sup>4</sup> Womanhood was in these programs treated approvingly, for – according to Julia Woykowska, a peer of Moszyńska’s born in 1816 and writing in 1843 – war was by then finished, proving female equality and equal rights to fulfilling their potential should be treated as light-hearted jokes, as an anachronism.

Women’s civic subjection, best seen in the institution of marriage, was also maintained by women. According to Woykowska, writing in one of her regular articles – passive postures, demoralizing them, tying them to domestic lives that were strictly separated from public life, thus the so-called “family hearth,” represented the trivial sphere of women’s “fitting about.”<sup>5</sup> From the very beginnings certain hopes were offered by Christianity, which, nevertheless, shifted femininity into the sphere of sublimated phantasm,

4 On the topic of Narcyza Żmichowska and her work, see Ursula Phillips, *Narcyza Żmichowska. Feminizm i religia*, trans. Katarzyna Bojarska (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IBL, 2008).

5 Woykowska is not concerned with the precise indication of the historical moment, but with the emancipatory potential of the idea.

a sphere of longing for sanctity which did not correspond to women's realistic capacities. Christianity, although it did not alter women's position as set beneath that of men, with its models represented by Holy Mary, turned them into the embodiment of hyper-natural holiness and highest priesthood.<sup>6</sup> This phantasmic sublimation did not lead to improvements in women's position and role in society, although it could have. Debased, devalued, considered to be substandard, halfway through the nineteenth century they found their advocates in Saint-Simonists and Fourierists. Woykowska considered the ideas offered by the former to be anachronistic and repetitive of an unrealistic sanctification of women in society, which could not be applied to anything other than literature, and in reality disabled women wanting to function in the public sphere or else outside of traditional structures.<sup>7</sup> Proposals put forth by the Fourierists turned only into political slogans, while women remained an objectified, reduced tool, as summed up in Woykowska's article. The writer rejected this unrealistic vision of womanhood, her own conception being motivated socially and ethically. Women should have the chance – she wrote – to partake in the process of moral perfecting, while also marking their presence and usefulness in social activities (Woykowska herself was active in pedagogy among the lowest rungs of Polish society). She referred to the emotional strengthening of women's presence in the public sphere:

[Women] embracing the whole of Humanity in their hearts, will forget differences in status and there, where today humanity is demoralized by [God's] Mercy, they will defiantly serve their Civic Duties – thereby actively contributing to rising of millions – millions – from the moral and physical impoverishment, hastening their coming – without allowing finer feelings to perish in their wombs.<sup>8</sup>

Civic duty ought to be far from delicate exaltation, for it belongs to the domain of civic activity, but this does not mean that women lose their honesty as

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6 Julia Woykowska, "O stosunku kobiety do mężczyzny i w ogóle do Społeczeństwa," *Tygodnik Literacki* 48 (1843): 378.

7 The feminist component of the Saintsimonists' program is still perceived in this spirit today, e.g.: "Saintsimonist women, like the workers, turned out to be the biggest losers of the failure of this moment. Activist women who allowed themselves to be drawn in by these emancipatory phrases were firmly discredited and ostracized for their »liberated« way of life." Karol Popowicz, *Saint-Simon i saintsimoniści – od rewolucji do kolonizacji* (Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego: Warszawa, 2018), 142.

8 Julia Woykowska, "O stosunku kobiety do mężczyzny i w ogóle do Społeczeństwa," *Tygodnik Literacki* 52 (1843): 410.

an aspect of their identity: "Women freeing themselves from the horrid yoke of singular opinion, and yet above all retaining that most touching poetry, the heart of a woman."<sup>9</sup> In a similar spirit is the writing of Edward Dembowski, a contemporary philosopher. In an article titled "Uwagi o wychowaniu ze szczególnym względem na kobiety" (Notes on upbringing with special concern for women, *Przegląd Naukowy*, 1842), he assigned women feelings of love which do not devalue their intellect, which is developed and present to the highest degree. For the thinker, love meant a feeling directed at sacrificing the self,<sup>10</sup> which can be considered as another form of civic duty. According to Dembowski, love was a disposition revealing itself in action and in reaction. It could not develop in conditions of subjection: "Though how can we demand that women give love to the husband [...] if, though they are caring and loving, not a friend, but a master awaits a woman at home; he gives her orders, not advice; or else abandoned, she is lost in the prosaic reality of domestic chores, which no husband's smile can sweeten."<sup>11</sup> It is symptomatic that in the first paragraph the journalist parts with tradition ("the world casts off the rotting bark of over-ripened concepts"),<sup>12</sup> considering his own vision as a manifestation of modernity.

The emancipatory intellectuals of the 1840s made use of a refreshed set of concepts, based on the philosophical levelling of men and women together. These views were in conflict with earlier discourses, represented by normativists, such as Klementyna Hoffmanowa nee Tańska, born in 1798 (almost a peer of Piotr Moszyński), who gave the pedagogical prompt for a well-rounded education to be offered to young women, but promoted the view of women as being substandard to men in all possible family and social arrangements. An additional new value was found in the category of feelings, assigned to women, which from a romantic curious disposition transformed into a quality that was useful for family and society. From today's perspective, this rather conservative defense of women's emotionality had its positive aspect, which becomes obvious when we take into account that the psychiatric machine for suppressing and fixing erroneous emotions, while also repressing insanity, was already gaining momentum.

9 Julia Woykowska, "O stosunku kobiety do mężczyzny i w ogóle do Społeczeństwa," *Tygodnik Literacki* 51 (1843): 403.

10 Edward Dembowski, "Uwagi o wychowaniu ze szczególnym względem na kobiety," in *Pisma*, ed. Anna Śladowska, Maria Żmigrodzka, vol. 1 (Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe: Warszawa, 1955), 147.

11 *Ibid.*, 150.

12 *Ibid.*, 146.

### Masks, Polyphonies

A key aspect of Moszyńska's records is the continual changing of textual masks by the speaking subject, which was forced to seek external legitimization for its activities, while comprehensively constructing the qualities of its identity. The epistolographic and diaristic "I" takes on various forms in subsequent attempts at persuasive correspondence, which is supposed to mark out new lines of personal freedom, above all seeking to reject women's paradigmatic oppression by men. Here we find – at a textual level – a generational conflict.

Her letter to her husband dated 4 April 1850 features several quotes from the Bible. Moszyńska expresses a critical evaluation of mothers and wives being stripped of rights and freedoms by quoting the verse "What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder" from Matthew 19:6. Further on, she quotes Ecclesiastes 4:9–10: "Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone." The third fragment is "Image of a Strong Woman" from the Book of Proverbs 31:16–22.

She considereth a field, and buyeth it: with the fruit of her hands she planteth a vineyard.

She girdeth her loins with strength, and strengtheneth her arms.

She perceiveth that her merchandise is good: her candle goeth not out by night.

She layeth her hands to the spindle, and her hands hold the distaff.

She stretcheth out her hand to the poor; yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy.

She is not afraid of the snow for her household: for all her household are clothed with scarlet.

She maketh herself coverings of tapestry; her clothing is silk and purple.

L. Juliana Claassens reads this fragment in the context of Martha Nussbaums's human flourishing and reveals its oppressive character: women are presented as functioning in the public sphere, not only as connected to the private, domestic sphere. Their safety is not compromised, they retain a corporeal integrity, which allows them to take part in various activities. Women have the right to own property, from which they draw income, being guided by reason. They enjoy a sense of safety and prosperity, though their inner, emotional life remains hidden.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> L. Juliana Claassens, "The Woman of Substance and Human Flourishing: Proverbs 31:10–31 and Martha Nussbaum's Capabilities Approach," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 16 (2016): 16.

This fragment of the book of Proverbs was criticized, as creating an unrealistic image of women, as one can see in it a woman in the full bloom of her humanity, as being capable and independent – the sort who can see the difference between being dutiful to her husband and a slave to her marriage. The language found in the Bible – the tongue of mothers and fathers – can be a nightmare, one would like to say, an unwanted legacy. Upholding the status quo,<sup>14</sup> while also updating traditional cultural coda, Moszyńska seems to be able to convince her husband that it is possible to find a symbolic foundation for that which is currently undergoing change. Feminist critics found visions of oppression in this notion of the “strong woman,” while in a nineteenth-century dictionary “strong woman” carries a powerful and positive identity context.<sup>15</sup>

Moszyńska created her persona through the myth of the female soldier or knight, who is fighting for her nation's independence (this was her parents' and husband's experience), while she submitted to a military regime herself. In Pirna, she slept on the ground, tempering her body, walking barefoot in the garden behind the secure unit, and in a letter dated 15 March asked Piotr to raise their sons and daughters in the same military spirit: “And so I would like to ask you to raise, not by force or violence, but slowly, withy play-like life: let Daughters and Sons of ours work together, let them develop their physical and mental faculties equally; let them in good time live on bread and water and sleep on the ground beneath a naked Sky, for Eagles make their nests upon

14 Rachel Aumille, “The Lick of the Mother Tongue: Derrida's Fantasies of the »Touch of Language« with Augustine and Marx,” in *The Language of Touch: Philosophical Examinations in Linguistics and Haptic Studies*, ed. Mirt Komel (NY: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), 107–120.

15 It is not clear to me how it is that for six months of being interned in Pirna she does not mention her philanthropic and social works, does not craft her identity around civic duty, and yet we know that for some years she took part in creating sanctuaries (cultural centers) for children in Krakow. Ksawera Grocholska, a friend of the family, who was also a renowned activist helping Polish refugees in the Russian Empire, visited Anna in Pirna in the spring. In a letter dated 15 May 1850, she tries to talk Piotr into taking his wife back home, explaining that the therapeutic methods of the time were ineffective and inhumane, stripping women of their dignity, something Anna “should never be deprived of; Comme chrétienne, comme votre épouse comme Mère et Comme Citoyenne d'une si malheureuse et Chère Nation” (231). Women's dignity is based – according to Grocholska – on their ability to act as mothers, wives, Christians, and Polish citizens. In a letter written to Anna on the same day, she mentions that in Krakow poor folks and children from sanctuaries were awaiting her return (228). Moszyńska meanwhile focused her experience – later criticized by emancipated women of the second half of the nineteenth century – on that of being a mother and wife. Maybe it is the faint border between family life and civic engagement, associated with the sphere of women's activities, which caused Moszyńska not to feel the need to speak about this aspect of her functioning.



high rocks!" (174). Speaking in Biblical terms, she assured Piotr that all her games with womanhood and manhood fit into God's sacred order. Thus, symbolically speaking, femininity was not a barrier in order to enter one's personal experience in national or religious mythologies. Yet something emerges in the letters and diaries from a taboo sphere, from silence – a sexuality, which Moszyńska considered a part of religious and national traditional imaginarium. Sensual and sensitive to physical contact, she asked Piotr in one of her letters to come earlier to her by himself, without the children, so she could spend some intimate moments with him. And this is the end of her affirmative relation to feminine/married sexuality, which, once it appeared in the text, took on the form of sexuality which was – in the language of the document – "sinful."<sup>16</sup>

Moszyńska talked about this sphere of her intimate life, using the available erotic expression of national myths involving Queen Wanda.<sup>17</sup> When on 13 March she escaped from her room to the rear of the asylum and was then led back by a German man she had met, she described the scene making reference to this very legend:

And many people saw and heard me shout to the whole World that I am a Polish Queen, that Wanda who was as unwise as I, for she did not want to take a German, for he is not a born Brother, merely a cousin, and saying that it is only a God of native Brothers ordering to love she jumped in the Vistula! But why she did so, I cannot in truth say, perhaps time will tell. I must however be just to myself in having been wiser than she was, this time, not only did I not resist at all, but having taken him by the neck I sang to him of the Rosary." (61; *Diary*)

Moszyńska did not reject female sexuality, as demonic, dark, destructive, quite the opposite – she was subject to it, performed it, generating it openly.

Perhaps it is only an automatic association of similar combinations: Polish woman and German man. Moszyńska uses the myth of Wanda to create a narrative in terms of certain visual character, a textual echolalia. But there are more fragments combined in this way – no new qualities were created to meet the need of the female subject negotiating her own position. Moszyńska relies on the sparse textual universe at her disposal: calling herself the sinful biblical Eve, or else her own daughter Helena, while Piotr – by the name of their son

<sup>16</sup> "Helenka still so naive that she knows not Polish grammar and instead of Sinful [Grzeszna] she thought Polite [Grzeczna]" (158). In writing about Helenka, Moszyńska is in fact writing about herself.

<sup>17</sup> A legendary Polish Princess who refused to marry a German Prince. Heroine of numerous works of fiction that were an artistic reinvention of the legend.

Emanuel. Verses from Ukrainian folk songs helped expand the language she shared with Piotr, operating in myth or biblical references:

Hryć, stay away from evening dances  
Only witches all around  
And each Girl with darker eyebrows  
Is a veritable Witch.<sup>18</sup>

Petie is who I love  
Petie I will wed  
Oh, misery, not Petie  
Light skin, dark mustache  
I kneaded, I baked  
And for whom? For Peter!  
Not Peter, but Hryć,  
Have mercy God of wafers!<sup>19</sup>

The hero Hryć, starring in the first song, is Piotr. Anna is the witch-seductress, the “Girl with darker eyebrows.” Male-female relations – as Moszyńska seems to say with the aid of rhythmic phrases found in Ukrainian – are incredibly interwoven with sexual-physical relations. This can be – apart from existential or moral questions, such as obedience or independence – also a domain for negotiation.<sup>20</sup> “In the nineteenth century, peasant sayings and songs still talk about love as something which is done rather than felt,” Tomasz Wiślicz makes this key observation, allowing us to better understand the Ukrainian quotes Moszyńska uses, defining male-female relationships in

18 “Ne chody Hryciu na wieczernyci  
Na wieczernyci wsi czariwnyci  
Kotra Diwczynna Czornobrywaja  
To Czariwnycia sprawedywaja.” (153).

19 “A ja Petrusia lublu  
Ja za Petrusia pijdu  
Ej tycho ne Petrus  
Biłe łyczko czorny wuś  
Nawaryła napekła  
A dla koho dla Petra  
Nyma Petra tylko Hryć  
Żal sia Boże palanyć!” (150).

20 I would like to thank Monika Rudaś-Grodzka for suggesting the idea of “negotiations” when talking about women in the personal sphere in the nineteenth century.

sexual contexts.<sup>21</sup> Moszyńska wrote to Piotr in Ukrainian on 14 March, asking him to visit: "Mój Piotrusiu mij hołubku sywenki pryidy, pryid' do mene zawtra i to na Nuż, bo ja z Petrom zaczęłam robotu i z Petrem Choczū skinczyty w Sobotu" (161). She called him to come to her, flirting in Ukrainian, when imagining meeting his first wife Joanna, in Ukrainian sniping at sister Klotylda, which was reputed to have married an elderly soldier in a union stripped of passion.

Verses from Ukrainian songs came to her automatically, as if by accident, although always in an explicitly erotic context. Their lyrics were more expansive and gave more freedom, breaking with the Church model of sexuality, which was also parodied in erotic poetry.<sup>22</sup> Dobrosława Wężowicz-Ziółkowska writes that folk songs did not organize sexuality. They organized themselves "around the body subservient to the rules of power structures."<sup>23</sup> The essence of liberated sexuality is to be found elsewhere: sexuality practiced widely, as sanctioned by nature, was not burdened with the sense of guilt, shame, or conviction about sinning:<sup>24</sup> "Through the coincidence of male and female [...] it is in some way a repeat of God's act of creation, a fixed reflection and renovation of the order of things, agreed at the start, *in illo tempore*."<sup>25</sup> Moszyńska elaborated in her diaries on the physical communion in marriage that was sanctioned by God:

Believe me, beloved Piotr, that if I asked you to come to me to stay the night, this is because until now I have rather been ashamed of kissing, caressing, around people, as in the time when only God is watching us; but if need be, I will surrender this shame too. My Darlingest and why should we rid ourselves of these pleasures so innocent for this happiness, which I am convinced even Angels in Heaven are free to enjoy; and those I miss so much, the way Children miss their Mother's caresses?" (11)

Wężowicz-Ziółkowska's interpretation, which draws attention to the relations between human sexuality and the Church, Bible, and Heavenly order,

21 "In the nineteenth century, peasant proverbs and songs still speak of loving as something which is done rather than something which is felt." Jean Louis Flandrin, "Love and Marriage in the Eighteenth Century," in *Sex in the Western World. The Development of Attitudes and Behaviour*, trans. Sue Collins (Chur: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1991), 80.

22 Dobrosława Wężowicz-Ziółkowska, "Modele polskiej seksualności ludowej (wraz z postscriptum)," *Postscriptum Polonistyczne* 2 (2008): 76.

23 *Ibid.*, 82.

24 *Ibid.*, 84.

25 *Ibid.*, 84.

indicates that in spite of a certain literalness folk poetry not only accepted a range of sexual dimensions, but also wrote it into the Divine order and norms. Moszyńska did not want to talk about this topic from the heart of her urbanite society or with the aid of bourgeois timid language, or else using the lexicon of Romantic poetry, as she would not find the right words there. By herself – parodying Queen Wanda's patriotic gesture or else alluding to the seduction of Eve – she used the style of folk song, which combined the divine with the obscene. Equality between partners could be established on the basis of Christian ethics.

The Old Testament view of a strong woman and the New Testament suffering of the Way of the Cross have become a reservoir for language and presentation speaking about female subjection, but also allowed the possibility of pushing boundaries with the use of literary experiments featuring self-crucifixion (with masochistic undertones), replaying scenes of seduction by sinful Eve and Queen Wanda, who according to legend drowned herself to save her virginity. It turned out however that in this power dynamic of the husband and psychiatric learning, efforts based on fitting in with structures and at the same time going beyond them, were not to be combined.

On 15 March 1850, Moszyńska began writing a rather disorderly letter to Piotr, in which her two friends, the deceased Eleanora (Lola) and living Felicja Wężyk (Linia), are recalled in autobiographical context. In Moszyńska's medical history, Anton Dietrich wrote that she experienced a serious crisis the same day and was put in a straightjacket. The patient regained peace of mind on 23 March, but returned to the letter a day earlier. In a fragment added on 22 March, all the characters listed thus far finally met. Moszyńska was able to look at herself with real insight, and although the rhythm of this epistle still seems disturbed, feverish associations reach the highest pitch.

She passed down the (utopian) revelation that the Kingdom of God can be found here on Earth. She recalled that Easter begins in ten days and the association with pre-Easter confession took her back to April 1831, the time of her first ever confession. She then became aware of the situation she was in and asked Piotr to come to Pirna – not as a husband, but as her confessor. She mentioned tempering the flesh, and a possible trip to Odessa to see Moszyński's first wife, Joanna, and her family. Up to the culmination: "I feel that I am something more than a Woman and Less than a Man, oh yes, some thing, some other, as our proverb has it »half Dog half Goat, God knows not.« I am half Doggie and half Woman, I am a Hermaphrodite, An is my name" (173). The association with a hermaphrodite and self-fertilizing in the patient's narrative returned – as Dietrich wrote in his notes – in the first week of April.

Some traces of hermaphroditism can be found in a poem by Narcyza Żmichowska – an emancipatory writer, born in 1819, and so a generational peer of Moszyńska – “Szczęście poety” (Poet’s happiness), published in the journal *Pierwiosnek* in 1841. Their presence is accompanied by a tension connected with gender-based limitations, with the awareness of taking up a position which will go beyond regulated norms. For Żmichowska hermaphroditism appears when the female lyrical subject in the act of usurpation regarding norms is situated on the border separating the female from the male, and says: “If a poet I were.”

This double attribution turns out to be insufficient and Żmichowska goes a step further, performing an act of transgression – dualistic sexual/gender identity vanishes in the name of the poet’s own identity, one who is neither man nor woman. In the third part of the work, the female subject goes through further transformations, the eventual forms being symbolic in nature, but they are also free from gender conditioning, being elements of the world of nature: a flower, an eagle, and a stone.<sup>26</sup>

As much as in Żmichowska hermaphroditism is a starting point for abandoning gender identification and for spiritual transformation into a being which achieves self-realization and self-reliance (Romantic genius), in Moszyńska this is a sign of polyphony, of identities entangled, of the bustle of numerous roles. The author experiences aporia, an internal conflict with no way out. She falls into the void between disparate choices, as if she wanted to escape the necessity of choosing either personal freedom and thus leaving her husband, or submission and staying with the family, conforming to the rules of the game.

Existence in the persona of a madwoman – which is another mask – was precisely predicted by Moszyńska: “Something ugly whispers into my ears »lie, invent and your suffering will cease, you will be happy, say you are sick, you were a crazy woman, that you cannot remember anything«” (16; *Dziennik*). Admitting to madness could have justified her conduct and brought her back to her family, perhaps she thought naively. At the same time madness, as she said in the quoted passage, is a state in which she was, is a feeling of dignity in the self. In the act of confession – encountering her husband’s power over her and that of psychiatric knowledge – this state took on the character of an error, while she herself felt complete, or else: tried to achieve completeness in her existence and her expression. “I told you, Piotr, love me, and you always answered: thou art sick, I called to you, Piotr, love! While you fed me

26 Magdalena Siwiec, “Czy romantyczna poetka jest poetką? O Szczęściu poety Narcyzy Żmichowskiej,” in *Romantyzm, czyli inter esse* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IBL, 2017), 163–166.

medicines," she wrote in her diary (9). It was too early then for madness/weirdness and isolation to become a tragic choice: "In the name of individual and ambivalent truth of existence, not allowing the self to be reduced to a permanently pre-agreed schematic and repertoire, often not allowing me to express myself."<sup>27</sup> Remaining in a state of madness at that point represented a future option, recognized by Moszyńska, but associated solely with failure. Although the announcement of a personal defeat could be seen in the superficially autobiographical set of references to her childhood.

At the end of this chain of characters that Moszyńska takes on as her personas, there is a little girl: Maria Eleonora. This is actually the name of Moszyńska's daughter, who was five at the time, and it was also the name of Eleonora Karwicka, Moszyńska's friend, who died a year before Maria Eleonora was born. Towards the end of her stay in Pirna, in her correspondence, Moszyńska played out – using these name-signals – the last "Good-Friday-ish" masquerade. "Sen Marii Eleonory" (Maria Eleonora's dream) from a letter dated 9 June, is a story which is apparently aimed at young readers, but is actually aimed at Piotr. In it Moszyńska imagines a scene in which the little girl protagonist falls asleep and dreams that she has gotten lost in a forest. She then encounters a bush with thorns – she weaves a crown from it for her head, and uses the thorns to pierce her crossed-over feet:

Blood shot out, scared by the sight of this and the pain she felt, the Child wanted to pull the thorns out from this freshly made wound, when she saw her Father standing over her, looking at her with a stern, though not angered, expression; and finishing the work began, he placed his hand on the Child's breast, and pressing it down gently forced her to lie back somewhat. Marya Eleonora then felt the thorns pressing into her little head, tears flowing heavily down from her eyes, but having been raised obedient by her Mother and by the respected Father K: not to ask Father "why?" but to follow his will instead; she said not a word. (218)

In the letter dated 10 March, the girl in this recollection, or retold story, also faints, falls asleep, is defenseless, left in a locked room. The character of Father from "Sen Marii Eleonory" completes the crucifixion – nailing the girl's hands to the ground with the thorns.

Moszyńska's epistolographic and diarist "I" succumbed to continuous splitting into masks, roles, functions – expressive, symbolic, rhetorical. A splitting which in Moszyńska's intention was to help her integrate with her surroundings, but instead the norms she encountered in the process led to rejection, isolation, and many more years in another psychiatric institution.

27 Maria Janion, "Gdzie jest Lemańska?!", in *Kobiety i duch inności* (Warszawa: sic!, 2006), 227.

Simultaneously the very resistance to those norms fueled the creative invention of autobiographical writing about the self, as Moszyńska still desired to write (diaries or letters) in the struggle to complete her identity. In the final image of the crucified girl (roughly repeated in diary notes), the hierarchy of generations and genders returns, as if to satisfy Moszyński's demands. "Crucifixion," verbalized and presented using worn out associations with the motif of sleep and the conventions of didactic fable, may be a foreboding of Moszyńska's defeat, a forecasting of the failure of her spontaneous project. Or, at the same time, it is the inception of her full existence transported only now to the imagination, and a closure of the attempt to exist in text form.

### Queen of Mad People

Anna Moszyńska used the discourse about womanhood of the 1840s as it was practiced by the likes of Julia Woykowska or Edward Dembowski, and also in literary texts by Narcyza Żmichowska – countering a strong female subject, basing its public, family, and individual functioning on emotionality and honesty. The role of education in building a sense of civic and social emancipation of women was emphasized by these writers. They also introduced discourses which argued for equality between men and women – though at the same time underscoring their unique differences – but they still did not grant women any political influence, or rather they did not seek to fight for that influence. Moszyńska – coming from the same generation as the other authors named above – used these ideas for the development of her own individual expression, both in her locution and behavior, as a strong female subject created by a pre-insurgent generation of intellectuals, confronting ideas of gender differences with the generation of their parents.

On the one hand, Moszyńska was the intellectual daughter of her times, and on the other she was playing a literary game. Not expression perhaps, or at least not only, but a comprehensible and effective communication was her priority (her diary was also kept in the form of a diary-letter, diary-confession), and so if she was to reformulate her familial and social position, she looked for help in biblical imagery. In twisting the conservative assumptions of pedagogy in her textual declarations she did not deny her religious beliefs, nor the search for support in the Holy Scriptures, nor being a wife and mother.

Anna Moszyńska's letters thus show *in statu nascendi* the splitting and then the re-joining – through the use of a dairy and correspondence, under conditions of psychiatric incarceration – of her female identity. As a wife, Moszyńska discussed with Piotr Moszyński the limits of abstract obedience

to her husband, using the Old Testament portrait of a “strong woman” to postulate gender equality. At the same time, as a woman-author, she tried to fight for inclusion in the masculinist idea of “poet-prophet” roles, forecasting the impending utopian notion of “communism” (this is the term she uses) of religion and classes.<sup>28</sup>

Although the identity of a woman-mother was mostly presented in the context of Christ-like suffering – hence a mother giving birth in pain and enduring worldly hardships – her intention, in spite of this uniquely transgressive project, was to remain untouched. She transformed herself as a woman on the following planes: literary (in the form of a tragicomic sketch, in which she – the woman unjustly imprisoned in a hospital – runs away and sends her servant to replace her), mythological (Queen Wanda), phantasmal (woman soldier), symbolic (hermaphrodite), and religious (crucified girl). Eventually she found herself in a clinch of possibilities, impossibilities, and desires; and the only way out was a final, paradoxical alienated identity of the “queen of mad people.”<sup>29</sup>

*Translation: Marek Kazmierski*

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28 She invites her servant woman Weneranda Stylińska to Pirna, and announces, probably aware of the ironic aspect of her message, the friendly–sisterly character of their relations.

29 Therapy in Pirna was partly successful, as Moszyńska was moved by her husband in the summer of 1850 to a hospital in Leubus (now Lubiąż in Poland). She spent the time between 1850 and 1851 with her family in Krakow, but her worsening mental condition meant that she had to once more be interned in Leubus. She spent the next two decades in the hospital, returning to Krakow ten years prior to her death in 1889.



## Abstract

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**Emilia Kolinko**

THE INSTITUTE OF LITERARY RESEARCH OF THE POLISH ACADEMY OF SCIENCES

*Cas-cou: a Strong Woman! The Divided "I" in Anna Moszyńska's The Letters and Diaries (1850)*

This article analyzes the various rhetorical and communicational strategies present in Anna Moszyńska's (1820–1889) diaries and correspondence, written while Moszyńska was held in a mental asylum in Pirna (1850). The fragmentation of identity visible in these texts is treated as an attempt to rewrite Polish patriotic and prophetic phantasms. These sources also evidence the way in which such ego-documents functioned weakly along emancipatory discourses in the early 1840s. Paradoxically, these were not in open conflict with traditional systems of value, which Moszyńska wanted to be a part of on her own terms.

## Keywords

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madness, lunatic asylum, women's history, queer, narrative agency

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 Philippe Lejeune
 

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## The Personal Journal of Émilie Serpin (1863–1881)

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**I**n 2006, my friend put me in touch with a scholar from Tours who wanted to get rid of a pile of notebooks that he had bought a couple years back at a flea market. We agreed on a deal. When he was passing through Paris, he handed me the notebooks. The faded ink on the cover announced: *The personal journal of Émilie Serpin* and, on the top and on the left, there was a small inscription “J. M. J.” Praised be the Divine Providence, Jesus, Mary, and Joseph – Émilie’s notebooks came to the right address. I was going to depose them at the Autobiography Association (Association pour l’Autobiographie) so that they would be safe. But first, I was going to read them! And, right away, another miracle – I, agnostic and anti-clerical, converted, at least to Émilie. Was it because she herself was religious about her journal? Was the “J. M. J.” not supposed to stand for “Journal Mon Journal” (“Journal My Journal”)? If I spent long days without ever feeling bored, holding a reading glass in my hand (the ink had faded so much), meticulously studying the two thousand pages and transcribing the journal bit by bit, it is because I knew that Émilie, in the solitude of her bedroom, was on the verge of heresy, preferring her journal to God himself. It is 24 December 1865... is she going to celebrate Christmas, the

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### Philippe Lejeune

– a preeminent French scholar of autobiographical writing, he lectured on French literature at the Université Paris-Nord until 2004. Author of numerous works on personal journals and autobiography, e.g., *On Diary* (2009), *Pour l’autobiographie* (1998), “Cher écran...” *Journal personnel, ordinateur, Internet* (2000), *Signes de vie (Le pacte autobiographique, 2)* (2005), *Le journal intime: histoire et anthologie* (2006), *Aux origines du journal personnel. France, 1750–1815* (2016).

anniversary of the birth of Jesus? No, she is going to celebrate the anniversary of her journal, which she began writing on a gloomy evening in Angers, on 24 December 1863. Right now, she is a twenty-eight-year-old unmarried woman, she works as a governess for count de la Béraudière, she is taking care of three little girls and she spends the summer in Anjou, at the Château de Bouzillé and the winter in Paris. This is her in her small room in Paris:

24 December [1865] – it has already been two years, almost to the minute, when I found myself in my small bedroom in Angers, with my soul drowned in a profound sorrow, not knowing how to find the strength and courage to fight the torments of life, the storms and obstacles of a world that presented itself as furious and menacing. And so, I have come to a strange resolution: I got some sheets of paper and sown them together, I then took a fountain pen and on the cover of the notebook, I wrote a couple of words that surprised even me: *Personal journal of Émilie Serpin*; this is my name, but why have I decided to start writing a journal? To the world, to a stranger, it is just a pile of paper that could be used as touchwood or as rolling papers for tobacco; but to me, I think I am not exaggerating when I say that the journal is my joy, my consolation, my sweetest pastime. Who would think that while reading those lines at times grim, acerbic, dreary and discouraging? Oh, but perhaps I am wrong! The pain that I describe here, after entrusting it with God, turns into joy, I feel relieved once I write about the weaknesses of my poor heart: I have more courage and I feel less alone once I am able to find myself in my room and write about what happened during the day. I am not sure whether there is hope for my soul; alas! I have all the reasons to believe that there is not! But I do not want to preoccupy God with myself, so I begin the third year. What will it be like? You know it, oh almighty God and this is enough to me because I only want what you want! And so, I continue with my journal for as long as there is a major reason to abandon it.

Two years later, when her journal is four years old, Émilie does not see it as a simple means of alleviation, or of great consolation that can be compared to God, but a divine inspiration – making the journal her own Savior, whom she would consider equal to Jesus!

24 December [1867] – Midnight, midnight approaches! [...] Once again, the anniversary of my daily notes; I am celebrating it for the fourth time. Oh, how much pain has perished once I have confided with my secret journal! How many tears have stopped dripping down my face once I picked up my pen and described some of the bitter sorrows that haunted me, some of harsh memories, some of bitter regrets that horrified me a lot less since I shared the secret with my notebook! Blessed be thou, my God for this thought that you had inspired in me,

because I have no doubt that it came from you, this project conceived one day in the middle of great anxiety, while the whole world seemed to have abandoned me. A piece of paper, an innocent notebook gave me comfort and perhaps, with your permission, my Jesus, it can also be my Savior? Without it, without the consolation that I experienced when you told me to confide in my journal, would the hopelessness have not touched my heart with its icy hands? I tremble at the thought of it. Yes, I would have been saved once again by your divine Providence and I admire your secret plans about me, oh my king, who uses such simple ways to keep me close to You.

Let us not be afraid to say that Émilie had faith in writing and this faith, which seduced me, will guide my presentation. But first, we have to present Émilie. Her story is a full-blooded novel: theatrical and with sudden twists of fate. Her social destiny has made her a privileged observer and critic of the small-town and Parisian society of the Second Empire. Her journal is also, last but not least, a real encyclopedia of religious practices. A protagonist of a novel, a witness of history, a religious bigot? This fanatically religious spinster will eventually end up as a mother of many children, but for a very long time, writing will be her sole passion. How did her journal end up a century later in a flea market? Countless family documents disappear without a trace, but this unique testimony survived a whole century. Without a doubt, what prevented the journal from destruction was its thickness and aesthetic quality, but it did not save it from eventually being put to waste.

The journal consisted of seventeen notebooks of the same size (15,5 × 20 cm), but of a different volume (from 102 to 188 pages). The paper was sown and cut by Émilie. All the notebooks were kept in the same style: there was the “J. M. J.” on the top left corner, then the inscription “the 1st notebook” (etc.) on the top right corner and finally, written in three lines in the center, the title *Personal journal / of / Émilie Serpin*. The journal was kept daily, at least up to the thirteenth notebook (from 24 December 1863 to 21 February 1871). Each time when Émilie puts her pen away, she explains herself that she was bound to restrain herself from writing. And so, sadly, the notebooks 14 and 15 (1871–1874) went missing, they were probably borrowed never to be returned. The notebooks 16 and 17 (1874–1881) are visibly kept with less discipline and the journal ends in 1881, the seventeenth notebook has only thirty-three pages filled out of 154.

When Émilie starts her journal on Christmas in 1863, it is not really her first time. She had already kept a journal, but she had destroyed all of the notebooks. She regrets it and so, in an effort to make up for the loss, she writes down her autobiography, from her birth in 1837 to 1863. The autobiography is written in an additional notebook of eighty-nine pages, without a title. From

her birth until 1881 (when she was forty-four years old), her whole life is written down by her.

Her social destiny agrees with the general trend at the time, when the lower classes were experiencing a social climb towards middle class. She does not mention her grandparents. Her father, a teacher in Tours and later in Bourgueil, settled in Chinon where he also bought a small business which his wife took care of. Émilie and her sister were put in a religious boarding school, where she proved to be an excellent student. She then started helping at the family business, which sadly eventually went bankrupt. The family left Chinon and settled in Chapelle-sur-Loire, where the father became a teacher in the public school system, which, despite the support of the curia, competed with a school owned by sisters. Émilie went to school herself and she passed the teaching exams in 1859. In May and June of 1856, Émilie was a first-hand witness of the famous levee of the Loire, which she turned into an epic piece of storytelling in her autobiography. In her youth, she admitted to being a joyful, cheerful girl, which earned her the nickname "Big Laugh." Indeed, she came off as happy and full of energy. In 1860, she met a young man, Luis Guérin, who worked in La Chapelle as an office worker for an engineer, Mr. Verger. They fell in love, the parents consented and so they became engaged in 1860. However, the young man was ill, probably with tuberculosis. He went to get treatment in his family home, and first wrote to Émilie with rather sad news, but the letters eventually stopped coming, which worried the young girl, who, nevertheless, did not stop waiting for a word from her fiancé. On 7 June 1861, Louis' sister told Émilie that her fiancé had been dead for seven weeks. And Émilie had not even been informed!

She was in shock and decided to leave her family; she entered a convent in Angers as an assistant teacher. But soon she got offered a better job: to become a governess for the aristocratic family La Guesnerie, where she was to take care of the education of the fifteen-year-old Madeleine. She took the job. She spent the winter in Angers, in different *châteaux* – but life was hard: she felt like an outsider, she did not get "the attention that people born into wealth certainly possess." Émilie suddenly found herself in a particularly interesting position, she lived at the top of the social ladder, in a challenging, yet fascinating, predicament – she simultaneously lived the life of the aristocratic family and of their servant, so she really saw everything. However, she felt an immense loneliness, she did not have the company of her beloved younger sister and she was mourning the loss of her fiancé. Émilie sought comfort in religion. In Angers, she got in touch with an old colleague of Louis, who had become a priest, father Guignard, who eventually became her counselor and friend. In a Jesuit priest, Émilie found her spiritual guide and confessor. She really got immersed into religious practice, which filled the emotional void in

her life, the rhythm of her day was defined by morning and evening mass, but most of all, she felt like she belonged to a community again. But in the end of 1863, Madeleine de La Guesnerie, who by that time had turned seventeen and who was supposed to “enter the world,” did not need a governess, so Émilie loses her job. What will she do next? It is in her small bedroom, which she will have to leave soon, that in the evening hours of 24 December 1863, she starts, or rather comes back to writing her journal. In the final passages of her autobiography, which sum up the two years she had spent at the La Guesnerie household, she decided not to “reveal the secrets of other people or give away their vices or their actions that could possibly lead to scorn or contempt against them.” The discretion was easy to keep in a short summary, but proved much more challenging in a detailed day-to-day journal.

After a month, Émilie finds a new job: she becomes the governess of the three daughters of count de la Béraudière. However, there is a significant downside to the situation: she has to leave Angers, her new employers spend the winter in Paris and spring and summer in Anjou, at the Château de Bouzillé, in Melay. Émilie ends up working for the family for the next seven years, from March of 1864 to April of 1871. During that time, she rarely abandons her journal, except for short periods of time. She has many new experiences: she discovers Paris, she goes to the theater (which could possibly be a sin!) and swims in the sea in 1866. During this time, she continues being unsure of her future: marriage seems out of her reach, she had definitely reached the age of a spinster (twenty-five); from time to time, she considers going to a convent or maybe just looking for another job. If her journal, where she meticulously describes her passion for religious practices, can at times be boring, it goes back to being fascinating when Émilie abandons religion and focuses on the social intricacies of her situation. She shares the life of her masters (she eats with them), but also the life of the servants (she proofreads and corrects the correspondence). She can observe both the inside and the outside, the façade and the backstage, and at times she does not feel bound by the rule of secrecy that she had written down in her autobiography. The negotiations concerning her salary lead to almost socialist, and surely morally harsh, conclusions. The egoism, the shallowness and the inconsequence of their behavior are absolutely revolting to Émilie. When it comes to her students, they often pushed her patience to the limits... If her religious effusions are a bit waffly and seem as if they were written down in order to convince Émilie herself, her bits concerning her daily life are clean-cut and precise.

Life is unpredictable. This monotonous existence could have lasted a long time, but then, suddenly, on 3 November 1870, in the middle of the war, a turn of events changed the destiny of Émilie. “Oh how my head is confused! Oh how my life is like a novel” – Émilie was often being dramatic (14 January

1868) about the smallest events [Father Neury, her Jesuit confessor, is back in Paris! Exiting the la Madeleine (a church in Paris), she saw a man who looked like her dead fiancé, Louis!]. But this time, her life really did look like a novel: she was proposed to by Mr. Verger, the engineer, former employer of Louis, who was a lot older than her. He had just lost his wife, he remembered about Émilie and he wanted to marry her! She barely remembered him, he intimidated her when she was little, she would pass on the other side of the street to avoid having to talk to him. "It all seems like a dream or at least a strange reality." Their first meeting, and the crucial one, took place in Bouzillé, on 11 December 1870: they got on their knees in order to pray together, they talked for four hours and she consented to the marriage! The wedding, presided over by Mr. de la Béraudière, mayor of Melay, took place on 18 April 1871. The former spinster from the lower classes suddenly married into the middle class and quickly gave birth to three children (Marie, Joseph, Elisabeth). She spent the next years taking care of the house and being preoccupied with her job, she also had to deal with her aging husband's increasing health problems (he died in 1883). What a pity that notebooks 14 and 15, where Émilie described her marriage, had gone missing! Starting from 1874, when notebook 16 starts, until the end of the journal in 1881, everything was so intense in Émilie's life that she simply did not have time to keep her precious journal...

What to do with two thousand pages of text where the ink is slowly fading? First, we have to digitize them, in order to save them and make reading them easier, then they can end up at the Autobiography Association, where they can be found under the code APA 3143. The perfect thing to do next, would be to transcribe everything. That transcription could then serve as a basis for both an edition of the whole journal, without a doubt, an impossible mission and an edition of a sort of montage of its excerpts. The transcription could also be used for various topics that are tackled by Serpin: the history of education, the history of religious practices, the "genre" itself, local history, the history of contemporary elites and of life in château, and so forth: the journal is a real treasure chest for social history and the history of mentality. I wanted simply, as a sort of preface to future research or editions, to recall, with the help of some quotations, the topics that touched me the most: the faith that Émilie Serpin had for writing, her talent which, in her own way, she proved, and her dream of becoming a writer.



In the center of everything was Émilie's small bedroom, that she used to call *chambrette*, where she would be able to write alone, in peace. "I have to write since there is no one I can speak to" (3 February 1866). The same need

to escape from loneliness pushed her towards religion and writing. Everything gets mixed up in her journal: her notebook fills itself with prayers and religious texts written under the sign of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, but in church, contrary to what one may think, Émilie considers the sermons as works of art, as artistic performances that she can evaluate and grade: she describes her joy while listening to them, she compares the talent of the priests, she contemplates writing summaries and revues, she also makes a (modest!) attempt to compete with the priests by going from being a member of the audience to writing sermons herself. We will find in Émilie's writing a leitmotif of wanting to take the place of the artist, of the creator. In the preface to her journal, she writes: "We would laugh out of pity if we read a text that proved the author's incapacity, but I would take excessive pride in hiding what could turn me into an object of derision" (24 December 1863). It is not therefore Christian humility that makes Émilie so modest, but a kind of self-aware pride.

Apart from sermons, the thing that Émilie seems to like the most about going to church is the music. This is one of the things that she appreciates in Paris, a city that otherwise terrified her. The music there was beautiful. In Melay "the singers sang rarely and it was for the best, because once they opened their mouths, it made you want to run away; their provincial throats were extremely loud, as if they did not want their voices to get lost in a crowd of screams. The representative of the curia and the priest are anti-musicians and cannot sing at all..." (15 August 1864). In Paris, as a real connoisseur, Émilie writes differently about each church: "I do not feel guilty about going to St. Roch church at all, the evening prayer there is sung beautifully, the »Regina« was the one that enchanted me the most; a young boy, who must have been 13 or 14, sang the solo part, but his voice was so ravishingly beautiful, there was such an incredible sweetness to it. Then, the choir sang various parts of *Alleluia*, it was very nice" (3 April 1864). But her true love was the music at her own parish, the Ste-Clotilde Church and we really have to admit that she had good taste: since 1859, the organist and the musical master was César Franck. "The music at Ste-Clotilde is always beautiful, but today it really exceeded itself, the harp and other instruments that join the organ on special occasions really make a marvellous effect" (16 April 1865). "There was a procession of the Blessed Sacrament and the music accompanied; it made me teary in spite of myself. What an agreement, what a harmony: the melodious harp, the beautiful organ with its million low-pitched, harmonious voices, the basses, but most of all the beautiful voices of our choir possessed tonight an almost heavenly quality" (3 February 1866). Émilie wanted to sing herself, she would sometimes give it a try when she was alone:



24 December [1863] – [...] Oh my beloved solitude! How could I worship you more! Here I am, alone with God, always in his presence, I indulge in my work with pleasure: I pray, I read, I write, I sometimes sing. Oh, what I sing is neither melodious, nor harmonious; nature restrained itself from blessing me with gifts that she so generously gives to others; I can easily think of the reason it is so: my excessive pride would make me feel happy if I had a nice voice or if I had any talent at all, any advantage at all and God in his goodness prevented me from the danger of pride: I am thankful to him from the bottom of my heart and if I do sometimes regret not being able to sing, it is only because it would bring me personal satisfaction, I would not seek recognition in false flattery of a world that I find so malevolent.

When she first comes to Paris, she feels guilty when she goes to the theater (which is rare), but she allows herself to go see Italian operas: it is not sinful because she does not understand the libretto and can focus on enjoying the music. After hearing *La Somnambula* by Bellini, whose music she finds “delicious” (26 March 1866), she can take communion without feeling guilty and without the need to re-confess. She does not understand the language and the music purifies the whole experience.

Finding a valuable thing to read proves more problematic. Thank God, Émilie is guided by a periodical that she subscribes to, the *Messenger du Sacré-Cœur de Jésus* (The messenger of the Sacred Heart of Jesus) a monthly bulletin of the Apostleship of Prayer. The booklets of around sixty pages offer piety in various forms: articles, chronicles of current events, biographies, sometimes poems, news from missions, and the like. After she asks Father Noury, her Jesuit confessor, for permission, he allows her to read, with precaution, *The Confessions* of Saint Augustine (this book is not for everyone). When asked about the novels of Walter Scott, he deems them readable, however useless. He steers her towards pious biographies, Saint. John Vianney, Saint Elizabeth of Hungary, *Life* of father de Ravignan. But she had already read them! Just as she had read *Les vies des saints personnages de l'Anjou*, *Les Chouans*, *épisodes des guerres de l'Ouest*, *Le Zouave pontifical*, *Une sœur de Fabiola* (The lives of saints of Anjou, The Chouans, scenes from wars in the West, The papal Zouave, Fabiola's sister), and others. We would have to break into the inventory of her library and find out which books she borrowed. She reads *Une année dans la vie d'une femme* (A year in the life of a woman) written by Zénaïde Floriot, a novel in the form of a journal that takes place in Anjou. Seized with emotion, she reads *Le Souvenir des morts, ou Moyens de soulager les âmes du purgatoire* (Memories of the dead, or ways of comforting souls in purgatory) by father Louis Chevojon, thinking without a doubt about her Louis (29 July 1864). Her spiritual guides warn her to be wary of reading novels “that Saint Jerome calls feasts for the devil” (16 October 1864) and to refrain

from the study of *La Vie de Jésus* (Life of Jesus) by Renan. They emphasize that especially dangerous are those bad books that are “so well written that they shape your taste and style,” juxtaposing them with good ones that are equally well-written, but do not destroy the soul of the reader.

Émilie immerses herself in pious literature. However, certain titles make a particularly strong impression on her and seem especially personal, admirable, and awake a certain melancholia in Émilie. She mentions them when she writes about books that she would like to write. She describes this intense feeling twice and each time this leads to an immediate rush of sadness after she realizes that she is in fact not a real writer. Her genres would have been lyrical poetry and personal journal.

At the end of July 1864, she is about to compose a “collection of chosen verse,” here are a couple of her thoughts after having read Victor Hugo and Lamartine:

19 August [1864] – [...] I copied everything in the collection that I am making. *La Prière pour tous* [Prayer for everyone] by Victor Hugo is so well-written. Oh, how could a heart that dictates such things not belong to a Christian? He believes in God, he proves it by making his daughter pray and be thankful for everything she has and for herself; he admits that God is great and good and that he is our father; he recommends pity for the dead and wishes that, thanks to people praying for them, they:

Flinch in their graves after hearing their names,  
Knowing that someone remembers them here  
And, like a furrow that can still smell the flower,  
Sense in their empty eye sockets a tear forming!!!

Mr. de Lamartine also wrote some beautiful religious poetry and he also was not religious. However, what can be a more fulfilling reading than *Le Crucifix*. We read it with such joy, that we never feel bored by it. All those poetic meditations are admirable. How I regret not being able to write down everything that comes to my head. I would be so happy to have nice pieces of rhyme for every crucial event in my poor life.

Émilie would sometimes try to rhyme, we have a touching piece of evidence of her poetic attempts in the end of the first notebook, when, after she had bid farewell to prose, she resorts to poetry. We can see that she does not master the art of prosody, but we are still moved by her attempt which marries her two passions, lyrical poetry and personal journal:

Oh you, who had always been my dearest confessor  
Accept, secret friend, my farewell, my homage.

I always told you about my pain, my dolour  
 Now you end, no matter the storms that ravage.  
 That will however affect your mistress  
 You will never learn about any more distress  
 But despite that, you will often visit her mind,  
 She will never forget you and every day she will find  
 A precious memory from the bottom of her heart  
 In her spare time, she will go back to the best part  
 A passage she had read countless times  
 This was prolonging the moment when her heart chimes  
 Muting the sorrows of the present day  
 That she would then gladly to God almighty convey  
 Her hand will write them down in a new notebook  
 Her soul will rejoice and with pleasure look  
 At the modest paintings that are her life  
 And of which there is surely not one [...]

Another book that moved Émilie was the four volumes of *Le Journal de Marguerite* (The journal of Marguerite; 1858, two volumes) and *Marguerite à vingt ans* (Marguerite is twenty; 1861, two volumes), one of the bestsellers when it comes to literature written for young girls in the second half of the century. This book filled with admiration and jealousy numerous generations of young journal-writers: it was so well-written and so touching that a private little journal seemed completely worthless next to it. Émilie shares the opinion about the books: "There is a long way from my poor journal to this one, how well it is written and what pleasure it brings!" (21 July 1864). Two days later, she feels hopeless and wants to burn her journal: "Oh how much I am not able to convey all that *Le Journal de Marguerite* managed to communicate! Many people make, like me, short daily summaries of their lives, however, what is specific to my style is that I am stupid. Sometimes, I feel the desire to burn my notebooks [...]" (23 July 1864).

Reading *Le Journal de Marguerite* re-awakens in Émilie the pain of not being a professional writer, which she had already expressed on numerous occasions since she moved to the Château de Bouzillé in the beginning of June 1864. "I must have really little literary talent" (10 June 1864), she sighs, before trying one more time to describe her walks in the countryside. And then, it would be so nice to be a poet to describe swimming in the sea!

8 July [1864] – it is almost certain that we are going to swim in the sea; should I be happy? I do not know. The ocean has to be a magnificent spectacle; artists paint it so beautifully that I have been wanting to enjoy it for a long time; but every new

thing is to me a new reason of regret and bitter pain. Why enjoy the ocean alone? Why should I be deprived of the necessary talent to write about the experience so that my memories can bring me joy again or interest my friends? Those two sorrows are more violent to me than one could imagine. To write would be my ambition. Oh, if only I knew how to write! If only I was not so stupid, if only I was a poet! How delicious moments I would have experienced. But what is the origin of my desire, is it not wanting to be praised, to be glorified, to have good reputation? My God, I do not even know the reason myself, I can only suppose. How absurd is my foolishness!

Émilie tries to convince herself that she should be thankful to God for not having any talent! She might not be a poet, but she is without a doubt a writer. Her two main activities in her small room, apart from her tapestry work, are writing letters and entries in her journal. She spends hours on end writing letters – very often letters of other people. Her expertise and her sense of Christian charity make her take care of all the inhabitants of the house when it comes to correspondence. Since she was fifteen years old and living in Chinon, people had already referred to her as a public writer, even though the thought of writing to strangers about things that she did not understand terrified her! (31 July 1864). She does it out of the good of her heart, moved by the helplessness of those around her who were incapable of writing their own letters (10 August 1865). As Émilie, she writes an enormous amount of letters to her close ones (especially to father Guignard and her sister Célestine). But the ones she wrote to the most often, regularly, but who also proved the most problematic were her family, her parents, her brother Alfred, her sister Elisa, and her favorite sister, Madeleine. Émilie feels hurt when the exchange of letters proves out of balance:

*6 April* [1864] – [...] In my family relations there is a thing that shocks me: each time that anyone experiences pain or has an issue with something, they immediately write to me and I cannot remember a single time when I would not answer with words of encouragement and with pieces of advice based on my own experiences. And so, I also describe to them my sorrows, my aches, but I never get an answer, not even one sentence, not even one word that would come from the heart. But oh, I do not say this as a rebuke. With God's help, I will learn how to bear my cross and my sorrows, I do not share this pain with anyone, but on the inside, I suffer a great deal.

Perhaps there is a relationship between this absence of reaction and the things she says about the way she edits her letters, with a slightly discouraging verbosity?

2 August [1865] – [...] I wrote a long letter to Alfred. I am not sure how it happens but I write very often to members of my family, and each time I find myself writing a lot, but still there is always something that I did not manage to write about. If I wanted to describe everything, I would have to write to them every day. I end up thinking that I am driveling and that it would be for the best if I kept certain things to myself.

She did not make copies of her own letters, but since she had left her family in 1861, she kept almost all the letters she got. They are stored in her correspondence desk, "I have loads and loads of them," she specifies (16 January 1870). Those letters are often marked with black: "Alas! Death is everywhere, mourning will be the experience of everyone, oh how life is sad!"

However, without a doubt her true friend (from a human point of view) and her true work of art (from a literary point of view) is her journal. Just as I had suggested in the beginning, the excessive emotional investment of Émilie can be a problem from the perspective of religion: does she not love her journal a little bit too much? Does she not pay a little bit too much attention to everything that concerns the journal? Does the journal indeed help her to become a better person, or does even the theory that the journal would make her a morally better person prove to be a sign of excess? Every time that Émilie starts a new notebook and every 24 December, the anniversary of the journal, she examines this issue. No, she is not superior in any way, she wants to work on a "good and solid conversion" (24 December 1864), she sees that her effort is futile, but she hopes things will get better next year. Later on, she would try to add a professional aspect to her writing and turn it into a "journal of education": "I would be able to see more clearly if I did not do well at my job or if I went wrong about correcting a mistake..." (3 March 1866), but this decision would not prove fruitful. The real profits were neither moral, nor professional, but psychological: the journal allows her to keep her balance, to fill her loneliness, to compensate her emotions. At the end of the second notebook, she comes to a smart conclusion that if the journal should not allow her to become a better person, it certainly helps her to "maintain" herself. The journal, in its essence, is God who holds you by the hand...

3 October [1868] – [...] Today my notebook ends, tomorrow I am going to begin a new one for the Rosary; I value this habit very much and if I regret anything, it is not doing it earlier and destroying a few loose pieces of paper where I expressed my soul. In order to contain my emotions, I have to confide in something; writing them down is sometimes enough to control the buoyancy of impressions and if I am being honest, I have to say that I do not waste my time on emotions; not that I am making any progress in virtue, in sanctity, alas! No, I have to admit it, but

would I be able to stay what I am if I did not have my journal? I do not think so, this meditation is much needed, therefore I should continue it.

Eleven years later, after having lived through a lot, in the penultimate entry of her journal, Émilie thanks the notebook one last time:

*13 April [1881] – Just like a sincerely devoted friend, you are my comfort, oh, my darling notebook! [...] I go back to you each time a challenging event occurs in my life. It is not out of negligence that I seem to have abandoned you. I simply rarely have time to do anything by myself, for myself; my occupations take my time and exhaust my strength. Only God can see it, but this is enough. I am exactly where your saint Will has placed me, my God, and so, far from whining, I accept, oh I accept the chalice and, taking the example of my Savior, I will drink it until it kills me.*



The afterword, or almost an afterword, from the last notebook, is written by Émilie. I wanted to give here a sort of foretaste of a text that I hope one day will be accessible to a wider public, relieved of some of the pious effusions, focusing rather on putting into light the life and the testimony of a woman coming from the lower class describing the life of the ruling class. An exploration of an unknown manuscript of this type can lead to all sorts of emotional response and all sorts of traps. At times, we are enchanted, as if we were reading a Balzac novel. Other times, the distance between the religious and political ideology of Émilie and those of the reader define the reception of the journal. On the other hand, it would be difficult, without publishing certain passages of the journal, to convey an idea of the stages we have surpassed as a society. I admit that I would sometimes think Émilie stupid, just to end up with a conclusion that I was the stupid one. I was first fascinated, then disturbed, exasperated, bored, moved, and friendly towards the author. After going through hundreds of pages, I have got used to coexisting. I had been seduced by her sincerity, once I accepted the auto-persuasion within her religious discourse. I had been also seduced by the clear-headedness of her discourse that she managed to maintain in her journal. Last but not least, I had been seduced by her passion for writing. As an appendix, I propose that we read the first page of her journal: Émilie offers us a kind of personal tour through her discourse, using emotionally loaded words, that move us thanks to their simplicity and accuracy: what is a journal, if not “the future, bit by bit, drop by drop”? When it comes to the future of the journal itself, it was miraculously saved from the harsh fate that Émilie had anticipated. She believed that her soul was immortal, but that her journal would inevitably perish. If we

remember all this in heaven, perhaps we will be able to say to Émilie: we are here and you are with us.

*July 23 [1864] – [...] I sometimes feel a need to burn my notebooks; the fear of future regrets prevents me from doing so. In any case, why should I pay attention to the elegance of style, to wanting to excite an interest in a piece of writing that dies while being born? If I die before my sisters, they will not make my journal public, I am sure of it; if I die after them, it will be my nephews and nieces who will throw the notebooks into fire, because they will not find any use in keeping them. All this is clear and easy to understand. My intention is to leave the question of the journal in the hands of father Guignard if I die before he does and if God blesses me with the awareness of approaching death. But he will also throw the notebooks into fire, because there is no other use in them; but maybe he will take some time and read a few lines from the journal before throwing it into the flames? With God's help, his eyes will rest on the right passages to reassure him about the good he had brought into my life and to make him want to pray for me, who will always see him as a brother and a friend. And if in Heaven, I am able to remember my earthly existence, it would be the thing that would make me proud.*

## Appendix

### The first page of the *Personal Journal*

*Angers, 24 December 1863 – My pen and my paper, these are the things that console me, my notebook is discreet, it is also patient, my repetitions never make it weary, it does not complain about the monotony of our conversations and since I do have this safe haven to console me after each new sorrow, it is always something. I should collect what I write, maybe one day I feel the need to re-read a few pages from my history. I regret having burned all my past notes. I would like to write regularly, even if I only write down the days of the month if nothing interesting happens on particular days. Nothing that would interest other people will fill these pages: there will be no poetry, no display of talent, no spirituality, so who could ever find my writing interesting? It is solely for me that I keep what I call my little journal. We would laugh out of pity if we read a text that proved the author's incapacity, but I would take excessive pride in hiding what could turn me into an object of derision. I regret not having written anything in exactly ten years or at least capturing some moments from this life full of sorrow, deception, sadness: we like to remember only our teary moments, but there were also a few moments of sweet satisfaction, I have not forgotten them; I would like to have all these moments together. But my journal is not about the past, which I would not like to reminisce, but about the present, the future bit by bit, drop by drop,*

to the point when it becomes my present. Undoubtedly, there will be times when various circumstances will take me, in spite of me, back to past events, I will not escape from those thoughts, because what I would like to avoid is to present my life as a detailed history of million different ways of suffering and sacrificing myself, I have trusted everything with God, I do not want to stop what I have undertaken.

*Translation: Gabriela Łazarkiewicz*

## Abstract

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**Philippe Lejeune**

*The Personal Journal of Émilie Serpin (1863–1881)*

This article by a preeminent French scholar of feminine journals, the founder of the Association for Autobiography, presents an analysis of a single diary kept by a humble teacher, who was forgotten by history. Through this intimate journal Lejeune presents nineteenth-century female spirituality, coming into contact with music through Catholic practices, as well as the loneliness of a teacher in an affluent household and her religiosity. For Émilie Serpin the journal serves as a friend, and her relationship with it and with religion permits the nurture of her self-esteem, badly hurt by her experiences of living among the rich. The writing stops when the author marries in a turn of fate she did not foresee.

## Keywords

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French 19th-century diarism, intimate journal, Émilie Serpin, personal archive, 19th-century Catholic religiosity, female spirituality



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Svetlana Tomić

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## Rediscovering Serbian Women's Memoirs: Gendered Comparison in a Historical Context<sup>1</sup>

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**R**ecently published memoirs of important women in Serbian culture can be understood as a powerful addition to the official history. Natalija Obrenović, the Queen of Serbia; Savka Subotić, the mother of Serbian feminism; Stanka Gišićeva, one of the first professional female teachers; and Paulina Lebl Albala, the leading Yugoslav feminist figure, came from different localities, social groups, and ethnicities. In their memoirs they focus on self-representation, women's lives and perceptions, at the same time presenting a noteworthy account of Serbian history and society.

As I have analyzed in my earlier works, contrary to the mainstream writers, a significant number of women writers advocated liberal culture.<sup>2</sup> Draga Gavrilović, Mileva

### Svetlana Tomić

is an Associate Professor at the Faculty of Foreign Languages (Alfa BK University, Serbia). She participates in a research project Gender Equality and the Culture of Citizenship Status. Tomić is an assistant editor of *Serbian Studies* (Indiana University) and a contributor to *World Literature Today*. She was a guest lecturer at the Faculty of Political Sciences, the Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory, Belgrade Open School, OSCE Mission to Serbia, and Columbia University. Her main research interests are institutionalized public knowledge of nineteenth-century Serbian literature, research methodology in closed societies, hidden history, women's writings, and Post-Yugoslav Literature. She has authored five monographs.

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1 I thank Professor Radmila Gorup for inviting me to deliver this lecture at the Harriman Institute at Columbia University on 17 November 2015. A much longer version was published in Serbian: Svetlana Tomić, "Korišćenje zanemarenih književnih tekstova radi razumevanja evolucije srpskog društva," in *Doprinosi nepoznate elite: Mogućnosti sasvim drugačije budućnosti* (Beograd: Alfa BK Univerzitet, Fakultet za strane jezike, 2016), 53–85.

2 Svetlana Tomić, "Draga Gavrilović (1854–1917), the First Serbian Female Novelist: The Old and New Interpretations," *Serbian*

Simić, Milka Grgurova, Natalija Obrenović, Kosara Cvetković, Danica Bandić, and Jelena J. Dimitrijević changed Serbian literature by creating new types of heroes and plots, thus transforming the position of women characters from sleeping beauties to powerful thinkers. Of course, all their achievements were well known to contemporary public, but were later forgotten, due to the restricted literary canon.

The context in which these memoirs were written was shaped by political liberalization, educational reforms, language reforms, the attainment of formal education by the first generation of girls, and the appearance of first women teachers. The main point of this background is that economic needs triggered legislative change, which in turn changed the public life. Similar changes occurred in most European countries as well. This was the time when John Stuart Mill underlined the need to use women's talents since they represent half of human resources.<sup>3</sup>

In what follows, after presenting Serbian historical context, I will introduce the authors and their subject matter. The main part of this essay is the comparison of memoirs from the same historical period, composed by both women and men, and selected according to their subject matter, aesthetic value, and the motives for their composition – a pioneer attempt at a synthetic gendered comparative reading of memoirs written during more than a hundred years spanning the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries.

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*Studies*, vol. 22, (2008): 167–189; Svetlana Tomić, "Tipologija književnih junaka i junakinja u prozi srpskog realizma iz rodne perspective" (PhD diss., University of Novi Sad, 2012); Svetlana Tomić, "Muške norme i putopisi Jelene J. Dimitrijević," in *Kultura, rod, građanski status*, ed. Gordana Duhaček and Katarina Lončarević (Beograd: Fakultet političkih nauka, Centar za studije roda i politike, 2012), 156–175; Svetlana Tomić, "The Travel Writings of Jelena J. Dimitrijević: Feminist Politics and Privileged Intellectual Identity," in *On the Very Edge: Modernism and Modernity in the Arts and Architecture of Interwar Serbia 1918–1941*, ed. Jelena Bogdanovic, Lilen F. Robinson, and Igor Marjanovic (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2014), 115–135; Svetlana Tomić, *Realizam i stvarnost: nova tumačenja proze srpskog realizma iz rodne perspektive* (Beograd: Alfa univerzitet, Fakultet za strane jezike, 2014); Svetlana Tomić, "Značaj književnog stvaralaštva Milke Grgurove (1840–1924)," in Milka Aleksić Grgurova *Atentatorka Ilka i druge priče*, ed. Svetlana Tomić (Beograd: Službeni glasnik, 2014), 425–452; Svetlana Tomić, "Značaj književnih radova kraljice Natalije," in Kraljica Natalija Obrenović, *Ruža i trnje: uspomene, aforizmi i priče, pisma*, eds. Ljubinka Trgovčević, Svetlana Tomić, and Ivana Hadži Popović (Beograd: Laguna, 2015), 243–255; Tomić, *Doprinosi nepoznate elite*.

3 "The loss to the world, by refusing to make use of one-half of the whole quantity of talent it possesses, is extremely serious" John Stuart Mill, *The Subjection of Women*, ed. Susan M. Okin (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1988), 89.

### Memoirs and/in Serbian History

First of all it should be noted that memoirs have a different status in the study of Serbian history than in the study of Serbian literature. Even though historians consider the memoir to be an important, primary source of information, the historians of Serbian literature seem to have largely neglected this genre in their studies. And although the status of these texts varies within both disciplines – they are highly regarded in history and rather overlooked by literary studies – both groups of researchers acknowledged only those memoirs that were written by men.<sup>4</sup> This is worth emphasizing because no matter what type of history textbooks on nineteenth-century Serbia you open – whether on history of society or literature – you can hardly find any evidence that women have existed in the past at all. For example, the first historian of the modern Serbian literature, Jovan Skerlić, in 1914 mentioned only four women writers. Even worse, at the beginning of the twenty-first century official historians in a textbook titled *A Short History of Serbian Literature* included only one female writer from the nineteenth century. These are the textbooks used to educate students, nonetheless, and while studying them one must infer that women did not have any important impact on society or contribution to culture.<sup>5</sup> However, information presented in the textbooks stands in sharp contrast with some other sources, such as *Srpkinja* from 1913, where more than forty women writers from the nineteenth century are presented, or, for that matter, with textbooks by foreign authors, such as Celia Hawkesworth, who wrote a whole book about Serbian (and Bosnian) women writers.<sup>6</sup>

In order to better understand some historical changes occurring in the nineteenth century, we have to consider their political, social, economic, and

4 Dušan Ivanić, "Pogovor," in *Memoarska proza XVIII i XIX veka*, vol. 2, ed. Dušan Ivanić (Beograd: Nolit, 1988), 289–308; Dušan Ivanić, *Srpski realizam* (Novi Sad: Matica srpska, 1996); Dušan Ivanić, *Događaj i priča. Srpska memoarsko-autobiografska proza* (Niš-Beograd: Filozofski fakultet: Filološki fakultet, 2015).

5 Cf. Slobodan Jovanović, *Vlada Milana Obrenovića, knjiga I–III* (Beograd: Izdavačko i knjižarsko preduzeće Geca Kon A.D, 1934); Vladimir Stojančević, Jovan Milićević, Čedomir Popov, Radoman Jovanović, and Milorad Ekmečić, *Istorija srpskog naroda*, vol. 1, no. 5, *Od Prvog ustanka do Berlinskog kongresa 1804–1878* (Beograd: SKZ, 1994); Jovan Skerlić, *Istorija nove srpske književnosti* (Beograd: Izdavačka knjižara S. B. Cvijanovića, 1914); Snežana Samrdžija, Ljiljana Juhas, Dušan Ivanić, Predrag Palavestra, and Mihajlo Pantić, *A Short History of Serbian Literature*, trans. Levkov Bulat B. (Belgrade: Serbian PEN Centre; Novi Sad: Artprint, 2011).

6 *Srpkinja: njezin život i rad, njezin kulturni razvitak i njezina narodna umjetnost do danas*, ed. Serbian women writers (Sarajevo: Pijuković i drug, 1913); Celia Hawkesworth, *Voices in the Shadows: Women and Verbal Art in Serbia and Bosnia* (New York–Budapest: CEU Press, 2000).

cultural context, especially with regard to women's issues. During the first half of the nineteenth century, after two uprisings, Serbia gained autonomous status, following nearly five hundred years of existence under the rule of the Ottoman Empire, and formal independence was achieved at the Congress of Berlin in 1878. Historians underlined the following:

[The Balkan countries had] a very specific type of modernization. It did not start by a gradual development of economic, social, political, and cultural elements. The Balkan modernization started suddenly and abruptly, during national revolutions, when national states were formed. In such a historical context, political modernization happened before economic and social development. These conditions created a strong conflict between the state with its modern institutions and the poor, rural society.<sup>7</sup>

In the nineteenth century the peasant class constituted more than ninety percent of Serbian population. Serbia was smaller than today, it was an underdeveloped, rural country, and modernization required better educated people.<sup>8</sup> At that time, the position of Serbian women was similar to the position of women in other European countries. The Serbian Civil Law (*Srpski građanski zakonik* 1844–1946) secured a patriarchal social system, which harshly restricted women's freedom and rights. Women did not have the right to work in public and even married women were classified in the same group as immature, immoral, delinquent, and insane citizens.

However, the state's need for economic development urged implementation of the new law in 1846 that established elementary school education for girls. In the midst of the nineteenth century the number of elementary schools grew rapidly. The bottleneck, the major constraint in educating the population, was the lack of teachers, who were, at that time, exclusively male. This triggered a radical change: a new education law was enacted in 1863, establishing the first high school for girls and allowing them the right to work as teachers. This was a revolutionary change. Women entered public life and soon became present in various spheres of intellectual production.<sup>9</sup>

7 Dubravka Stojanović, *Iza zavese: ogledi iz društvene istorije Srbije 1890–1914* (Beograd: Udruženje za društvenu istoriju, 2013), 249.

8 More details can be found in Vladimir Stojančević et al., *Istorija srpskog naroda*.

9 According to foreign travelers of the time and to Serbian historians who have researched private life in Serbian history, women rarely went out of their houses before that time. Men seldom traveled to other villages or towns. Women teachers were mobile, they moved from place to place because of their job. They expanded their job, their network, and entered other intellectual spheres outside the classroom. Many women teachers

They started appearing as writers of all genres, including critiques, as well as translators, textbook authors, editors, principals, nurses, and artists. As underlined by one of the Yugoslav feminist leaders: "It was a time of transition from the patriarchal toward a more cultural era."<sup>10</sup>

At the time, Serbia had two main cultural centers. One was Novi Sad, the city in the Hungarian, and later Austro-Hungarian Empire. Serbs migrated there in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in search of a better life. The other cultural center was Belgrade, the capital of Serbia. The development of elementary education, along with the language reform of Vuk Karadžić in 1868, allowed literary realist production to flourish.

### Women's Memoirs Rediscovered

Only one out of four women authors under discussion here, namely, Stanka Glišić, managed to publish her memoir during her life and by herself.<sup>11</sup> More importantly, Glišić's memoir published in 1933 was the first memoir in Serbian culture by a woman author.<sup>12</sup> The other three women, under discussion here, were of foreign origin and were educated abroad. Natalija Obrenović (1859–1941) was a princess from 1875 to 1882, and later became the first Serbian Queen of the new era (1882–1888). Unlike the first princess Ljubica

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were engaged in women's associations. During the wars they worked as nurses. They were recognized as valuable citizens even though they did not have such legal status. Cf. Aleksandra Salamurović, "Slika balkanske žene u putopisu Feliksa Kanica *Donau-Bulgarien und der Balkan*," *Liceum* 12 (2009): 46–64; and Marko Popović, Miroslav Timotijević, and Milan Ristović, *Istorija privatnog života u Srba* (Beograd: Clio, 2011).

10 Jelena Lazarević, *Engleskinje u srpskom narodu* (Beograd: Beogradsko žensko društvo, 1929), 84.

11 Stanka D. Glišićeva, *Moje uspomene* (Beograd: SKZ, 1933); Natalija Obrenović, *Moje uspomene*, ed. Ljubinka Trgovčević (Beograd: SKZ, 1999). A new edition of Natalija's memoirs was published together with her stories, aphorisms, and correspondence: Natalija Obrenović, *Ruža i trnje: uspomene, aforizmi i priče, prepiska*, ed. Ljubinka Trgovčević, Svetlana Tomić, and Ivana Hadži-Popović (Beograd: Laguna, 2015); Savka Subotić, *Uspomene*, ed. Ana Stolić (Beograd: SKZ, 2001); Paulina Lebl Albala, *Tako je nekad bilo*, ed. Aleksandar Lebl (Beograd: Aleksandar Lebl, 2005).

12 It seems that Stolić incorrectly stated the publishing year of Stanka Glišić's memoir as 1908. See, Ana, Stolić, "Društveni identitet učiteljice u Srbiji 19. veka," *Godišnjak za društvenu istoriju*, 3 (2001), 229. In the bibliography and on the book cover the year printed was 1933. In a reputable daily newspaper *Politika* and in the famous journal *Srpski književni glasnik*, Stanka's memoir was announced as a new book in the spring of 1933. Cf. (Anonymus) "Knjige i časopisi," *Politika*, Beograd, 2 April 1933, 20; and B.M. Stanka, D. Glišićeva, "Moje uspomene," *Srpski književni glasnik*, 16 April 1933, 638.

Obrenović, who was illiterate and who mainly dedicated herself to the private family sphere filled with children, princess Natalija Obrenović, of noble Russian-Romanian origin, was tutored at home, and she spoke several languages. Natalija supported women's education and encouraged women to work in public. In her memoir, she wrote in detail about the suffering endured throughout the marriage to Serbian King Milan, as well as about political events, her various duties, and thoughts on people she worked with. One can be surprised with the extent of private accounts written by Queen Natalija Obrenović. She narrated her marital suffering, and the experience of the female body, such as pregnancy, delivery, and breastfeeding. Her memoir finishes with the year 1887: before the tragic outcome of the royal marriage, marked by the first divorce in Serbian royal family. There are speculations that this was just the first part of her memoir, and that she described the rest of her life in another text which is kept in the Vatican Manuscript Department.<sup>13</sup>

Living at the same time as Queen Natalija Obrenović but in a different place, in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Savka Subotić (1834–1918), of Serb-Greek origin, also made efforts to improve the position of Serbian women. Similarly to Queen Natalija, Subotić had private tutors. She often lived abroad, in “strong cultural centers of the period,”<sup>14</sup> such as Novi Sad, Zagreb, Vienna, and Timișoara. She was the mother of eight children, a very energetic worker, and a busy activist. Savka was married to Jovan Subotić, a lawyer, politician, and writer, and she frequently accompanied him on his travels.<sup>15</sup> She pursued ethnographical research and was acknowledged as a scholarly “pioneer in the field of Serbian folk textiles and needlework.”<sup>16</sup> In order to save and promote women's handmade art, Savka hired many Serbian peasant women and promoted their work in Europe. She was the initiator of numerous women's associations in Vojvodina. At the end of the nineteenth

13 For more details about Natalija's life see, Ljubinka Trgovčević, “Priča jedne kraljice,” in Kraljica Natalija Obrenović, *Moje uspomene*, ed. Ljubinka Trgovčević (Beograd: SKZ, 2006), 19–46; Svetlana Tomić, “Hronologija života i rada kraljice Natalije Obrenović,” in Kraljica Natalija Obrenović, *Ruža i trnje*, 469–492.

14 Biljana Šljivić-Šimšić, “Savka Subotić (1834–1918), The Mother of Serbian Women's Culture,” *Serbian Studies* 1 (1993): 72.

15 Her husband Jovan Subotić earned two PhD degrees (in Philosophy and Law), and was a lawyer and a writer. He often asked for her opinion (Šljivić-Šimšić, “Savka Subotić,” 72). Unlike that of Natalija and Milan Obrenović, the marriage of Savka and Jovan Subotić could be evaluated as a harmonious relationship, with mutual respect and understanding. At the time this was the kind of marriage which nurtured intellectual growth, creativity, and social connectedness and it was not easy to find.

16 Šljivić-Šimšić, “Savka Subotić,” 85.

century, she “represented to the world at large Serbian Women fighting for the equality of women,”<sup>17</sup> as a well-known public speaker in the Empire and abroad (the first talk she gave was in 1866, in Zagreb). Many foreign newspapers published her photographs and articles about her work. Because of her grand role in the women’s emancipation movement, she became a honorary member of many Serbian women’s associations.<sup>18</sup>

In her memoir Savka Subotić wrote about her life, but even more about the cultural and social past of the Serbian people in Novi Sad. She wrote about the early private education of girls, and also about the times when Serbians of Novi Sad published the first newspapers, got first umbrellas, irons, opened the first child care center, restaurants, and the like. She also wrote about the intellectual elite of the time, whom she and her husband met, about reputable writers, artists, politicians, and so forth.

While these first two authors are relevant for the period before the time of women’s formal education, the next two, Stanka Glišić (1859–1942) and Paulina Lebl Albala (1891–1967), are important for understanding the period after the introduction of universal education for women. Glišić was one of the first professional teachers in the second half of the nineteenth century. A few decades later, Glišić was Lebl’s teacher when the First Grammar School for Girls was opened in 1905. Lebl Albala was a leading Yugoslav feminist figure at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Memoirs by Glišić and Lebl are an excellent source for discovering the development of professionally educated women of that era, as both of them wrote about their life and career. Stanka Glišić was born in a rural Serbian area, in a Serbian Orthodox family. Paulina Lebl was a Jew. She was born in Sophia, the capital city of Bulgaria, as her father, an engineer, was employed in the construction of the first Serbian railroad at the time. In their childhood, both girls suffered because of their fathers who did not care about the family. Instead of glorifying *patres familias*, Glišićeva and Lebl described their fathers as irresponsible heads of the family. While Glišićeva decided not to provide the negative details regarding her father, repressing her anger and keeping the illusion that not writing meant not remembering, Albala revealed more stories about her father. At some point she admitted that her father, who

17 Hawkesworth, *Voices in the Shadows*, 128.

18 More about Savka Subotić’s life and work see: Arkadije Varađanin, “Savka Subotić,” in *Srpkinja: njezin život i rad*, 28–29; Šljivić-Šimšić, “Savka Subotić,” 69–87; Gordana Stojaković, “Savka Subotić (1834–1918),” in *Znamenite žene Novog Sada*, vol. 1, ed. Gordana Stojaković (Novi Sad: Futura publikacije, 2001), 92–93; Ana Stolić, “Savka Subotić – Slika jednog sveta,” in Savka Subotić, *Uspomene* (Beograd: SKZ, 2001), 19–28; Gordana Stojaković, *Savka Subotić (1834–1918), žena koja nije ništa prećutala* (Novi Sad: Akademski knjižica, 2018).

abandoned his wife and five daughters, was responsible for her developing a psyche that only felt safe in female company.<sup>19</sup>

This is important because men writers of memoirs often idealized the family life, as well as fathers, and marriages.<sup>20</sup> Seeing the suffering, and the anger and humiliation of their mothers, both of these girls learned that women's dignity is inseparable from economic security. But the life and the position of a teacher in Glišić's time was not the same as the life of a teacher in Albala's time. In Glišić's time, women teachers began to fight for their authority and for better working conditions. Women teachers were discriminated in their workplace, which meant women were paid less than men for the same work; they were also restricted from applying for jobs in most of professions. The ongoing public debates about the role of women in society were negative towards women. In the nineteenth century the public opinion considered women teachers unnecessary, and women intellectuals were scoffed at by Serbian society. On the other hand, insufficient number of teachers proved that women teachers were a precious group of workers.<sup>21</sup>

At that time, Paulina Lebl appeared on the stage of public action. In her memoir, Lebl explained why she became the leading Yugoslav feminist figure. She revealed a long lasting frustration of many talented women – even though Paulina was the best university student, she could not become a university professor just because she was a woman. In order to improve women's social and professional status and gender equality, Lebl founded the Yugoslav Association of University-Educated Women in 1927 and served as its president for many years.<sup>22</sup> During the Second World War she moved to the United States.

19 Cf. Glišićeva, *Moje uspomene*, 5–8 and Lebl Albala, *Tako je nekad bilo*, 74–75.

20 Ana Stolić, "Žena u srpskoj memoaristici XIX veka. Pitanja kontinuiteta, društvenog modela, obrazovanja i zapošljavanja," in *Pero i povest. Srpsko društvo u sećanjima* (Beograd: Filozofski fakultet, 1999), 13.

21 According to historians, at the beginning of the twentieth century (1903–1913) women teachers, physicians, and telegraphists could not gain the same rights and benefits as men. Serbian political elite did not accept working women's pleas for changes in promotion and protection of their rights and economic position (Stojanović, *Iza zavese*, 249–267).

22 She also wrote the pieces on Yugoslav and Bulgarian history of literature in *Encyclopaedia Hebraica*. Paulina Lebl "founded the Yugoslav Association of University-Educated Women in 1927 and served as its president for many years. In addition to her efforts to promote the social and professional goals of educated women, Albala, who had grown up in the Belgrade Ashkenazi community and was married to a Zionist leader who was the president of the Belgrade Sephardi community, was active in Zionist youth work." Harriet Freidenreich, "Yugoslavia" <http://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/yugoslavia>, Jewish Women's Archive. *Jewish Women: A Comprehensive Historical Encyclopedia*, accessed 7 September 2015.



Her articles on Serbian writers can be found in the *Columbia Dictionary of Modern European Literature* (1947).

### **Memoirs: A Gendered Comparison**

A comparison of selected women's memoirs with those written by men in the same period highlights the characteristic features of both. Contrary to the leading women intellectuals of the time, male figures such as Milan Milićević (1831–1908), Vladan Đorđević (1844–1930), and Jovan Žujović (1856–1936) held various high public positions, for example, ministerial. Milan Milićević was one of the first professional male teachers and a highly prolific writer. Later on, Milićević worked as the Serbian school supervisor (1861–1880), the Principal assistant to the Minister of Interior, the director of The National Library, and a member of the State Council. Milićević published many memoirs, but here I wanted to compare his and Glišić's accounts of their teaching experiences, which is why I chose to use the edition in which he described the time at the beginning of his teaching career (1850–1852).<sup>23</sup> I read his very extensive *Dnevnik* (Diary) to examine whether he represented the women elite when he was a school supervisor, and the way he did it.<sup>24</sup> Both Vladan Đorđević and Jovan Žujović were politicians and ministers who worked with Queen Natalija.<sup>25</sup> I was particularly interested to see how they presented Queen Natalija and other educated women, and if they did so at all. Vladan Đorđević, in turn, was a physician, a prolific writer, organizer of the State Sanitary Service, and a minister in many Governments.<sup>26</sup> In his memoir Žujović described the time from his schooldays

23 Milićević published his memoirs in 1894, 1895, 1896, 1897; they were later reissued in 1952 and 1989.

24 Milan D. Milićević, *Dnevnik I* (1.januar 1869–22.septembar 1877), ed. Dr. Petar V.Krestić (Beograd: RTS: Zavod za udžbenike, 2011).

25 Vladan Đorđević was a physician, prolific writer, organizer of the State Sanitary Service, the mayor of Belgrade, Minister of Education, Prime Minister of Serbia, and Minister of Foreign Affairs. Jovan Žujović was a pioneer in geological and paleontological science in Serbia, a diplomat, and the Minister of Education. He was also a university professor and one of the first rectors of the Belgrade University when there were hardly any women students.

26 Đorđević wrote many voluminous memoirs. For this research, I used the compiled edition of three of Đorđević's memoirs: from his grammar school time (1856), about the Serb-Bulgarian War (1885), and about the time Đorđević was in prison: Vladan Đorđević, *Uspomene* ed.by Svetlana Slapšak (Beograd: Nolit, 1988). In order to compare Queen Natalija's accounts on Serbo-Bulgarian War and the same events described by Đorđević,

till 1915. He mostly wrote about the political situation in Serbia and about the progress of his career.<sup>27</sup>

After reading and comparing these memoirs written by the two groups of intellectuals, one can clearly see the difference between them, both with respect to subject and to style. As memoir writers, men were mainly focused on their career and its progress. In contrast with women, men memoirists wrote mostly about other men. Even though women teachers were a new and revolutionary element of social and cultural change, men did not write about them. For almost three decades, the first High School for Girls was the main Serbian institution which produced women intellectuals.<sup>28</sup> In his memoir Milićević described the time in which he started his career as a teacher, but he did not write about women teachers.<sup>29</sup> At the time when Milićević worked as a school supervisor (1861–1880) he wrote an extensive diary, but he just named a few women teachers.

In mid-nineteenth century, educated working women represented a revolutionary change, a new presence and new force of social change. It is astonishing that neither the work of women teachers nor the entrance of the first generations of women students to Belgrade University was noted in the works written by male authors.<sup>30</sup> The same ignorance can be noticed in Jovan Žujović's memoirs. His wife, Stana, was Natalija's favorite lady in waiting, but he did not write a word about her personality, while Queen Natalija mentions Stana's friendship, education, intelligence, and social behavior in her memoirs.<sup>31</sup>

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I used the entire edition of Đorđević's memoirs of the Serb-Bulgarian War, which consists of 1410 pages: Vladan Đorđević, *Istorija srpsko-bugarskog rata 1885, knjiga 1-2* (Beograd: Zadužbina Ilije M. Kolarca, 1908).

27 The title of Žujović's memoir is *Diary* (published in two volumes in 1986), but the editor reasonably argued that the genre of Žujović's text is a memoir because it was not written on a regular daily basis and some parts did not have a day date. See Dragan Todorović, "Predgovor," in Jovan Žujović *Dnevnik I*, ed. Dragan Todorović (Beograd: Arhiv Srbije, 1986), 27–28.

28 In Kragujevac such an institution was opened in 1891, and in Šabac in 1904. Ljubinka Trgovčević, *Planirana elita. O studenitima iz Srbije na evropskim univerzitetima u 19.veku* (Beograd: Službeni glasnik, 2003), 26.

29 Milan D. Milićević, *Iz svojih uspomena* (Beograd: Nolit, 1989).

30 It is indeed strange to read that Stanka Glišićeva described her conversation with Vladan Đorđević – the Minister of Education and the memoirist – and not to see any equivalent reflection on that event in Vladan Đorđević's recollections of that same time.

31 "Despite the fact that Stana was much younger than me, we were more friends than the queen and her lady-in-waiting" (Obrenović, *Moje uspomene*, 141).

Men memoirists rarely wrote about their private lives. They idealized their families and did not write about their marriages. Žujović presented his childhood as a harmonious period. He did not provide any information about his mother and he left the account of his father somewhere in the background. According to historians, very little intimate stories have been preserved which further complicates reconstructing the private lives of individuals from that period.<sup>32</sup>

Relying on aesthetic values, academics previously analyzed only male memoirs. One historian of Serbian literature, Dušan Ivanić, held a view that memoirs written by men from the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries were not “high quality works of art,”<sup>33</sup> nor artistic texts.<sup>34</sup> Indeed, men authors I mentioned here employ a literary style that has more in common with a dry report, and enumeration seems to be one of their primary devices. The form of their memoirs is similar to a register, or to some official document. The construction of unselected or plotless narrative leads to voluminous memoirs. Especially Đorđević’s war memoirs are difficult to follow. Readers may have a hard time focusing throughout them.<sup>35</sup>

Comparatively speaking, the same can hardly be said about women’s memoirs. Firstly, women authors produced more structured stories. Their memoirs are not crammed with arid reports and unessential details, but are instead written as good, stylish, and interesting novels. They can be also defined as *Bildungsroman* or novels about a character’s education and moral growth. Secondly, they all begin with some hook; continue the flow through impressive episodes, while omitting irrelevant parts, and the stories end in an unforgettable way. The difference in style can be clearly seen when writings with the same or similar subjects are compared.

For example, information about the first teaching experiences differs a lot between Milan Milićević and Stanka Glišić. They both shared a common problem, namely the lack of basic knowledge about teaching methodology. Milan Milićević only briefly narrated his experience, and chose not to share his feelings, insecurities, fears, or humiliations with readers. Rather, he emphasized his success. Stanka Glišić’s writings stand in stark

32 Stolić, “Žena u srpskoj memoaristici XIX veka,” 9.

33 Ivanić, “Pogovor,” 308.

34 Dušan Ivanić, “Memoari Jakova Ignjatovića u kontekstu srpske memoaristike 19. vijeka,” *Zbornik Matice srpske za književnost i jezik*, 38 (1990): 54.

35 Future researchers can compare its first variants because Đorđević rewrote the 1908 edition and included in it many different sources in order to offer a war history and a military textbook (Đorđević, *Istorija srpsko-bugarskog rata 1885*, vol. 1), vii–xi.

contrast with Milićević's prose, as she gave more details of her first devastating meet-and-greet moment with the pupils, the sufferings caused by the lack of experience, and of the hard work she had to commit to in order to overcome it.

So far, official Serbian historians have not paid enough attention to the cultural change that came along with the education of women. Quite often authorities presented a very narrow scope of women's role in politics and culture, thus diminishing women's intellectual capacities in governance and leadership. For example, in the case of Queen Natalija, Serbian academic historians presented mainly her marital portrait. New research provides evidence for her important role in women's education, politics, literature, art, culture, and ethnography.<sup>36</sup> The historians also did not find Savka Subotić's work important enough to be included in the history textbooks. Moreover, the very subject of the memoirs by Stanka Glišić was misinterpreted. By asserting that her memoir is about her brother and not about her, the authorities not only falsified her narrative focus but denied the female identity. Deretić argued: "Glišićeva mainly wrote about her brother, the famous writer Milovan Glišić, about their family, and their time."<sup>37</sup> I wonder whether Deretić read her memoir at all.

Women authors provide more information about their social group, women's education, and early professions. For example, Queen Natalija's memoir is a valuable source for research on the early women elite in modern Serbia. She mentioned her son's governess, and several of her ladies-in-waiting. So far there is no comprehensive research on the women elite in Serbia of the time, and this is a topic that would certainly be of interest for feminist researchers.<sup>38</sup> Thanks to Stanka Glišić and her memoir we have some important details from the lives and work of the new social group,

36 Jasmina Trajkov, "Album kraljice Natalije Obrenović," *Kruševački zbornik* 3 (2008): 101–121; Ana Stolić, "Žurka na dvoru nedeljom od pet do osam," *Srpsko nasleđe*, 9 September (1998), <http://www.srpsko-nasledje.co.rs/sr-l/1998/09/article-06.html>, accessed 3 November 2015; Ljiljana Stankov, *Katarina Milovuk (1844–1913) i ženski pokret u Srbiji* (Beograd: Pedagoški muzej, 2011); Jovana Blažić, "Moskovski slovenski komitet i školovanje srpskih i bugarskih pitomica (1876–1877)," *Mešovita građa (Miscellanea)* 33 (2012): 301–314; Tomić "Značaj književnih radova kraljice Natalije," 243–255; Svetlana Tomić, "Znanja o ulozi kraljice Natalije Obrenović (1859–1941) u srpskoj kulturi i društvu: tumačenje, zaštita i oživljavanje starog i novog nasleđa," in Svetlana Tomić *Doprinosi nepoznate elite*, 145–163.

37 Jovan Deretić, *Istorija srpske književnosti* (Beograd: Prosveta, 2004), 812.

38 Gordana Stojaković explored the significant women elite in Serbian culture of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

that of the first women teachers.<sup>39</sup> In the accounts of Đorđević's and Queen Natalija's there is an interesting discrepancy between their recollections of caring for 1,500 wounded soldiers during the Serb-Bulgarian War. While Đorđević praised only King Milan and himself, Natalija explained her leading role in solving this situation.<sup>40</sup> She declared herself the Minister of Defense and asked foreign rulers for medical help. Queen Natalija also praised the women of Belgrade, who provided substantial help as nurses. Numerous other sources confirm this significant role of Queen Natalija.<sup>41</sup>

However, memoirs are not free from contradictions and different views on the same or similar issues. Such parts reveal the existence of hidden, psychological battles, and they help understand the writer's personality and life conditions. For example, at the beginning of her memoir, Queen Natalija condemned her mother-in-law for having the affair with the Romanian Prince Kuze. Later, Natalija confessed that she fell in love with a diplomat. At that moment Natalija stated that she could have done anything just because she wanted to be loved and happy. Another example of self-denial can be found in Glišić's memoir. Stanka Glišić firstly stated that she did not marry because married women teachers faced many hardships as mothers. They had only fifteen days of maternal leave and often lived without receiving any help. Several pages later, Glišić mentioned that the main reason she remained single were her different political views. In both cases, those contradictions indicated restricted social norms on women's sexual liberty.

It is also important to consider motives: why did these memoirists write at all? There are different theories and approaches to memoirs. Some theoreticians of memoir stress the unreliability and selectivity of the writer's

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39 For example, authorities mentioned the new Law of The High School for Girls from 1879 that required that all women teachers should pass their professional exam in order to get their professional qualification. But it seems that in reality it was difficult to follow the legal process and rule of law. Stanka Glišić stated that she had worked as a teacher even though she only took the teacher's exam ten years after the law was passed (in 1889). As Stanka explained – the teacher's final exam was based on all school subjects that were taught throughout six school years. At that time (1889) the teachers worked at school all day long. In order to prepare for the final exam teachers had to study during nights. Stanka Glišić admitted that during her exam she was so extremely tired and fatigued that she could not recall the details she had been teaching her pupils for eleven years! (Glišićeva, *Moje uspomene*, 25).

40 Cf. Đorđević, *Istorija srpsko-bugarskog rata*, 1070 and Obrenović, *Moje uspomene*, 162–163.

41 For examples, see *Domaćica*, the journal of the Belgrade Women's Society. See also, Ljiljana Stankov, *Katarina Milovuk (1844–1913) i ženski pokret u Srbiji* (Beograd: Pedagoški muzej, 2011).

memory.<sup>42</sup> Others stressed the confessional nature of the memoir.<sup>43</sup> In my personal view, the memoirs could be seen as something similar to the psychological drama of confession; the author has the urge to tell his or her story under some kind of pressure.<sup>44</sup> Subotić, Đorđević, and Žujović were encouraged by other people to write down their memories, but Queen Natalija, Stanka Glišić, and Paulina Lebl felt the pressure to write about their own version of truth or their own perception of reality. And their perception is the perception of the oppressed.

While new memoirs theoreticians such as Thomas G. Couser equate the meaning of the memoirs with the words "memory" and "to remember,"<sup>45</sup> I would rather recall the original, broader meaning of the Latin word *memoria*. Its meaning "to be mindful, aware and careful, remembering" helps us to understand that some memoirs could have been produced under the pressure of internal need to intervene with the public knowledge. Natalija wrote: "I don't like that lack of respect for what represents a history of one country." She was well aware that not all records corresponded to the facts.<sup>46</sup>

The urge to intervene is even more present in Stanka Glišić's memoir. She deserves special attention since her memoirs are the very first published by a Serbian woman author. At the beginning of her career, Glišić taught history along with many other subjects. She knew the value of primary sources. She recalled how difficult it was for her to understand the ancient time and its

42 William Zinsser, *Inventing the Truth: The Art and Craft of Memoir* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998); Annie Dillard, *The Writing Life* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1998); Thomas G. Couser, *Memoir – An Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2012).

43 James Atlas, "Confessing for Voyeurs; The Age of Literary Memoir is Now," *New York Times Magazine*, 12 May 1996.

44 Peter Brooks, *Troubling Confessions – Speaking Guilt in Law and Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

45 Couser, *Memoir – An Introduction*, 19.

46 Obrenović, *Moje uspomene*, 90. In her memoir she precisely mentioned the dates and documented letters of King Milan and other politicians and diplomats. Natalija also did not approve of destroying the historical monument because it was built by the opponent royal family of Karađorđević. There are some indications that the Queen Natalija Obrenović was constantly disappointed with the way King Milan and other Serbian authorities (such as Vladan Đorđević) and historians presented her in Serbian history. See, e.g., Slobodan Jovanović, *Vlada Milana Obrenovića, knjiga I–III* (Beograd: Izdavačko i knjižarsko preduzeće Geca Kon A.D., 1934). Unlike any Serbian noble women before, she put a lot of effort into publishing different types of documents on her illegal divorce and illegal deportation. Maybe this awareness of tendentious misinterpretations motivated the Queen to write her own account on the past to intervene.

people, “who disappeared off the face of the earth.”<sup>47</sup> Quite possibly, Glišićeva wanted to provide a prime source of document by herself. And she did it exactly on the seventeenth anniversary of the opening of the first Serbian High School for Girls, at the time when major journals, such as *Politika* and *Srpski književni glasnik*, hardly mentioned such an important institution. Was Natalija being too optimistic when she stated: “One day History will be its own judge”?<sup>48</sup>

In conclusion, historical memoirs authored by women were a neglected genre in Serbian history and literary studies. They were known to academic historians but have not been published for a long time. And even when they were published at the end of the twentieth century, scholars did not analyze them properly.

Women authors provided different points of view, different information, and different perception from male authors. Male memoirists ignored the rise of women in public life. Women memoirists wrote about themselves and in the process they revealed their personal point of view during the early pioneering days of modernization. They wrote about their own lives and education, their peers, and the struggle and obstacles they faced. They also provided details about the culture and women's engagement in politics, none of which has been presented by official historians before that.

The lack of critical evaluation of memoirs corresponds with the reduced presentation of the period of Serbian realism. In this sense, memoirs will prove to be useful to the ongoing re-evaluation of this literary tradition. There is growing evidence that the actual literary production of the period differs from the one presented in the textbooks and curriculums.

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47 Glišićeva, *Moje uspomene*, 27.

48 *Spomenica Nj.V.Kraljice Natalije. Izvorna građa za istoriju kraljevskoga bračnog spora* (1891), without pagination.

## Abstract

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**Svetlana Tomić**

ALFA BK UNIVERSITY, SERBIA

*Rediscovering Serbian Women's Memoirs: Gendered Comparison in a Historical Context*

The purpose of this paper is to indicate ideological, institutional, and methodological problems in researching women's autobiographies in Serbian culture in the second half of the nineteenth-century. The dominant patriarchal norm of the Serbian culture is the reason why women have been an undervalued social group and a marginalized research subject. This mainstream attitude permeates both public life and academia, which causes stigmatization of the researchers in woman studies. Old historicism is still the methodology of the day, neglecting more recent and modern achievements. Besides perpetuating and habituating biased (read incorrect) knowledge, it neglects the complex context of the modernization which seeks interdisciplinary approaches. In the first part of the paper, I turn to semiotics, cognitive psychology, and memory studies to point out the importance of writing about the self and to illustrate the examples of blocking the social transfer of memory. By implementing methods of theory of literature and feminist theories on life narrating, I explain the advantages of Lee Gilmore's concept of autobiographics since it encourages establishing facts on life and reality beyond the formal borders of texts. This is the first interdisciplinary synthesis of autobiographies of important women in Serbian culture. It considers political, cultural, literary, and subversive power of both fiction and documentary writings by women.

## Keywords

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Serbian history, Serbian literature, women's emancipation, memoirs, women's self-representation



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Monika Rudaś-Grodzka

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## Bronisława Waligórska Dreaming

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DOI: 10.18318/td.2020.en.1.11 | ORCID: 0000-0002-2939-9583

### A Prison Dream

The letters written by Bronisława Waligórska in the Warsaw Citadel – where she was imprisoned as a member of the Proletariat Party for conspiratorial and terrorist activities – that she sent to her sister between July and December 1886, deserve our undivided attention.<sup>1</sup> They are a shattering testimony of the age and the personal experience of a woman who devoted her life to workers' rights and the national cause. Her struggle ended with personal tragedy, as well as being almost completely forgotten by her descendants. History has not asked about her much, because it had no place set up for her in its annals. Archives (in this case, her letters) and the recollections generated by them, often working

### Monika Rudaś-

**-Grodzka** – Associate

Professor at the Institute of Literary Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences. She is interested in history of ideas, nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature. She leads the work of interdisciplinary research group Women's Archive and she is Head of Postgraduate Gender Studies at the Institute of Literary Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences. She has published, e.g., *Sfinks słowiański i mumia polska* (2013), *"Sprawić, aby idee śpiewały."* *Motywy platońskie w życiu i dziełach Adama Mickiewicza w okresie wileńsko-kowieńskim* (2003), the exhibition catalog *"Polka. Medium. Cień. Wyobrażenie"* (2005), and many articles in literary history and literary criticism.

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<sup>1</sup> The manuscripts of these letters are held at the Musée Adam Mickiewicz in Paris, MS no. 1109. They were published by me as *Listy z cytadeli 1886*. Most of these letters were undated and not in order. Władysław Mickiewicz's manuscript from 1907, which contains an unpublished French translation of these letters (*Lettres de prison*, Manuscript in the collection of the Muzeum Literaturny im. A. Mickiewicza in Warsaw, no. 78), retains the chronological order of the first and the last three letters and was therefore helpful in the process of establishing the chronology of the whole correspondence, to a certain extent.

against the directions marked by existing historical narratives, allow us to pose questions about how Waligórska saw herself and what her role was in the specific context of the age she lived in. It would seem that the easiest way is to reconstruct the events which preceded the arrests of the members of the Proletariat conspiracy group. Attempts to place the life Bronisława Waligórska lived, as it emerges from personal and official documents, force us to consider the connection between histories large and small. It might seem that her life, and the main course of history she so wanted to be an active part of, though flowing in parallel, did not intersect at key moments. Waligórska did not perceive this duality, being convinced that it is one and the same current. There is nothing extraordinary in her approach, as it is typical of human kind. The banality of aporia between our insignificance and the currents of history which carry us away is troubling. The biggest mistake we could make would be to assume this is obvious, hence it is worthwhile referring to the motto from Ortega y Gasset to a book by Annie Ernaux: "All we have is our history, and it does not belong to us."<sup>2</sup> Applying these words to Waligórska we should pose the question as to what it might mean – this idea that our histories do not belong to us? As we read the letters for the first time, we are struck by the large emotional amplitude of these writings. Her attempts to deal with her past, as well as that of her family, reveal something we have not yet seen in her writings – layers of bitter reflections and dark thoughts. The pessimistic way in which she perceives her own history is juxtaposed with her life decisions which are presented to her sister (and the tsarist prison censors). This narrative (assessing her own life story) is interwoven with outbursts of despair and flows of sudden hopefulness that show the complex nature of her inner life. In a letter to her sister Jadwiga, dated December 1886, she wrote of the ill omens hanging over their family:

You know, as I sit here and wonder – I become more and more convinced that the Waligórski clan has been cursed with a certain fatalism ever since 1830 – for the past fifty-six years, we have been wandering lost like a band of gypsies – anything we touch turns to disaster – each member of this blessed family becomes a victim of their own good faith and noble drives – it is said we will be rewarded at a later time for all this – we are to see "that which the human eye has not seen" and hear "that which the human ear has not heard"! St. John, in his Apocalypse, preaches wondrous things about this land – delights the likes of which mere mortals have not dreamt – blissful delights lasting eternity – I would give half of this blessed

2 Annie Ernaux, *The Years*, trans. A.L. Strayer (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2017). I am grateful to Iwona Misiak for directing my attention to these words and to Ernaux' book.

eternity for some earthly pleasures – for it is better to count your blessings right here and now rather than count on things as yet unknown. Secondly, it seems that it was not all created for me to marvel at – I am more likely to see black characters with wondrously glowing eyes, magic fires, all among terrible darkness. The world of simmering passions and impressions – then eventually most probably four planks and a pile of worms – if I am not mistaken, is what each human being is inevitably destined for.<sup>3</sup>

The second letter worth quoting is equally dramatic. On 9 December 1886, she wrote to her sister:

How stupid is this life! Am I not right? Would it not have better been [*sic*] had our father, had he hung himself before marrying our mother! A hundredfold better for himself and for us! At present, winds are howling, which instantly improves my mood – I would fly with it – running across fields and forests – racing some twenty miles from here, to where trees are also making a noise – finding the white stone with a guardian angel – lying down upon it, not wanting to rise anymore.<sup>4</sup>

Both letters are testimonials of a sense of failure, lack of hope, and increasing despair – they are a foretelling of Waligórska's impending death. Life experiences forced her to discard the idea of higher, divine justice, but also would not allow her at that moment to believe in historical justice. Waligórska saw herself as one more cursed member of her family, who having failed to overcome her sorry fate, trapped within a cycle of misfortunes and catastrophes, was condemned to repeat the mistakes of her ancestors. A few weeks following the writing of this letter, at the start of January 1887, she poisoned herself with sulfur and died in terrible pains. And yet we cannot conclude that this feeling of having failed in her role as a family member was the sole cause of her taking her own life.

The gauntlet she threw down before the curse she felt her family lived under was to become a member of the Proletariat political party. Her correspondence contains numerous traces that evidence her strength, dignity, and responsibility for her own actions. In one such letter, she writes: "Did someone put me here out of love? [...] One is an inevitable consequence of

3 Bronisława Waligórska, *Listy z cytađeli 1886*, ed. and introd. Monika Rudaś-Grodzka (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IBL, 2018) 133–134.

4 *Ibid.*, 126.

the other.”<sup>5</sup> In spite of the weight of individual and familial defeat, her belief in the need to continue working to effect civic and political change remained unshaken in her until the very end.

Waligórska remains convinced that she made the right choices and nothing was capable of forcing her to deny or abandon her ideals: “Beauty over muck – and I will not change!”<sup>6</sup> This unbending attitude, fiery and almost violent, was accompanied by a feeling that she accepted the consequences of these radical steps, while imprisonment was its natural end. Retreat was impossible, even if it meant loss of liberty, something which was the most precious thing for her. In her December letter, she wrote: “I put freedom above all else, but there are certain types of shackles which feel quite light.”<sup>7</sup> And yet with every day the idea of regaining her freedom was becoming more unlikely, sleep being her only solace: “I will once more be cradled by that artificial dream, the one your letter woke me from. Jadwigo, do not interrupt it with your stubbornness, and try, as much as you can, to improve Your situation in life.”<sup>8</sup>

Waligórska thought she was dreaming her own dream. It was not important whether this sleep was soothing, something she used to escape into during her worst moments, or whether it turned into nightmares – what mattered was that it was her own. Her life was to be a dream, and dreams were to be her life. Even when she was waking up from them, she could always choose to return into their realm, into the sphere of her personal autonomy. “My life at present is a dream, no matter the awakenings! Was my life, as well as yours, not a row of such dreams and wakings? When we sleep we dream, and when woken up we look bravely at reality, whatever it might be.”<sup>9</sup> The motif of sleep, so popular in literature and art, at present often functions as inspiration for movies, which end with the realization that they did, in fact, tell the story of a dream that, once ended, results in everything going back to the way it was.

Waligórska too, at the start of her prison stay, believed that she would come to awaken and find herself in a reality she would once again recognize, something she would have to face all over again. Still, even more terrifying is the vision that someone sneaks up on our dreams in order to manipulate and take away that which is most personal to us, and we have cause to suspect

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5 Ibid., 118.

6 Ibid., 98.

7 Ibid., 128.

8 Ibid., 126.

9 Ibid., 117.

that this is what happened to Waligórska.<sup>10</sup> Another variation of this motif is the idea of dreams which belong to other people.<sup>11</sup> I believe that examples from works of fiction can help us shed light on Waligórska's personal drama, for I believe in their power and think they can lead us to real life crossroads. Meanwhile, researching Waligórska's contribution to grand histories can be merely circumstantial, absolutely condemned to failure, as hard evidence is lacking, and faint traces remain in the sphere of suspicion. From the very outset, I wish to announce that there are no guilty parties in this matter. We can find a similar case in the Czech television series *Bez vědomí* (dir. Ivan Zachariáš, 2019).<sup>12</sup> The English title *The Sleepers* is more adequate in terms of narrative: the show's characters, who thought they were taking part in the transformation taking place in their country in 1989, discover they are merely powerless tools in the hands of greater history. When they finally wake up to that which surrounds them, they realize their lives were fictions played out in the theatre of the world.

As to Waligórska, what mechanisms rule history and what is the role played by individuals in this? Seeing history as a force ruled by cruel natural machinations, scholars and researchers often apply the conception that it is humanity that creates history. Many of us will agree that the worst sort of human foulness is better than the machinery which absorbs us, taking away our sense of existence and forgetting about its actors. The final argument in these sorts of deliberations is our free will, so let us not abandon the assumption that it is human beings in defined conditions who create historical events. And we see the need to acknowledge the thought that fatalistic causes can reveal themselves in human history.<sup>13</sup> This is not the work of providence, nor of any self-developing progress, but rather the product of the mechanisms of human origin that are getting out of control – such as the systems of policing and of state oppression, which produce terrorism as their side effect (I am skipping over illegal political

10 This sort of premonition can be found in movies such as *Inception* (dir. Christopher Nolan, 2010) or *Paprika* (dir. Satoshi Kon, 2006).

11 Movie heroes learn that they are a part of a dream/phantasy of a madman intent on destroying the world. Psychopathic, cruel, merciless Doctor No, Batman, Dr Strangelove attempt to fulfill their own dreams and if it were not for the superheroes who stand in their way, they would bring about total annihilation. Sometimes, as in *The Truman Show* (dir. Peter Weir, 1998), the hero discovers that he is living in a dream world that is not his own and from which there is no escape.

12 I am grateful to Katarzyna Sierakowska for recommending me this series.

13 Jerzy Topolski, *Wolność i przymus* (Warszawa: PIW, 1990), 18.

parties or other forms of resistance against the ruling elites). Is it here, between the center and the margins, that we might find the necessary laws governing the course of history?

Waligórska's death forces us to consider whether history plays out as a continuum of various, often accidental events, or rather as a carefully laid out plan. The traditional ideas of an eternal return or the realization of Spirit in world history can no longer be defended, for we are rather ready to admit that they have more in common with conspiracy theories, and we are merely marionettes being handled by forces which are ever better at forcing us to do their bidding. In fact, the greats of this world who believe that they are in charge of their own lives force us to think of the cruel irony, concealing some sort of merciless power. It is easy to get carried away by these radical visions, but life itself will not allow it: in a surprising and unpredictable fashion it snaps out of the order of things and disrupts the joints of self-perpetuating social cohesion, whose inertia destroys anything that stands in its way.

### A Daughter's Dream

Bronisława Waligórska, the daughter of Aleksander, who took part in the uprisings of 1831 and 1863, was born in Christiania (Oslo) in Norway, and at the age of twelve was put in the care of St. Casimir orphanage in Paris. After a year there, she was handed over to a convent in Krakow, on St. John's Street, where she spent her youth. We know that following the year 1865 Waligórska left for Rejowiec, and then moved on to Warsaw, where she worked as a private tutor. This was when she became involved in Proletariat – a revolutionary workers' movement. We do not know the exact date she became a member of Proletariat, but as an educated person, she was responsible for organizing workers' clubs, including lectures and talks for the laborers. In 1885, following the arrests of a group led by Maria Bohuszewiczówna, Waligórska became a member of the Central Committee and took part in planning the execution of two informants (Piotr Piński<sup>14</sup> and Michał Kapszukiewicz<sup>15</sup>), while also agitating workers to perform acts of terrorist assassinations of other traitors.<sup>16</sup>

14 Piotr Piński, alias Pierzyna, woodworker, member of the Proletariat, agent provocateur and Russian spy.

15 Michał Kapszukiewicz, alias Telesfor Kicz, city herald, informant, and agent of the gendarmerie.

16 See: Monika Rudaś-Grodzka, introduction to Waligórska, *Listy*, 13–86; Leon Baumgarten, *Dzieje Wielkiego Proletariatu* (Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza, 1966), 730.

She dreamt of personally executing two dignitaries who were hated by all Poles: Governor-General Iosif Gurko and the Russian curator of the Warsaw Educational District, Alexander Apukhtin, who were responsible for banning the Polish language in schools.<sup>17</sup> Arrested on 2 July 1886, she spent six months behind bars and died on 3 January 1887.

### Dreams of a Father

The confessions in Waligórska's letters show just how influential her father was in her life, and how she never managed to break the spell he had cast over her. From the earliest years, she experienced fantasies relating to memories of her father, which affected her personal development. Aleksander Waligórski – a born soldier, emigre, agent, and insurgent – was the embodiment of all nationalistic and patriotic phantasms of the Romantic age. As a young man, he was involved in “the cadet’s conspiracy” and took part in the November Uprising (1830–1831). For his part in the Battle of Grochów on 25 February 1931 he was awarded the Golden Virtuti Militari Cross and promoted to the rank of lieutenant. While abroad, he at first taught at the military school in Bourges, becoming close with Władysław Zamojski, eventually his confidante. In 1838, he left for Norway, where in Christiania he was employed as an engineer responsible for topographic measurements during bridge building works and canal digging at the Office of the Director of Canals and Ports.<sup>18</sup> Prince Jerzy Adam Czartoryski, appreciating his skills, made him his own spy and sent him on a mission to Sweden. In 1845, he married the twenty-year-old Emma Mellis, who bore him eight children. In choosing between the good of his nation and his family, he chose the former, waiting for a signal to rise up, never paying his children much attention, leading his family to near-abject poverty, and, most probably, his wife to suicide. Promoted to the rank of general, Waligórski took part in the January Uprising, which ended badly for him, for he was accused of making wrong and incompetent decisions. He joined the uprising in support of the dictatorship of Marian Langiewicz, becoming for a short time the Chief Military Commander of the Kraków Voivodship. In the Lublin region, he served under General Antoni Jeziorański, who was accused of betrayal and incompetence. Waligórski took part in the battle of Kobylanka, following which he was accused of abandoning his troops, what

17 Wiktor Hipszer, one of the arrested assassins, testified that on 27 June 1886 during a picnic in Wilanów, where the assassination of Piński was planned, Waligórska revealed to him her plan to kill Governor-General Gurko. See: Waligórska, *Listy*, 153.

18 I sourced the information on General Waligórski's career from Jacek Juniszewski, *Generał Waligórski. Inżynier i żołnierz* (Brzezina Łąka: Wydawnictwo Poligraf, 2013).

led to the scattering and crushing of his unit.<sup>19</sup> Near Kobylanka, he lost his seventeen-year-old son Władysław, whose corpse was desecrated by Russian soldiers. Waligórski dreamt of becoming the dictator of the uprising, but this was stopped by his two lost battles – the first by the river Sanna and the second near Dratowo. He was court-martialed and removed from active duty. Sick and impoverished, he died in Paris, in the almshouse of St. Casimir.

### Dreams of a Bomb

From letters written from prison to her sister, we can just about work out what role Waligórska played in Proletariat's terrorist activities. We are aided in this by investigation records documenting the assassination of Piotr Piński.<sup>20</sup> From the lengthy testimonies given by three men, who blamed Waligórska for being involved in the attack on this tsarist agent, it transpires that if she was not the initiator of the killing, then she was at least very keen to see it happen. It must also be added that, unlike her accomplices, Waligórska during her interrogation kept a dignified countenance and did not give up any names. Her attitude towards terror was in large measure a product of her party's program, which used violence as one of the fundamental tools of struggle.<sup>21</sup> On the other hand, however, she – the daughter of an insurgent and military man – was raised in a tradition that allowed use of all means in fighting the enemy, either open, conspiratorial, or partisan. In the opinions of her peers and historians of the labor struggle, Waligórska was a real radical, while her closest associates accused her of being too emotional about all their shared affairs.

Leon Baumgarten wrote: "Having been raised in a monastery, where she was taught some ruthless attitudes, she quickly became a keen proponent of terrorist tactics."<sup>22</sup> This hastily oversimplified conclusion has led to the image of Waligórska we are left with today – one which is detrimental to her legacy and contributed to the legend of Waligórska's excessive preponderance for the use of force. Juxtaposing these critical and discrediting opinions with her letters forces us to look at her differently, as her correspondence reveals in her that which is most human: helplessness, powerlessness, desperation, despair, shame and also a sense of dignity, nobility, and moral purity.

19 Juniszewski, *Generał Waligórski*, 97–99.

20 Zespół Prokuratora Warszawskiej Izby Sądowej 1876/1918, AGAD, no. 1275. The case file was published by me in the edition of Waligórska's letters.

21 It is true that there were three assassinations at the time, all on the lives of traitors and spies.

22 Baumgarten, *Dzieje Wielkiego Proletariatu*, 728.



The differences between the judgements she made as opposed to those made by others encourage us to look at her life from a broader perspective, seeing it not just as an individual drama, but a whole theatre staging a modern statehood, political parties, and also mechanisms of oppression and forms of resistance.

Let us start with the key issue and questions regarding the sort of terrorism we are dealing with in the case of Waligórska – a vital question as she never took direct part in assassinations. This matter seems layered because in her life real and imaginary plans overlapped. She was so absorbed by her ideals that, at times, she was unable to keep up with everyday events. Her powerful declaration that, when woken from dreaming and faced with this world's injustices, she would "look directly at reality, regardless of what it is actually like," preparing herself to make the greatest sacrifices, leads to doubts as to whether she was able to raise a hand against any other human being.

Barbara W. Tuchman in her book *The Proud Tower*, focused on world history between the years 1890 and 1914, describes the wave of assassinations which preceded World War I.<sup>23</sup> In describing terrorism in the context of anarchy, Tuchman points to the idea that it is not possible to understand the nature of terrorism without anarchistic philosophical thought: "No single individual was the hero of the movement that swallowed up these lives. The Idea was its hero. It was, as a historian of revolt has called it, »a daydream of desperate romantics.«"<sup>24</sup> Waligórska's life was in essence an example of the existence of the continuity of Romantic ideals, while she herself seems to be a desperate Romantic struggling between nationalistic ideals inherited from her traditional father and socialistic notions which announced the coming of a new epoch. Her worldview can seem too full of contradictions, for the revolutionary program rejected the idea of a fight for Poland's independence, while the tradition of resistance against the forces partitioning Poland did not take into account a new set of social classes. In spite of these ideological divergences, Waligórska brought together her understanding of the civic cause with the necessity of a war against the Tsar. Her family trauma played an important part in her political attitudes. It is not possible for us to exclude the notion that

23 Barbara W. Tuchman, *The Proud Tower. A Portrait of the World before the War, 1890–1914* (New York: Random House, 2014). Tuchman writes that "six heads of states were assassinated [...] in the twenty years before 1914. They were President Carnot of France in 1894, Premier Canovas of Spain in 1897, Empress Elizabeth of Austria in 1898, King Humbert of Italy in 1900, President McKinley of the United States in 1901, and another Premier of Spain, Canalejas, in 1912." Tuchman, *Proud Tower*, 69.

24 Tuchman, *Proud Tower*, 69.

she was also driven by a desire to avenge her brother's pointless and humiliating death, as well as wish to make up for her father's disgrace, following the accusations of treason levelled at him.

In one of the notes Waligórska left behind, transcribed by the tsarist administrators, we find descriptions of how, before the killing of the traitor, she was preparing mentally for an assassination attempt at Apukhtin: "Next, the author ponders how best to execute her plan: if it could be done in the evening and without witnesses, then flee abroad and rest after all the troubles; or else maybe go see him pretending to apologize, bend the knee, putting one's hand in one's pocket... But one might miss – to avoid this, the author had to learn how to shoot accurately at targets. Although the first way seemed safer than the second, in a situation when the culprit was hiding, innocent parties might have been affected, especially the university. Waligórska decided to choose the second option and allow herself to be sent into exile in Russia, or, which was far more likely, straight to the gallows."<sup>25</sup>

This summary of her writings causes mixed emotions, they cannot be considered trustworthy, as we do not know if the administrators made any errors, or if they carried out their task to the letter, in writing such a shocking mixture of cool calculation with desperation. The very way in which the aims are formulated seems naive, but one cannot dismiss their revolutionary ethics. Waligórska, wanting to prevent innocent deaths, decides to sacrifice her own life. This decision is an adequate interpretation of Tuchman's thesis, that only the ideal matters, with people being mere pawns. One of the protagonists in the novel *Dzieje jednego pocisku* (Annals of a single projectile) by Andrzej Strug, expresses the credo embraced by most revolutionaries, including Waligórska herself: "We – tools, machines for tossing bombs, spies creeping up on our enemies, knights of the night."<sup>26</sup>

In deliberations on the nature of terrorist acts, one must not avoid the individual as well as the social dimension – the notion of self-sacrifice. Terrorism perpetrated in the name of a better tomorrow was perceived by those perpetrating it as the greatest sacrifice: nameless, without glory, without being remembered by descendants, as an act which excluded the chance of becoming culturally immortalized. For centuries, people were willing to die, even kill in the name of religious convictions. However, with time this desire lost its previous character, instead gaining a political aspect in the nineteenth century, but its sacred dimension, though invisible, remained. Waligórska's confession fits with the first point of Sergey

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25 Waligórska, *Listy*, 188–189.

26 Andrzej Strug, *Dzieje jednego pocisku* (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1971), 50.

Nechayev's *Revolutionary Catechism*, demanding that individual affairs and egoistic aims be abandoned.<sup>27</sup> Agreeing to become a mere part of a historical process is a sign of one's ideological honesty and readiness for martyrdom. What is more, in a secularized world, terrorism retains some messianic aspects. Bombs have become modern messiahs.<sup>28</sup> No one knows the time or place they will go off. No one knows the hour of their death. Unpredictable, Medusa-like, it is to be a sign of new times to come, forecasting a complete collapse of the old world and the birth of the new.

### The Good and the Bad?

Tuchman classifies terrorists in two groups. In spite of the author's approach to the topic and her great erudition, this conception arouses resistance, for she writes: "[The Idea] had its theorists and thinkers, men of intellect, sincere and earnest, who loved humanity. It also had its tools, the little men whom misfortune or despair or the anger, degradation and hopelessness of poverty made susceptible to the Idea until they became possessed by it and were driven to act. These became the assassins."<sup>29</sup>

This list of idealists includes Pierre Proudhon, Mikhail Bakunin, and Prince Pyotr Kropotkin, while those who became its tools include desperado-assassins most often coming from low social classes. To sacrifice their life on the altar of ideals, they needed to suffer poverty, hunger, and cruel fate, thereby becoming warriors convinced of their mission and the need to fight to the bitter end. This classification which seems to justify one group at the expense of the other, is not representative for the whole phenomenon and demands that we reconsider if it really does reflect the mechanisms at work in Europe at the time, and, finally, if it provides a veritable description of terrorist organizations in the Polish Kingdom and Russia. We cannot agree that people on Polish lands, who decided to join the party and become its tools, were "little men," driven to act only by poverty, and not by a sense of injustice, at least to some extent. Revolutionaries came from a range of social strata, some had noble roots and were often schooled in Russia or elsewhere abroad, but they still decided to abandon their careers and affluent lifestyles for the cause. There were those, including Waligórska, who came from impoverished gentry and became members of the urban intelligentsia or the working classes. In their

27 Siergiej Nieczajew, *Katechizm rewolucjonisty*, [http://www.bakunin.pl/artzy\\_nieczajew\\_kat.html](http://www.bakunin.pl/artzy_nieczajew_kat.html).

28 Tuchman, *Proud Tower*, 69.

29 Ibid., 69–70.

new circumstances, affected most notably by economic factors, they were forced to verify their old ideas. Changes taking place right before their eyes formed new, radical attitudes that demanded self-sacrifice in the name of better tomorrows.

### **Sergey Nechayev – A Great Dream Hunter**

The first point of Sergey Nechayev's *Revolutionary Catechism* hits all those reading it with its uncompromising, almost inhumane, anti-European message: "A revolutionary is a condemned man. He has no personal interests, no affairs, feelings, attachments, possessions, even surname. He is wholly absorbed by one exclusive matter, one thought, one desire – revolution."<sup>30</sup> The manifesto, written in 1870 (regardless of whether he or Bakunin was its author), is one of the most impassioned calls to violence and revolution. Nechayev is one of the most puzzling figures of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The longer one thinks of him and tries to understand the man, the more one becomes confused. He is not complex, on the contrary, he seems simplistic, direct, brutal, and uncompromising. That which tends to be hidden in others is blatant in Nechayev. He said things not many would admit, or even allow themselves to think, as civilized people. Presenting himself as a person free of intimate attachments, loves, and friendships, he turned himself into a rootless, mysterious figure, freeing in others animosities, rebellious attitudes, and hate. He contended: "The nature of a real revolutionary excludes all romanticisms, all emotions, honesties, exaltations, delights. Even personal hates and vengefulness."<sup>31</sup> Often considered to have been a fanatic, who – one must stress this at all costs – infected all those around him with hate: emigre activists, students in Russia, prison guards, and so on. He gave them courage to enter a one-way road towards revolution, convincing them that he was ready for all and nothing scared him, for according to him revolutionaries should "day and night be driven by one thought, one aim – merciless destruction. With cold blood, undaunted striving for that aim, always ready to die themselves and with their own hands destroy all that which stands in their way."<sup>32</sup> Sergey Nechayev cannot be compared to any other well-known revolutionaries, being more reminiscent of biblical figures: Abbadon, the fifth angel of the Apocalypse, emerging from the abyss, carrying destruction, and Azrael who brought killing

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<sup>30</sup> Nieczajew, *Katechizm rewolucjonisty*.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

to humanity. Nechayev was a warning shot of the coming end of the world – appearing suddenly, awakening that which is asleep in people, that which was waiting for a sudden surge, and then vanished. His life, lived as if time is out of joint, with a dose of hubris, attacked historical rules, the very mechanisms which governed social relations. It is one of these cases where terrorists understood free will as necessity, as cold madness – never to back down, to maintain hate, to feed others with it. Nechayev returned with full force in the novels *Demons* by Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *Master of St. Petersburg* by John Maxwell Coetzee, and *Plomienie* (Flames) by Stanisław Brzozowski. All these authors were fascinated by a man who murdered a member of his own organization in cold blood, thus becoming a hero with ambivalent qualities. In *Plomienie*, he expresses judgements agreed upon by all “the righteous and noble” revolutionaries: “As long as I live, as long as I think, as long as I have a single breath in my breast, it too will be a scream: death to tyrants, death to deceit, death to exploiters.”<sup>33</sup> The literary version of Nechayev unmasks the lack of morality the world hides behind in its shadow, and itself hides behind laws, norms, and rules that justify every indignity and injustice:

As long as even one person dies in the world, as long as even just the one life is trodden into the mud, life is not worth living, it's not possible to live – only by fighting. Blood all over, human blood everywhere. Your learned authors pen their books in purple blood, your laws written with the tears of hungry children. Your virtue hasn't washed its clothes clean of blood. Your world feeds on carrion. You are surprised that I speak to you in this way, that I do not have polished, washed words. No. I am not from your circles. I do not want to learn, perfect, there is nothing other than the struggle.<sup>34</sup>

Nechayev came from a peasant family, making up for his lack of learning with passion, with feverish drive – his attitude, which was a call to action.<sup>35</sup> While living abroad, he convinced Mikhail Bakunin that he was representing a massive organization and, with his backing, returned to Russia, where he pretended to have a vast conspiracy network behind him. Things ended with the murder of Ivanov, a student, a member of his organization, and Nechayev's arrest. Bakunin calls Nechayev's attitude Machiavellian and describes how he betrayed his friends, misleading kind souls. Bakunin, though he discovered

33 Stanisław Brzozowski, *Plomienie* (Warszawa: Krytyka Polityczna, 2007), 108.

34 Ibid., 109.

35 Franco Venturi, *Roots of Revolution*, vol. 2 (New York: Knopf, 1960).

these dark sides to Nechayev's character, never managed to escape his charming influence and forgave him all his crimes. And he was not the only one to do so. In a letter to Talandier, Bakunin confessed: "He abused all our trust, stole our letters, shamed us terribly – in a word, behaved like a scoundrel. His only excuse was fanaticism! A man of incredible ambitions and though he was not aware of it, he finally saw the revolutionary cause as his very own."<sup>36</sup> Later in the same letter he warned his friend not to trust Nechayev and not to let him near his daughters, remembering what happened to those of Alexander Herzen:

N. is one of the most active and energetic [men] I have ever met. When there is a need to serve the *cause*, he does not waver, does not back down from anything, and becomes as ruthless with himself as he is with others. This is his prime characteristic, which drew and forced me to seek a union with him. There are people who think he is simply a blue bird. This is not true. He is a committed fanatic, but also dangerous to all who work with him.<sup>37</sup>

He outlines his method: "The body must suffer, the soul – be deceived."<sup>38</sup> At first, Waligórska wrote in her diaries about the rejection of his methods by a new generation: "His theory of the ends justifying the means put us at risk, and the murder of Ivanov filled us with horror and disgust."<sup>39</sup> She felt that these fantasies can only harm their cause.<sup>40</sup> And yet in a chapter dedicated to him, she describes a history of how Nechayev sent a letter from his jail, demanding he be released. He described in colorful terms the disruption he caused to the prison staff, claiming to have convinced them to join the revolution, planning his own escape. But he wanted it to be spectacular and glamorous. To impress his guards, his liberators were to come in army uniforms, decorated with medals. Vera Figner wrote:

Nechayev is completely unique, a special kind of character, one of a kind. No matter how terrible the memories of Ivanov's murder, one cannot help but admire

36 Michaił Bakunin, *Pisma wybrane*, trans. Bolesław Wścieklica (Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza 1965), 444–445.

37 Bakunin, *Pisma*, 442.

38 Ibid., 443.

39 Wiera Figner, *Trwały ślad*, vol. 2, trans. Julia Mincowa (Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza, 1962), 105.

40 Figner, *Trwały ślad*, 162.

his strength of will and decisiveness, cannot help but admire his ruthlessness in action; he did not act for his own sake, for ambitions, but limitless and honest in sacrificing himself in the cause of the revolution. Though he lacked higher moral valor, he possessed something suggestive, convincing, something which hypnotized simple folks.<sup>41</sup>

Nechayev's incarceration in a fortress made no difference to young revolutionaries, for he kept on issuing orders and requests, his power so great that Figner admitted they were ready to spill innocent blood.<sup>42</sup>

### **Theatrum Mundi – Life is a Dream**

Terrorism as an invention from the French Revolution is related to the existence of the modern nation state.<sup>43</sup> In answer to state sanctioned terror, anarchists, socialists, and labor movements used individual and party terror. It is widely known that these forms of violence were complementary and dependent upon each other. What is more, we have cases of successful attempts to take over revolutionary movements and create fictional, central, illegal party-led governments by state and police led factions, responsible for spying upon conspiratorial terrorist organizations. An example of this are the successful activities of the Russian police force Okhrana, which led to the internal break up of National Will and the Proletariat Party. And yet the complete destruction of such movements was a threat to the interests of secret police forces. Thanks to the existence of illegal political parties, the police became stronger, while its power became limitless, and was beyond all control.<sup>44</sup> The existence of supervised, and then broken up, political parties was sustained in a range of ways – at first, police officers infiltrated their ranks, a well-tested method, allowing the police to regulate the range and pace of terrorist activities. At the start of the twentieth century Okhrana agents held influential positions in almost all political parties, and oftentimes were even among the members of their governing bodies.<sup>45</sup> Police provocations within these structures led to the

<sup>41</sup> Figner, *Trwały ślad*, 230.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 260.

<sup>43</sup> Terry Eagleton, *Holy Terror* (Oxford: OUP, 2005), 1.

<sup>44</sup> Elżbieta Kaczyńska and Dariusz Drewniak, *Ochrana. Carska policja polityczna* (Warszawa: Bellona, 1993), 72–73.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

blurring of the line between good and evil and one might say that those who worked there were capable of anything. The only answer of the state to revolutionary movements was terror. On the one hand, notions of sacrifice and revenge were bandied about, and on the other, practical side, it was agreed that the innocent would have to die. According to revolutionaries, the good of the cause justified all means. The greater the terror unleashed, the more spies appeared and the more brutal the police response became, which was seen as a success for the police itself.<sup>46</sup> This must have had damaging influence on morale within terrorist organizations. Mutual mistrust, accusations of betrayal, and such, were commonplace, causing the mood to become unbearable, especially for conspirators who were less strong-willed – some of these really did turn into police informants, but there were many instances of secret agents changing sides, or else acting for their own financial benefit.<sup>47</sup>

Vera Figner summarized all this most fully in her diaries, where she explained how terrorism depraved both victims as well as perpetrators:

On the one hand, the party claimed that all methods were allowed in fighting with the enemy [...]; at the same, it created the myth of dynamite and revolvers, a halo over the terrorist, so that murder took on an attractive quality in the eyes of the young. The weaker the psyche of such youths, the harder their lives became all around, the more this revolutionary terror caused them to enter into states of exultation.<sup>48</sup>

We should next ask about how effective these activists and Waligórska were: was she a victim of their manipulations too? We ought to look at the history of the first labor party as a performance and try to assess who was the actual director, and who the actor. Waligórska was convinced that her failings were caused by the curse hanging over her family, and even if she really did believe herself to be a part of historical processes, she had a rather vague vision of her own place in this period. We can surmise that she did not suspect that her very life hung in the balance – on the one side of the scale were forces fighting for complete control over society, and on the other was a man convinced that he could create his own political reality. This was Stanisław Mendelson.

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>48</sup> Figner, *Trwały ślad*, 257.



## Act I

### Scene 1

The year is 1882. A labor party called Proletariat is set up in Poland. Following a wave of arrests in 1883 and 1884, as well as following the trial of twenty-nine Proletariat members, the party almost ceased to exist. In 1885, only a few workers were left in Poland – these were people who lacked the ability to restore previous structures or organize new projects. They lacked experience in conducting terrorist activities. None of these Proletariat members were professional conspirators. Their amateurish campaigns were limited to spying on traitors, informant, setting traps for them and readying more assassination attempts. The end of these activities was tragic; one of the conspirators – Jan Kowalewski – was sentenced to death by hanging for injuring an agent of Piotr Piński, Waligórska committed suicide in prison, and others were deported to the east of Russia.

### Scene 2

Instructions for taking action came from abroad. Stanisław Mendelson, both an intriguing and a disturbing figure, controlled events from Geneva and Paris. Between 1883 and 1884 he created, with Maria Jankowska, a center of influence, gathering round it well-known Russian emigres and Polish party activists. In the joint committee of Proletariat and Narodnaya Volya, the Russian side was represented by Georgi Plekhanov, Pyotr Lavrov, Lev Tikhomirov, and Antonina Połowska.<sup>49</sup> During this time Mendelson, along with Kazimierz Dłuski, Ludwik Waryński, and Szymon Dickstein, declared that it was necessary to part with all traditions of independence movements, while Polish patriotism was to be especially condemned. Ludwik Krzywicki, known for his critical opinions about his circle of associates, wrote in his diaries that Mendelson was an ambitious, conflicted, cruel, and power hungry person, changing his views and positions depending on the political mood of the time.<sup>50</sup> Mendelson came from a wealthy Jewish family, devoted completely to political games, his bloodied hands making him a very interesting personage.<sup>51</sup> His temperament allowed him to always be at the center of political party life, while his personal wealth meant he could publish journals *Równość*, *Przedświt*, *Walka Klas* and co-found the parties

49 Ludwik Krzywicki, *Wspomnienia*, vol. 2 (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1958), 290.

50 Ibid., 281.

51 Kasprzak, who is accused of treason, becomes the victim of his machinations, as he commits suicide.

Proletariat, Proletariat II, and the Polish Socialist Party (PPS). Dubbed by Krzywicki a “Jacobean of old school to the very core,” Mendelson belonged to the most feverishly active proponents of using terror for political ends.<sup>52</sup> He posed as an opponent of any sort of compromise, but at a later date he did not see any reasons not to work with Czas, a group of Stańczyk supporters from Krakow, while his career ended with him becoming a propagator of Zionism. He was known for his tendency to change his opinions and positions at a whim during discussions.<sup>53</sup> He disliked Marxism, though he did publish works by Marx and Engels, whom he happened to also personally know. In Narodnaya Volya meetings he played the part of a Marxist, mostly to annoy Russians but also for his own merriment. In the opinions of others, he was a cynic, a fake, a modern politician who delivered his aims – those he felt like chasing after at any time. It is hard to say what he was really like. Trickster, player, risk taker. And yet in this game he appeared to be a director who pulled strings, a manipulator, for whom the lives of people engaged in a cause had little value. Aware that his party almost did not exist, he put those who survived at risk of his own *idées fixes*, sacrificing human lives without worrying about costs and consequences. All these intrigues make him into a Polish version of Nechayev. Waligórska’s testimonies show that in 1886 she met with him in Paris, and then later on in Warsaw, it seems. What it was he managed to convince her of, and what he expected in return, we do not know, but she returned ready to use any and all forms of violence.

### Scene 3

Even though Narodnaya Volya collapsed in Russia, and despite the information that back in Poland more persecutions caused activists to feel discouraged and scared, Mendelson still tried to control and increase revolutionary fevers back home. Wincenty Janowicz, who left Warsaw on behalf of Proletariat, returned disheartened to Paris. He told Krzywicki that in Warsaw all that was left was a handful of workers, belonging to the organization. As a representative of the Central Committee, he met with resistance on their end, as they did not want to talk about the cause or do anything in its name. In certain places, the revolutionaries pretended not to know anything, and the reactions of some were almost hysterical.<sup>54</sup> Eventually, Janowicz announced to the workers that the party had decided to cease using terror, and talked about the

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<sup>52</sup> Krzywicki, *Wspomnienia*, vol. 2, 266–267.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 266–267.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 286.

efforts being made to improve people's lot in life.<sup>55</sup> Simultaneously, another agent from Paris, by the name of Teofil, tried to discount Janowicz's views, egging the others on to fight. This turned out to be Marcin Kasprzak, hiding under a pseudonym, while Mendelson was behind the whole deception.<sup>56</sup>

#### Scene 4

The year is 1886. Proletariat is completely disbanded. Stefan Ulrich is arrested as its main leader, while Mendelson is still carrying on party activities, and as we might suppose – agitating Waligórska and others to commit acts of terror.<sup>57</sup>

### Act II

#### Scene 1

The events take place during the 1870s and 1880s. Young people studying in Kiev and Petersburg made contact with nationalists, joining *Zemlya i Volya* (Land and Liberty), and then *Narodnaya Volya* (People's Freedom).<sup>58</sup> This included the likes of Edmund Płoski, Tadeusz Rechniewski, and Aleksander Dębski. Stanisław Kunicki, being a member of *Narodnaya Volya*'s Executive Committee, led to the cancellation of the agreement between these two parties in February 1884. Proletariat thus became firmer in its use of terror and it was decided it would no longer organize workers in a broader sense (strikes) due to political conditions. The central group that is mindful of these changes is made up of consciously aware socialists-conspirators.<sup>59</sup>

#### Scene 2

The year 1879. *Narodnaya Volya* is established in Russia, the first organization to formally use political terror – a model for all the terrorist

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 287.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 288.

<sup>57</sup> Krzywicki held the opinion that it was Mendelson who enticed Zofia Ginsburg to travel to Russia and assassinate Alexander III. Arrested in 1889, she was sentenced to death (the sentence was commuted to life imprisonment). Ginsburg committed suicide in the Shliselburg Fortress on 19 January 1891, while serving her sentence.

<sup>58</sup> Krzywicki, *Wspomnienia*, vol. 2, 66.

<sup>59</sup> Irena Koberdowa, *Socjalno-rewolucyjna Partia Proletariat, 1882–1886* (Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza, 1981), 129.

organizations to appear around the globe at later dates. Its program promoted socialist ideas and assassinations: "Its terrorist activities involved eliminating the most destructive members of government, protecting the party from spies, punishing the most blatant manifestations of violence and lawless actions by government administrators."<sup>60</sup> Rule over the party was executed by the Executive Committee, which, stripped of external control, became a mirror image of the tsarist regime.<sup>61</sup> The year 1881. Conspirators murder Tsar Alexander II. This was to be the Russian equivalent of the destruction of the Bastille, and nationalists were convinced it would be the start of a new era, the assassination was meant to move peasant masses to revolt all over the land. What happened instead was an increased oppression from police and gendarmes.<sup>62</sup>

### Act III

#### Scene 1

Narodnaya Volya was essentially ended by Sergei Degayev, one of its members, who was also a provocateur and police agent.<sup>63</sup> He joined the party in 1880, and his biggest ambition was to join the Executive Committee. Being clever and driven, he nevertheless lacked the will to kill in the name of ideals or to sacrifice his own life on the altar of the party's interests. He was filled with moral scruples, and for this he was condemned by other revolutionaries.<sup>64</sup> Vera Figner, who disliked him the most, wrote in her diary: "The most striking thing about him was a complete lack of individual personality, he was lacking in originality, in anything strong or unique. Softness and adaptability – these were the central aspects of his character."<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 142.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 143.

<sup>62</sup> Tuchman, *Proud Tower*, 73–74.

<sup>63</sup> Richard Pipes, *Zamachowcy i zdrajcy*, trans. W. Jeżewski (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Magnum, 2003), 121. Degayev was born in Moscow in 1857; after graduating from the Mikhailovskaya Artillery Academy in Saint Petersburg – where he befriended officers with radical views and engaged in antinational activities – he entered the Institute of Signal and Communication Officers.

<sup>64</sup> Pipes, *Zamachowcy i zdrajcy*, 133.

<sup>65</sup> Figner, *Trwały ślad*, 310–311.

## Scene 2

Georgy Sudeykin, head of the security forces in Russia, led to the breakup of Narodnaya Volya. He pioneered new policing methods, which then reshaped Russian security organs.<sup>66</sup> A unique character, a child of his times – the war he waged on terrorists reminded him of a hunt. Richard Pipes compares him to a hunter and prey all at once; he lived like a terrorist, had several passports and homes, meeting agents in a range of locations and times. Even though he served the Tsar with vigor, he did not respect the man. He saw himself as a constitutionalist, and when need arose, as a socialist, approvingly referring to the assassinations of Fyodor Trepov and other high ranking government officials. He was promoted in 1881, but he was feared and avoided in Moscow. Sudeykin developed his own strategy, taking the fight to the enemy, infiltrating revolutionary circles and disrupting their activities. His aim was to destroy the underground movement from within, demoralizing its activists, who were to wreck what they had created with their very own hands.<sup>67</sup> Having been promoted, he created a new department which was occupied with setting various factions against each other, spreading false rumors, inventing fake accusations against the most important conspirators, presenting them as snitches, and discrediting their revolutionary actions as led by the secret police.

## Scene 3

In 1882, Degayev became Sudeykin's agent, bringing them closer together. They had a lot in common, including a feverish sense of ambition. Pipes notes that Sudeykin was frustrated due to his low rank, for he saw himself as the order keeper in the empire. He thus became obsessed, hating the regime and revolutionaries, while the conspiracy he came up with remained under his control and was to bring him bounty.<sup>68</sup> Degayev aided in disbanding the terrorist organizations, having been promised a leading role in the party. Over 140 individuals were arrested in a short space of time, including Vera Figner, who then spent a long time behind bars. Sudeykin systematically changed the Narodnaya Volya structures, concealing within them his own police secret agents. Working on a change to the program, he planned the new Executive Committee elections. In the summer of 1883, he stood at the head of the

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66 Sudeykin was born in 1850 into poor and propertyless gentry. In 1874 he embarked on a career in the Special Corps of Gendarmes, a formation tasked with the safeguarding of national order and combating subversive activities.

67 Pipes, *Zamachowcy i zdrajcy*, 153.

68 Ibid.

revolutionary movement. Sick with hate, having failed to be promoted, he decided to use revolutionaries to kill his opponents within the government. Degayev agreed to kill various high ranking officials, including Vyacheslav von Plehve. Sudeykin was murdered in December 1883 and Narodnaya Volya finally fell apart.

#### Scene 4

It is 2 August 1886 – a Temporary Military Court sits to judge the case of Pinski's assassination, called up by Governor-General Gurko. Kowalewski, who shot the agent, was sentenced to death by hanging on 3 August and was executed on 23 August, while other conspirators were exiled to deep Russia. No one came to their defense – according to Baumgarten, silence fell over the whole affair, as society accepted the verdict. *Przedświt* and *Walka Klas*, edited by Mendelson, published no mention of the trial. Mendelson, in a letter to Julia Razumiejczykówna, wrote that he no longer trusted Warsaw and the assassination had been incompetently carried out.<sup>69</sup>

#### Epilogue

This machinery, created by both police forces and revolutionaries, began to live a life of its own, inhumane, though also rational, destroying both the weak and the strong members: string-pullers such as Sergei Zubatov, Vyacheslav von Plehve, and those who tried to outsmart everyone else, such as Sudeykin, as well as the crazed fanatics such as Nechayev and idealists such as Figner. This did not include everyone – Degayev managed to escape and get a post as a professor of mathematics at the university of South Dakota, living to a ripe old age. Others took up more conservative posts – such as Lev Tikhomirov, who joined the Duma as a member of parliament. Mendelson abandoned terrorism as a method, acting as the founder of PPS, considering it too radical. The rest either lost their lives or their freedom. Women revolutionaries, such as Waligórska, often accused of excessive emotionality, worked in the party which had been infiltrated by the police, trusting its leaders, who, led by personal interests, trumpeted the importance of ideas – the cause, as it was called at the time.

Looking at the life and death of Waligórska, we wonder if we cannot defend the logic of individual influence over hidden political and historical mechanisms. Should individuals be seen as worthless victims offered up on the altar of time? Would it be better for everyone if we “had never been born,”

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69 Baumgarten, *Dzieje Wielkiego Proletariatu*, 733.

as Waligórska herself wrote? How to see the past through the prism of human experience, which does not connect with the very core of history itself, though it is captured by it and feeds on the appearance of taking part in the great procession of the ages? How in the light of knowledge about the epoch and its mechanisms can we describe Waligórska's life? Should she not herself know all about historical laws and the cruel fantasies of those who thought they were the main agents of change? Shall we let her dream to structure the story of her life taken from her correspondence in terms of *life writing*? Waligórska believed her struggle had meaning and was convinced her engagement helped to improve the world. I do not know if this is enough, it seems doubtful, but I do admit that the meaning she assigned to her activities should help us defend against historical truths – individual value being sometimes more important than truth.

None of us can fully grasp our lives, and Waligórska was no exception in this. Only those who come after can perceive it in its breadth, but in no way does this entail full understanding, as key events or facts might be missing from the picture. Knowledge always remains fragmentary, incomplete, selective, and fails to fully capture the meaning of reality. Historical rule will persist, realizing its plans hidden from our eyes, invisible and incomprehensible, not letting us challenge it, nor contest it; in spite of this, against our better judgement, we will perceive it as an autonomous sphere, one in which humanity can reach its highest potential.

The only chance is individual historical rebellion against great histories – a suicidal act, inherently impossible, something which makes no sense in the light of historical reasoning, cannot exist separately, something which resists being absorbed into a whole and breaks free of the continuum, questioning higher forces, condemned to madness and being misunderstood, circling like a comet – only this gesture of dissent can save Waligórska's history and suspend the conviction penned on the pages of time.

*Translation: Marek Kazmierski*

## Abstract

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**Monika Rudaś-Grodzka**

THE INSTITUTE OF LITERARY RESEARCH OF THE POLISH ACADEMY OF SCIENCES

*Bronisława Waligórska Dreaming*

Bronisława Waligórska's prison letters to her sister Jadwiga (1886) are a testimony of a time and of women's experience in it – in this case, of a woman arrested and imprisoned in the Warsaw Citadel for her conspiratorial and political activities. Court documents show that she was involved in the assassination attempt on Piotr Pinski, and then tried to kill Governor-General Iosif Gurko and the curator of the Warsaw Educational District, Alexander Apukhtin. The article explores histories large and small – as well as tries to answer the question of the mechanisms that rule history and the individual's role in it – in the context of the events of the 1880s and 1890s, a time of terrorist activity in Europe. This historical background allows us to reveal the relationship between the police and illegal political parties, as well as observe the emergence of the mighty modern systems of oppression.

## Keywords

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correspondence, terrorism, dream, history, life writing



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 Cynthia Huff
 

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## Mind the Gaps: Victorian Women Writing Subversion Into the Archive

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DOI: 10.18318/td.2020.en.1.12 | ORCID: 0000-0001-8451-9894

In the American writer Susan Glaspell's 1916 classic play of insight and misprision, *Trifles*, the paraphernalia of a woman's daily life are read and re-read from different perspectives, with different results. While the County Attorney and Sheriff scour the bedroom and barn for conclusive clues, the important spaces to them, Mrs. Peters and Mrs. Hale piece together the trifles of Mrs. Wright's life: a broken jar of fruit preserves, unbaked bread, an apron, stitches in a quilt, a broken bird cage, and the last piece of the puzzle, a dead bird wrapped in a scrap of silk. From these fragments, from the past and the house itself and their own experiences as women and wives, the two women see the whole tragedy: a domineering and abusive husband, years of repression and silence, an outburst of anger and violence, and at last, desperate revenge and murder through hanging. Having read the story correctly in the only really important space, the kitchen, through which the men just sail, Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters, in a small but important conspiracy of sisterhood, abridge the text by hiding the dead bird. The men never notice. As readers, they could never get past their scripted methods and preconceptions. The women, however, learned how to apply their own experience, had learned different read-

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**Cynthia Huff** – an English Studies Professor Emerita at Illinois State University, has published on nineteenth century women's archival life writing, particularly diaries, as well as Victorian literature and culture. Her books include *British Women's Diaries*, *Women's Life Writing and Imagined Communities*, and *Inscribing the Daily: Critical Essays on Women's Diaries*, co-edited with Suzanne Bunkers. In 2017 she delivered a keynote address in Warsaw on women's writing in the archives.

ing strategies, learned to watch for the important symbols of one woman's domestic world, learned to read supposed trifles to discover the truth of Mrs. Wright's life.<sup>1</sup>

What Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters realize is that how you approach a person's life matters, that the methodology for reading it can uncover its secrets. The same is true for scholars delving into the archives of nineteenth-century women's life writing. An archive is an assemblage of material in multiple ways. It is ordered, or at least kept, by an individual or family, if in personal hands. If in institutional ones, by the record office or library that acquired the documents from whomever donated them. It is also an assemblage of materials put together by the woman who first gathered and composed them, and it is interpreted by the scholars who delve into an archive looking for the secrets it reveals about lives lived. I will discuss each of the ways the archive functions in these capacities and how knowing the provenance of an archive helps the scholar best approach the subversion and revolution that reading nineteenth-century women's writing can reveal. Knowing the provenance shows which women were likely to have their writing become part of an institutional archive, how archivists are likely to designate their writings, how women writers create multiple types of archives in assembling their chosen material, and how we as readers and scholars need to look with care at all aspects of the archive. But, first, I will consider how scholars have methodologically approached, or not, women's life writing and how looking at similar and different ways biography and autobiography have been conceived methodologically might help us both read the past and construct biographies of women with care.

Before the 1980s most academics eschewed the archives of women's life writing, convinced that the only lives worth considering were the lives of great men who represented their age and whose writings could be hailed as exemplary. Georg Gusdorf in his seminal essay, "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography," distinguished autobiography from biography by saying that the former "turned from public to private history" and argued for autobiography's status as literature and the autobiographer as self-referential and important.<sup>2</sup> Gusdorf says, "in autobiography the truth of facts is subordinate to the truth

1 Portions of this essay originally appeared as "Reading as Re-Vision: Approaches to Reading Manuscript Diaries," *Biography: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly* 3 (2000): 504–523, and "The 'Galton Family Books': Visual and Verbal Life Writing," *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 2 (2016): 189–202. Used with permission.

Susan Glaspell, *The Complete Plays*, ed. Linda Ben-Zvi and J. Ellen Gainor (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2010).

2 Georg Gusdorf, "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography," in *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, ed. James Olney (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), 31.

of the man.”<sup>3</sup> Major early scholars of autobiography, such as James Olney, emphasized metaphors of self. Biographers likewise wrote about the lives of great men worthy of emulation, who contributed to the march of history, but many of these biographers emphasized exterior events as representative rather than the interiority of autobiography studies, even though the “new biography,” instituted by Lynton Strachey in *Eminent Victorians*, dealt with unconscious motives. Biographers tended to focus on political and military leaders, men of letters, in short, the heroes worthy of Thomas Carlyle’s concept of hero worship, deeming the social and domestic much less interesting and not necessarily truly historical. Until 2010, the *Oxford English Dictionary* defined biography as “the history of the lives of individual men, as a branch of literature;” Ruth Hoberman notes Virginia Woolf’s comment that biography has been “too much about great men.”<sup>4</sup> Until relatively recently, neither scholars of biography nor autobiography have focused on women’s lives or considered them theoretically worthy. However, the academic progeniture both life writing disciplines have in common is Wilhelm Dilthey, the father-in-law of Georg Gusdorf, who argued that history cannot best be understood through all-encompassing concepts such as progress or society but must instead be seen in its specificity where individuals influence their surroundings as much as institutions or ideas affect them. Dilthey’s understanding of history as experientially and agentially motivated jives with feminisms’ emphasis on the importance of women’s experience and agency as well as makes way for what is now conceived of as the biographical turn.<sup>5</sup>

The editors of *The Biographical Turn: Lives in History* enthusiastically endorse the current direction and methodology of biography studies, which situates “human experience as the starting point of historical interpretation.”<sup>6</sup> They say: “Using the individual life as a lens or microscope, the research methodology of biography functions as a counterweight to abstract causation and »conceptual« history, using primary sources and the personal perspective to explore, relativize, confirm or correct existing understandings and interpretations of the past.”<sup>7</sup> Dating from the 1980s as an accepted scholarly

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3 Ibid., 43.

4 Ruth Hoberman, “Biography: General Survey,” in *Encyclopedia of Life Writing*, ed. Margaretta Jolly (London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2001), 1:112.

5 See, for example, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 193–198.

6 Hans Renders et. al., eds., *The Biographical Turn: Lives in History* (London: Routledge, 2017), 5.

7 Renders, *Biographical Turn*, 5–6.

methodology, the biographical turn as practice and methodology is significant and potentially revolutionary for helping us look at, practice, and conceptualize women's writing because of its emphasis on the experiential, the individual, and the personal as well as primary source material to revolutionize historical understanding. Women's Studies and Women's and Gender Studies have also foregrounded women as individuals and their experiences, and utilized archives to do so for many decades, and the impact of these disciplines on life writing studies has been immeasurable. Feminists have pushed students of autobiography studies to consider women, people of color, and other marginalized groups as well as diverse and marginalized genres, such as letters and diaries, often found in archives, in an effort to transform autobiography studies from a field focusing on autobiographies written by white, Western, economically secure, able-bodied, heterosexual men to become much more inclusive of the world's inhabitants and their methods of expression. Craig Howes, co-editor of the influential journal, *Biography*, locates the difference between biography and what has become life writing studies in the former's insistence on objectivity and alleged rigor. Clearly on the side of the diversity of life writing studies, Howes, echoing Julie Rak's *Boom!*, which is about the popular proliferation of memoirs, sees studying commodity production as a possible link between scholars of biography studies and life writing studies.<sup>8</sup> My reading is more hopeful in its attempt to use methodologies advocated by proponents of the biographical turn to reread history, especially women's history and life writing. Now, it seems, practitioners and theorists of biography are joining other life writing scholars as well as feminists to revision historical inquiry and methodology. As feminists have long done, practitioners of the biographical turn emphasize its interdisciplinary thrust, citing its use to scholars in a variety of disciplines and approaches in addition to history, such as literature, sociology, and race studies.

In effect, the biographical turn emphasizes, like much recent scholarship, a cultural studies approach that privileges the individual and whose impetus can be traced to the advent of *microhistoria* in Italy in the 1970s. The distinction between beginning with the individual as our scholarly starting point and commencing with an abstract concept, such as the family, the nation, or women, is significant for whether we read women's life writing at all, much less for how we read it, and the conclusions we might draw from our reading of it. Similar to third-wave feminism's emphasis on the diversity of, rather than the category of, women, *microhistoria* started with the individual – in

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8 Craig Howes, "What are We Turning From? Research and Ideology in Biography and Life Writing," in Renders et al., *The Biographical Turn*, 165–75; Julie Rak, *Boom! Manufacturing Memoir for the Popular Market* (Waterloo – Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2013).

fact with the historically silenced and marginalized individual – as the appropriate beginning for exploration and analysis. Thus, the concept of agency, itself a very important idea in Women's and Gender Studies and in life writing studies, assumed historical significance for the practitioners of *microhistoria*. Equally important, while traditional historians set out to write history and its actors' purpose in it according to a rational, organized pattern of behavior, microhistorians look for quirky and unconscious behavior as ways best to get at how individuals interact with and shape their historical milieu. The latter presupposes individual agency in historical revolution by foregrounding the importance of human inspired change in ways that women as historical actors can readily and subversively participate. Women may not have by and large been considered major movers of grand historical narratives but the approach of *microhistoria* affords their lives and deeds agency because it takes as its focus behavior that influences history by not adhering to the norm. This is the revolutionary quality of women's writing, the gaps and lapses that reveal women as important historical actors. Finally, microhistorians self-reflexively approach reading history by foregrounding their point of view, by realizing, as feminist theorist Donna Haraway tells us, that knowledge is situated.<sup>9</sup> Believing that context matters fully as much for the researcher as for her historical subject means that the researcher looks at the gaps and lapses in the narrative and foregrounds her own reading strategies and methodologies to create as thick and complex a description as possible. Like Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters in Glaspell's play, she does not just examine one part of the house, one aspect of the text, or even one text, for clues, but looks everywhere.

What I did not know when I began reading manuscripts by nineteenth-century women thirty-six years ago was that fragmentation, assumed and multiple voices, exclusion, and utilization of space were an important and revolutionary part of any construction of "self" or subjectivity. The self presented by women composing manuscripts was clearly not the unitary, text-based self of canonized literature or traditional autobiography and biography. And because I had been trained to read primarily for content and for the formal properties presented in a published text – the metaphors of self – I was unprepared to use my senses of touch and smell, even to interpret the spaces and gaps frequently present in manuscripts. Instead of presenting a polished, easily discernible kernel, women's manuscripts are deeply contextualized, often family-centered, multimedia discourses, so that the "self" projected in these documents is equally complex. Multiple forms and multiple subjectivities work together so that this collaged and contextualized subjectivity demands

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9 Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," *Feminist Studies* 3 (1988): 575–599.

a parallel reading strategy. Evelyn Schreiber writes that the African-American writer Toni Morrison presents “multiple constituencies” in her novels and that this “technique arouses the reader’s own multiple identities.”<sup>10</sup> The “multiple constituencies,” multiple media, multiple contexts, and multiple personae of women’s manuscript construction undermine our usual, codified reading strategies, born of learning to read print, and instead demand multiple reading strategies from a careful, “instrumental,” and “loving” reader, to use Judith Fetterly’s terms. Fetterly cautions us that to learn how to read best we must not adopt an antagonistic stance nor assume that the reading tools we are accustomed to using are the appropriate ones, but proceed more cautiously, trying out new techniques, learning how to care for the text and its writer.<sup>11</sup> I would like to suggest that our position as readers of archival women’s compositions is a very complex one which requires us to situate ourselves within the text as much as possible, something that the practitioners of microhistoria also advocate. Yet because we have even more difficulty as readers participating in the textual, historical, and personal design of manuscripts than we would of a piece of fiction, we must simultaneously realize our limited position and try to thicken our understanding by engaging their inner and outer worlds. Ideally, how we read women’s manuscripts depends on context and situation and the interrelationships among a variety of factors: ourselves as readers, the historical and social position of the woman composer, the manuscript’s textual form, how the manuscript is or is not written, and the extra-textual material possibly contained in it, to name a few. Learning how to read manuscripts is complicated detective work, a labor of frustration and love, which allows us much latitude for interpretation yet often gives us few clues.

To actuate our stance as friendly explorers of archival texts, we need to unlearn assumptions about the value of printed texts as well as our training as readers of published ones. Because we have been largely trained to read printed, published material, these texts have been sanctioned as significant by their status as a mass-produced commodity. Second, the markers in printed material are clear to us whether they are narrative devices intrinsic to different genres or spatial orderings such as paragraphs or stanzas. Third, narrative lines and character development stand out in published work because of focus. None of these learned aids to reading necessarily applies when we read manuscript diaries. Instead of a neatly printed text we encounter cramped and faded handwriting which may be written both

10 Evelyn Jaffe Schreiber, “Reader, Text, and Subjectivity: Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* as Lacan’s Gaze Qua Object,” *Style* 30 (1996): 449.

11 Judith Fetterly, *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction* (Bloomington – Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1978).

vertically and horizontally on the page. Also, we encounter a Babel of stories, meaning that it is up to us to decide which stories are most important. We can become, in effect, co-authors of the text. Reading archival women's life writing we relearn to be patient, to view repetition as positive inscription which may well unravel aspects of the woman composer's character, to consider textual gaps as frequently pointing toward significant events which require rereading of the text and further detective work. To use Marlene Kadar's phrase, we learn to look for the "autobiographical trace" in archival material,<sup>12</sup> looking for fragments of women's self-expression in unexpected places, in bits of lace and hair, in collections of picture postcards, perhaps in a box containing a dead bird.

Not only are we historically trammled as readers with a twentieth- and twenty-first-century perspective, but we also can often gain only an imperfect understanding of a woman composer's world, given the scarcity of textual clues. We must then be especially conscious of what we do or do not select as important when we read women's manuscripts, always aware that we may need to shift our reading strategy as a woman composer changes the material she includes. When dealing with nineteenth-century women's manuscripts it helps to be aware of family context because women writers often chronicled family events and thus composed their texts with the family as audience. Knowledge of this phenomenon can change the reader's stance and research in several ways, since it might cause her to consider personal documents written by a variety of family members, attune her to clues about major life events of others as well as the manuscript composer, question the textual construction of the manuscript as its composer chooses to focus on herself or those around her.

Up to this point, I have considered how we might best read primary archival material composed by women. However, there is another important consideration. That is, how does the construction of archives, mentioned earlier, influence how we go about approaching them? Microhistorians contextualize as much as possible, as do feminists and cultural theorists, and contextualization involves not only the self-reflexivity of the reader of archives but also the contextualization of the archive itself. Where is it housed? Is it in private hands, found in an attic possibly? Is it in an institution – a library or record office? What is the institution's criterion of selectivity? What has been the scholar's journey to locate the archive? Derrida emphasizes the institutional weight of archives but I think it is important to counter his certainty by carefully noting an archive's status and how the provenance of any

<sup>12</sup> Marlene Kadar (ed. and introd.) et al., *Tracing the Autobiographical* (Waterloo – Ont.: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2005).

woman's manuscript meshes with that status.<sup>13</sup> Historian Carolyn Steedman underscores archival work as an archetypal activity for historians but critiques both Derrida's and Foucault's penchant for equating the archive with state power, and emphasizes that scholars commenting on Derrida's *Archive Fever* "have found remarkably little to say about record offices, libraries and repositories."<sup>14</sup>

When I began reading manuscripts, I had set out to read those by unknown women, but I found myself primarily reading texts by women whose family members were socially or culturally distinguished, often because these are the ones that have been preserved and catalogued in the Record Offices or city libraries where the majority of women's life writing is housed in Great Britain. The location of these texts has two important implications: first, that manuscripts are symbiotically linked to their cultural context and cannot be read in isolation from that context; second, that these texts occupy a very ambiguous zone of authority. The historical context of these manuscripts, having survived and been archived due to class, both authorizes and de-authorizes them. The families from which these writers came had sufficient wealth, stability, education, and social standing to preserve these texts and later give them to public archives, or, as was true in many cases, grant them to the public along with family estates, homes, and other property. Yet they remain archived: important enough to be preserved, but not important enough to be duplicated, digitized, and publicly disseminated. That ambiguity links to their ambiguity of genre. Manuscripts by women are often part of a long textual tradition of diaries, journals, and letters, genres which have, until relatively recently, been relegated to sub-literary status and so unworthy of serious study. An authoritative text and "what surrounds that text culturally, socially, or educationally" fosters an authoritative reading, writes Kay Halasek,<sup>15</sup> and for readers seeking definitive readings, these "de-authorized" texts are non-texts, non-sense.

Yet the placement of women's life writing manuscripts in public repositories highlights their status as material available to all rather than to the privileged few, and, although such a public location enhances their availability, it nonetheless indicates some manuscripts are not considered art. This classification affects how, as scholars, we read these manuscripts, for consciously or

13 Jacques Derrida and Eric Prenowitz, "Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression," *Diacritics* 2 (1995): 9–63.

14 Carolyn Steedman, *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History* (New Brunswick – New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2011), 9.

15 Kay Halasek, "Feminism and Bakhtin: Dialogic Reading in the Academy," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 22 (1992): 69.



not, we may be at pains to prove their literariness, their worthiness; and this predilection may override our ability to decipher textual clues which enhance our reading of them. Diaries, letters, the ephemera of women's writing are also de-authorized because they are frequently uncatalogued and so not even part of the official archive. Both of the texts I will be considering here are housed institutionally in the University College London Library Special Collections, itself currently part of the National Archives of Great Britain, and are part of the extensive archives of the eugenicist and Victorian man of science, Francis Galton.<sup>16</sup> In this sense, these texts by nineteenth-century women writers are authorized and conventionalized as contributing to the record of an important male figure who easily functions as representing his *zeitgeist*. Yet, their very existence in a public archive makes these women's stories available, authorizes women and their writing as a part of family, national, and imperial history, and allows scholars to determine for themselves whether what these alleged helpmeets wrote is conventional, revolutionary, or both.

The Diary of Louisa Galton, 1830–1896, is a fascinating archival women's text, as much for what it does not say as what it does say about how a woman in Louisa's situation might construct herself through her text, about how she is revolutionary yet conventional. The diary also suggests to us useful reading strategies. Louisa's situation, and initial impetus for writing, were simultaneously common and unique among middle-class women in nineteenth-century Britain. Louisa was the appointed chronicler of the scientific achievements of a designated Victorian genius, her husband, Francis Galton. Being a family chronicler was a duty Victorian women were frequently educated to perform and one which still falls to women today. Their prescribed role as family chronicler meant that Victorian women might frequently use their diaries to construct elaborate memorials, biographies in the traditional sense, of male family members. The parameters of Victorian women's roles suggest that as readers we may want to consider their manuscripts using a microhistorical approach. This means looking at multiple contexts, which could include the construction of a family ideology and the relationships of that ideology to Victorian social, cultural, and political events, such as the maintenance of the British Empire or the construction of scientific progress.

Certainly, the text Louisa Galton constructs challenges us to consider multiple contexts and multiple representations. The ideology of women as family chroniclers was as ingrained for the Galtons as was the idea of raising male members to be Victorian geniuses; and both genders, in their respective roles, were meant to serve the fortunes of the family and empire. Louisa was expected to serve her husband as the scribe who recorded his successes for posterity,

16 Galton Papers, DMS Watson Library, University College, London: Items 53, 55, 57.

a role she inherited from the women in Francis's family. Francis Galton was expected to buttress the *raison d'être* of imperialism by discovering and elucidating the scientific basis for the alleged social superiority of British custom. He performed his duty to the empire well, for his scientific experiments on school boys, convicts, and the mentally impaired implied connections among class, genetics, and ability; and Galton's perfecting of fingerprinting enabled the British ruling class to keep track of the socially misfit. The case of Francis and Louisa Galton illustrates the far-ranging impact of a seemingly insignificant connection between the construction of family manuscript records and imperialism; and such a connection challenges us to consider new strategies for reading and interpretation.

When she married Francis Galton in 1853 Louisa did not inherit the inscription of Emma Galton's journal, the text produced by Francis's eldest sister to laud his achievements. Instead Louisa inherited an *Annual Record*, kept by Francis's mother detailing the first eight years of Francis's development and accomplishments. Initially, Louisa maintained the form of Mrs. Galton's journal, but quickly her retrospective record became separate pages, one labeled "Frank's Life" and the other "Louisa's Life." Struggling with her designated role as the family biographer of a scientific genius, Louisa assumes different voices when she inscribes Francis's page, sometimes using "I" and at other times calling Francis by his Christian name or deleting the subject. Each of her choices, whether conscious or not, indicates how closely we need to look for changes in inscription and consider how subversive these are. One of Louisa's decisions particularly indicates the necessity for us to notice a manuscript's spatial form. When Louisa begins to record a joint account for the newly-married couple, she writes on *h e r* page, the right-hand one, and does so for four years after their marriage, leaving Francis's left-hand page blank. Thus, Louisa creates a blank space where she tacitly but revolutionarily asserts her power as family scribe and suggests that for us to unravel all the textual clues it is as important to mind the gaps, to read what *i s n o t* written as well as what is. Louisa's uneasiness about which voice to assume – her own or Francis's – suggests that readers of women's manuscripts need to read with care. The "clues" in Louisa's account indicate that her record is simultaneously part of a family record, as constructed by others, and her own journal, where she asserts her independence from the familial imperative. It blurs the line between biography and autobiography and shows us that hybrid texts rather than hard and fast distinctions of genre were the rule for women's manuscripts.

By writing the Galton family record and chronicling the achievements of a Victorian genius, then re-writing it in her own terms, Louisa Galton was inscribing several levels of subjectivity: her own, the family's, and a nation's.

We cannot just read her diary, in fact women's manuscripts generally, as simply personal texts; instead, we need to look at the familial and cultural milieu to fill in the seeming gaps in these records. We also need to be aware of our dual scholarly roles. First, as scholars interpreting women's lives we are constructing their biographies. Second, we are providing witness to their lives, which, as current life writing scholars note, raises many ethical questions, including the issue of power differentials and the necessity for scholars to be self-reflexive and use care when reading and writing about women in history.

My second example, the archived *Galton Family Books*, manifests the Victorians' obsession with the representationality of material culture as a supplement to the written text to historicize, contest, and realize three levels of Galton family life inscription: collective Galton family history, the Galton's place within social, political, and scientific Victorian family history, and Galton family members' individual biographies.<sup>17</sup> This text foregrounds Victorian women's biographical acts using multimedia and prods us to consider how that might be useful today for complexly reading Victorian women writers and possibly constructing their biographies. Looking at the material and at multimedia is in keeping with life writing studies' current emphasis on the visual, which has concerned itself more with the contemporary than the historical. The two-volume *Galton Family Book* is ascribed primarily to Elizabeth Galton Wheler, who is Louisa's sister-in-law. Because the *Books*, handwritten by Elizabeth Wheler in 1883, are a multimedia collaborative creation where she was assisted by her son, Edward Wheler Galton, among other family members, they beg us as scholars and readers to read complexly and particularly, a strategy advocated by microhistorians. Elizabeth's multimedia techniques include those used in the album culture of Victorian Britain. This culture was commonly practiced by women from the aristocracy and gentry, and uses visual rhetoric well known to the Victorians. Because these techniques help underscore the *Books'* overt ideologies – deeply felt religious belief, a commitment to the burgeoning interest in science, the evocation of the past and the social status granted by property – knowing about them helps any scholar better read, understand, and contextualize a Victorian woman composer's position as a biographer and within her society.

Elizabeth created these texts within a sophisticated visual media tradition that has recently been uncovered by art historians and scholars of photography. That tradition, and its actualization in the *Books*, derived from: one, aristocratic collecting; two, family albums where photographs replaced names listed in the family Bible, thereby providing a visual record of inheritance; three, the *carte-de-visite* craze, which swept both England and America in the

17 University College London Archives, GALTON/1-116/1-47/35.

Victorian era; four, photomontage whose practice mixes images of photographs in order to create another photograph; and five, crest albums. All of these traditions were well known to and practiced by the Victorians, mainly upper-class women, although technological innovation made photography available to virtually everyone. Crest albums featured geometric designs, and once English printers began reproducing crests of arms and personal monograms in the 1860s, these were readily available for use. Elizabeth Siegel argues that photocollage was a well-established Victorian practice whose multimedia mixing of at-hand objects resulted in “the convergence of multiple authors,” both those who brought into being the materials used – the photographers, die-casters and newspaper producers, to name a few – and those who assembled them.<sup>18</sup> These assemblers were primarily upper-class Victorian women, like Elizabeth Galton Wheler, who had the material means at their disposal to put together such vibrant matter, and their role in doing so troubles a simplistically conceived role for nineteenth-century woman writers. As Patrizia Di Bello convincingly argues, women arranged albums, much as they arranged domestic interiors, as social markers to confer family status.<sup>19</sup> An astute reader can thus postulate that something as seemingly insignificant as creating archived family albums shows that Victorian ladies, who participated in the collaborative construction of collage, helped reinforce the rituals of “Society.” The fragmentation of collage also countermands the linear narrative of traditional biography and autobiography. Instead of building to a climax or suggesting linearity, collage suggests a life in multiplicity, in the process of being lived.

A careful reader immediately notices the complexity of the *Galton Family Books*. Painstakingly constructed principally by Elizabeth Galton Wheler who on the *Books* title page announces, “The Galton Family arranged by Elizabeth Anne Wheler 1883,” the *Books* perform multiple ideological acts by using varying media. That Elizabeth denotes herself as an arranger overtly points to multiple composers of the *Books* and to what the role of a Victorian woman biographer might have been. Because the *Books* are assembled via found materials whose production is collaborative and because Elizabeth explicitly points out that she had family help putting them together, the biographical act for women in the nineteenth century seems a collaborative rather than singular act. If this is the case, then a biographer or scholar currently constructing biographies of Victorian women might want to honor this tradition by likewise

18 Elizabeth Siegel, “Society Cutups,” in *Playing with Pictures: The Art of Victorian Photocollage*, ed. Elizabeth Siegel (Chicago: The Art Institute of Chicago, 2009), 13.

19 Patrizia Di Bello, *Women’s Albums and Photography in Victorian England: Ladies, Mothers, and Flirts* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2007).

enacting and recognizing the collective assemblage practiced by Victorian women biographers, an act which troubles the alleged linear construction of traditional biography.

In keeping with her role as a biographer, Elizabeth cross-referenced, which is a scholarly technique meant to suggest painstaking care and objectivity, elevate its subjects, and show important connections. Family documents, such as the *Books*, were most likely drawing-room conversation pieces left in prominent places so that visitors could peruse their contents; cross-referencing would help that process as well as emphasize the status of the individuals and family whose lives were told in such important texts. Cross-referencing also gestures towards scholarly discourse, buttressing the impression of veracity, authenticity, and authority, which Elizabeth as a biographer aims to present. It also suggests that as assembler and dutiful scribe Elizabeth has admirably performed the upper-class woman's familial and social role of fostering her family's national, as well as international, position, both in the present and for posterity.

In keeping with her use of multimedia, Elizabeth includes on the title page pen and ink drawings of the Galton family homes in Claverdon, Warley, and Loxton, as well as of Claverdon church. Including these images nostalgically suggests their familial and social importance and the place of religion in the Galton family, while the drawings evince that Elizabeth is an accomplished lady, trained in decidedly feminine artistic activities. Multiple visual markers communicate to the astute, careful reader today as well as to Victorian readers, who were well trained in the iconography of class and gender, that the Galton family was wealthy enough to own property and to educate a daughter in the desired feminine accomplishments and afford her the leisure to pursue them. It behooves us as readers to mind the visual markers of class, gender, and intelligence included in a family book, available for members of the family to peruse and for visitors to see. Such visual markers fill in the gaps we would miss if we only read the written text, for these markers show that the Galtons were members of the intelligentsia, the class that fomented the intellectual and social changes so characteristic of the Victorian era.

Another equally important consideration for the reader, scholar, and potential biographer of nineteenth-century women's writing and their multimedia construction is the tactility of Victorian albums. As staples of drawing rooms, these were literally fingered by anyone perusing their contents, which underscores their materiality, as does their being assembled by hand. Scholars of art history and photography emphasize that Victorian album culture should be considered tactile as well as visual because the body of the loved ones was evoked via mnemonic traces. These could be hair or lace, but given the Victorian belief in the power of photography to capture the loved one,

photographs also suggested tactility. The superiority of photograph portraits to these other mnemonic traces “lay in their capability to be not only an accurate representation of a loved one, but also an indexical trace, a relic of the body of the beloved person.”<sup>20</sup> The role of memory via touch was especially important for constructing a past, present and future of a particular family, but it was equally significant for creating an imagined community of family that would encompass the nation and the empire. The evocative likenesses in family albums, suggest both spatially and temporally as well as via touch and vision a conceptual image of family deep and broad enough to encompass the aspirations of empire. Being a careful reader means looking at these indexical traces, knowing their historical and cultural meaning, and not seeing them as add-ons or useless gaps in an archival text but as much a part of a woman writers’ record as marks made by a pen, as clues to her world and how she functioned within it.

How Elizabeth performed her role as family biographer is important and it certainly meant that she protected and nurtured the family name via damage control. The individual entry for Lucy Barclay Galton, Francis Galton’s grandmother and the wife of John Samuel Galton, illustrates this. According to one “official” history as well as contemporary word of mouth, Lucy was the daughter of philandering King George III. To dispel this smirch on the family name, Elizabeth writes to Mr. Capell asking him in his next edition of his *History of England* “to omit the false report,” which he accordingly does; rectifying the same story heard by Cameron Galton, Elizabeth’s son, in Dresden necessitates Elizabeth’s sister, Emma, getting “the testimony of all those still living who knew the facts.” This testimony is included in the *Galton Family Books* via letters allegedly tracing the routes of the rumors and is substantiated by Sophia Galton, another of Elizabeth’s sisters, who provides marriage certificates, settlement information and personal testimony regarding her father’s accounts. A number of interesting phenomena that reveal a postmodern approach to representational exchanges between history and life writing, both biographically and autobiographically, are at play here. One is the blurred line between “official” history and family history, since Capell agrees to alter his next edition at Elizabeth’s request. Including official documents in a family record and assuming that personal testimony has historical status also substantiates blurring and gestures towards us employing microhistorical techniques to tell nineteenth-century women’s biographies. As life writing scholar Sidonie Smith points out in her discussion of Hilary Clinton’s autobiographies, the “authenticity effect” is integral to convincing a reader /viewer that a text speaks truth, and this effect is

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20 Di Bello, *Women’s Albums*, 85.

created through the accretion of data that the culture from which it comes judges to be objective.<sup>21</sup> Official documents, which themselves help write a life, testimony from individuals thought to tell the truth, and histories, culturally assumed to be objective, all perform the authenticity effect and create truth value; and all are used here by the Galtons for that purpose. As readers and scholars of nineteenth-century women's life writing, recognizing the effects of writers and compilers adhering to truth value deepens our understanding.

In the *Galton Family Books*, Lucy's reputation, and by extension that of her Victorian heirs, is also rehabilitated and legitimized by items such as photographs of her sample work or her marriage certificate to Samuel Galton and her portrait, which bolster solicited testimony from living witnesses repudiating the false report of her mother's misconduct. In Victorian culture where physiognomy provided a window to the soul and well-executed needlework spoke to Lucy properly performing her role as a lady, Elizabeth's inclusion of these visuals convinces the viewer that Lucy could not possibly have had a dissolute past. Elizabeth also uses another common photocollage technique, drawing frames around the photographs of the portraits to create the visual sense of portraiture, thus symbolically conferring status. The visual and written texts discussed above are indexical and testamentary (and thus associated with the objectivity granted to law and science), and therefore cumulatively perform the "authenticity effect" for viewers of the *Books*.

The visual, the tactile, even the olfactory, all make up what we find in women's archives and are all traces that we as careful readers need to bear witness to and use to construct the biographies of women composers of diaries, letters, family books, and other texts. The materiality of texts, including their composition as physical entities, their use of collage, their textual spacing, their gaps and lapses, all matter to careful readers looking to uncover their secrets, to see their revolutionary potential. Their provenance, the composition and location of the archive in which they are found, make a difference, too. A painstaking reader will also want to read intertextually and look at texts by other family members as well as social, cultural, and historical work that helps illuminate women's writing. Self-reflexivity and a knowledge of and acumen in different reading strategies, including biographical, micro-historical, and feminist, also help the scholar of women's archival texts create a toolbox of reading strategies and potentially write a meaningfully nuanced biography. What I have tried to illuminate is how important it is to think of reading women's archival composition as methodologies of process, both our

21 Sidonie Smith, "America's Exhibit A: Hillary Rodham Clinton's Living History and the Genres of Authenticity," *American Literary History* 3 (2012): 523–542.

own and theirs, so that we mind the gaps more than we strive for a finished reading.

## Abstract

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**Cynthia Huff**

ILLINOIS STATE UNIVERSITY

*Mind the Gaps: Victorian Women Writing Subversion Into the Archive*

This paper looks at how methodologies advanced by the biographical turn contribute to revisioning nineteenth-century women's lives and sheds light on these women revolutionarily writing biography. It also advocates a scholarly reading practice of care and self-reflexivity and discusses archival methodology employed to write biography and autobiography. Examples of life writing by little-known Victorians, Louisa Galton and Elizabeth Galton Wheler, reveal that nineteenth-century women penned autobiography and biography, genres long regarded as the purview of powerful men. Louisa Galton wrote the biography of her husband, eugenicist Francis Galton alongside her own autobiography after inheriting the task of constructing Francis's scientific legacy from his mother. Yet Louisa subverted and revolutionized this biographical task and made the archival *Annual Record* her own. This subversion and assertion of agency shows the slippery slope between biography and autobiography, especially as the forms could be practiced by Victorian women writers, highlights how women have defied convention to write themselves into history, and suggests how scholars might best use women's archival texts to construct biographies of them. The *Galton Family Book* is an archival multimedia production where Elizabeth Galton Wheler uses the Victorian technique of collage to assure the Galton family's place in history. Looking at how collage represents the Galton family biographically suggests how multimedia methodology did capture, and could for current scholars, the complexity of an individual's life which is in keeping with current interest in microhistory.

## Keywords

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archival women's life writing, reading archives, women's manuscripts, biographical turn, Galton family



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Natalija Jakubova

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## Constructions of Parenthood in the Autobiographical Writings of Irena Solska (1875–1958)

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DOI: 10.18318/td.2020.en.1.13 | ORCID: 0000-0002-2304-8256

**T**he idea for this article comes from my research on the biography of the great Polish actress Irena Solska (1875–1958). Irena Solska was one of the most important actresses in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Polish language theater. Beside that the presence of her persona in the visual arts and literature of the epoch was extremely strong. The exploration of the available archive materials confronted me with a life stories quite different from those found in published sources. In this article I will concentrate on how her love affair with the playwright Jerzy Żuławski (1874–1915) was treated in those publications and what it looks like when confronted with the available archive sources, that is, about 150 letters to Żuławski from the period 1904–1906, currently in the collection of the Department of Manuscripts of the Adam Mickiewicz Museum of Literature in Warsaw, and some other documents – such as Solska's letters to Zofia Hanicka – from the same collection.

This love affair, which lasted from 1904 till 1906, was of central importance for Solska's biography and well known to her contemporaries. It was also depicted by Żuławski himself in his novel *Powrót* (The Return, 1914). However, because the writer's son Juliusz Żuławski was

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### Natalija Jakubova

– PhD, is a specialist in theater studies. In the years 1994–2019 she was a Research Fellow at the Institute of Art Studies, Moscow. Her publications include the books *O Witkacym* (2010), *Teatr epohi peremen* (2014) and *Irena Solska. Bremia neobychnosti* (2019) and numerous articles in collected works and journals (including *Teatr and Peterburski teatralny zhurnal* in Russia, *Pamiętnik Literacki* in Poland, *New Theatre Quarterly* in UK, *Toronto Slavic Quarterly* in Canada, etc.). She was a Lise Meitner Fellow at the Institute of Cultural Management and Gender Studies at the University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna (2018–2020).

reluctant to make his father's correspondence available to Solska's biographer Lidia Kuchtówna, she decided not to discuss the issue.<sup>1</sup> When Juliusz Żuławski changed his mind a couple of years later, Lidia Kuchtówna, who was working on the edition of Solska's letters found herself confronted with an overabundance of sensational material. She published 29 of some 150 letters, making the remark that she had to omit those which were "too intimate."<sup>2</sup> Since even the published letters conveyed the overt expressions of sexual desire incomparable with anything else in that epistolary volume, the suggestion that the omitted ones containing even more intimate proclamations reinforced the image of Solska as an insatiable *femme fatale* well known from her depiction in the cult novel by Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz *622 upadki Bunga, czyli demoniczna kobieta* (The 622 downfalls of Bungo, or demonic woman, 1910–1911, first published in 1972).<sup>3</sup> This approach to Solska's correspondence has recently been revived by a publication which takes the next steps in revealing Solska's sexuality to the reader, while making some suggestive omissions.<sup>4</sup> My research of the whole collection reveals that in fact it hardly contains any braver writing on sexual longings by Solska. Yet what was consistently avoided by both publishers is the story of her perplexed maternity (she believed her daughter to be Żuławski's child) and, consequently, her plans to leave her husband, to join Żuławski abroad, and to launch her artistic career anew.

Surely the aim of the moral censorship the editors of the letters undertook (Lidia Kuchtówna in 1984, and Elżbieta Nazaruk in 2011) was to protect Solska from too severe judgment. As a result, however, too many aspects integral to Solska's sexuality were eliminated from these publications: first of all, her passionate attitude to her motherhood, and secondly, her concept of creativity based on what can be described as *jouissance* – since she expresses it in a most

1 Lidia Kuchtówna, *Irena Solska* (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1980).

2 Irena Solska, *Listy Ireny Solskiej* (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1984), 9.

3 For more information about this construction see the chapter "The Profession of Mrs. Acne" in Natalia Jakubowa, *O Witkacym* (Warszawa: Instytut Badań Literackich, 2010), 46–85.

4 Elżbieta Nazaruk published some of the previously omitted letters under the title "Listy Ireny Solskiej do Jerzego Żuławskiego (1904–1906)" in the volume: *Zasługi Jerzego Żuławskiego i jego rodu dla literatury i kultury polskiej XX Wieku*, eds. Eugenia Łoch and Dariusz Trzeźniowski (Lublin: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej, 2011), 211–223. Alongside unjustified omissions and tedious comments of the editor about "passion" and "exaltation," which supposedly made Solska write too much and in an "unreadable way," this publication is full of date and transcription errors. Sometimes the editor even inserted the words missing from the original.

telling way precisely in the omitted letters, when planning her future life and artistic work abroad with Żuławski.

How are Solska's letters used in the writings about her? Most authors do not cite from this source at all. Presumably, they find nothing interesting in it, or, at least, nothing applicable either to the story of her work in theater or to her fame as a "demonic woman." There was hardly any specifically Solska-related scholarship after Kuchtówna's research in the late 1970s; Solska was interesting to scholars mostly as the prototype of the "demonic women" in Witkacy's work, but once again they relied here on Witkacy's opinion as it can be deduced from his prose and dramas. The situation could have been readdressed when Polish theater studies began to explore more and more gender issues. In fact, some texts written in this vein mentioned Solska, but never referred to her epistolary writings, probably because their published part reinforced the image they were trying to question.<sup>5</sup> Even recently, when a performance which highlighted Solska's involvement in helping Jews during the Second World War seemed to revive the interest in the artist, letters from this period did not draw any special attention.<sup>6</sup>

Solska reappears mostly in connection with Witkacy, and the image of Mrs. Acne from *The 622 Downfalls of Bungo* still dominates both the sphere of research and popular representations. Little attempt, however, is made to approach the issue as a virtual dialogue of these two artists: for example, looking for Solska's own views on art that could serve as her answer to Witkacy's representation of Akne as an actress who is esthetically at odds with art. To clarify, in his novel, Mrs. Acne is so obsessed with expressing her sexual desire that it blocks any possibility of truly aesthetic perception. Probably this would be different if the scholars would have Solska's letters to Witkacy at their disposal, but they are lost. And the letters to Żuławski might be discarded by the researchers as irrelevant because they are not written to Witkacy. After all, when Solska's letters are read by Witkacy scholars, they do not add anything to the already known image of the "demonic woman," which is probably worse.

5 See, for example: Łucja Iwanczewska, "Gdyby istniała..." *Trybuna*, March 14, 2008. No letter by Solska is quoted in the longest text recently dedicated to the actress, which is the chapter *Irena Solska – demoniczna kobieta* in the book: Dominika Spietulun, *Witkacowski muzy: Kobiety w egzystencji i dziele artysty* (Kraków: Towarzystwo Autorów i Wydawców Prac Naukowych Universitas, 2013), 63–93.

6 Cf. publications connected with the performance *Hideout* by Patrycja Dołowy and Paweł Passini (neTheatreT, 2014): Patrycja Dołowy, "Gwiazda po tamtej stronie muru: Okupacyjne losy Ireny Solskiej," *Wysokie Obcasy*, December 6, 2014, accessed June 23, 2018, [http://www.wysokieobcasy.pl/wysokie-obcasy/1,96856,17076569,Gwiazda\\_po\\_dru-giej\\_stronie\\_muru\\_\\_Okupacyjne\\_losy\\_Ireny.html](http://www.wysokieobcasy.pl/wysokie-obcasy/1,96856,17076569,Gwiazda_po_dru-giej_stronie_muru__Okupacyjne_losy_Ireny.html), Jacek Tomczuk, "Włosy trzeba mieć blond," *Newsweek Polska*, December 22, 2014.

One of the most idiosyncratic usages of Solska's letters is to be found in an essay by Tomasz Bocheński dedicated to the stay of Witkacy's father, Stanisław Witkiewicz, at the Adriatic seaside, where in 1910 he was visited by his son who was unexpectedly accompanied by the actress. The author of the essay had read Solska's letters to Żuławski, some of them written in 1904, precisely from the same resort on the Adriatic Sea. But with what result? From the rich collection one letter was chosen and rendered in a phrase which reduces its content to the longing for the lover's body and for the bodies of others "whom she »inspired«" (as Bocheński suggests putting the word "inspired" in inverted commas).<sup>7</sup> Bocheński recalls Solska's letter not as anything that can somehow explain her (because everything worth knowing about her seems to be already known), but as something which can explain a lot about the resort where she wrote the letter to her lover in 1904. Thus, Solska functions as a synonym of vanity and falseness, she is reduced to the sexualized body – a body which surely lacks any sickness to be cured at the resort, but is there purely for show. (Therefore, in this passage of Bocheński's text, Solska is juxtaposed with the senior Witkiewicz, who came to the resort for cure.)

Probably Bocheński's attitude would have been different if he had had the opportunity to read the whole block of letters written in connection with Solska's journey to the seaside in 1904. The context for the journey was actually the extreme fatigue caused by the earlier intensive schedule of performances and a suspicion that it may be a symptom of some serious disease (Solska writes that she lost two kilos in six weeks' time<sup>8</sup> and is so weak that she prefers to enjoy the sea panorama from her room rather than leave it<sup>9</sup>) or, last but not least, of a possible pregnancy. What about "inspiring" the writer by the actress? Bocheński, who in this context puts the word "inspired" into inverted commas, is right only to the extent that usually this word referring to such relations as those of Solska and Żuławski sounds like an euphemism and evades the discussion of their complex and by no means idealistic – by no means purely "spiritual" – nature. Still, the letters of Solska can be described by this word. It concerns, rather, mutual inspiration. It also concerns what I call *jouissance* as the source of her own creativity, which is usually suggested in Solska's own writings by the images of sun, spring, and victorious

7 Tomasz Bocheński, *Witkacy i reszta świata* (Łódź: Oficyna, 2010), 13.

8 Irena Solska to Jerzy Żuławski in an undated letter written in Abbazia upon her arrival there, early September 1904. Department of Manuscripts, Adam Mickiewicz Museum of Literature, Warsaw.

9 Ibid. The second part of the same letter, dated as „Monday” (most probably September 5, 1904).

strength. It is important to understand, however, that – like probably all love letters – Solska's letters are mostly written from the terrain dominated by sorrow, *Sehnsucht*, and pain. Through the entire correspondence Solska tries to examine these feelings and the feelings of her beloved. She tries to explain her sorrow by the legacy of a family whose members are marked by melancholy and awful neurasthenia,<sup>10</sup> then by the oppressive marriage and the need to conceal her love. Finally, she writes ironically that she and Żuławski could open "an agency of torments and enervations."<sup>11</sup> After all, it is herself whom she blames if her beloved feels sad, because she presumes that by nature he should be full of joy. This is connected with the fact that Żuławski constructed himself as a man of Mediterranean culture, and in Solska's letters from the sunny seaside we find the direct response to these views. It is already there in the second letter from the seaside when, answering the missive of the beloved, she writes: "yes, you are right, we should live differently, with the sun, in the sun and spring,"<sup>12</sup> and once again asks him to forgive her immense fatigue. The impact of what Solska perceived as the Żuławski-inspired sunny culture of the Mediterranean is, however, most obvious in another letter, which is probably the most important one of those written at the seaside, and also remains unpublished. Solska wrote it after her periods had come after considerable delay and she felt relieved that this time she had not become pregnant. In this letter, she juxtaposes those pains and tortures that would wait for both of them if their child would be born under the present conditions – to the prospect of mutual creative work which would compensate this impossibility of finding happiness in a common family. She asks Żuławski for a play "as a child asks for a fairy tale," and then writes: "and you give me these »fairy tales« and will give me them, and I will tell them to the people, to the whole world, you will see, there will be great happiness, great joy."<sup>13</sup>

10 "Jestem z rodziny melancholików, nerwowców strasznych," Irena Solska to Jerzy Żuławski, 25 April, 1904. Department of Manuscripts, Adam Mickiewicz Museum of Literature, Warsaw.

11 "Moglibyśmy założyć biuro dręczeń i denerwowań" Irena Solska to Jerzy Żuławski, appr. 8 September 1904, Irena Solska, *Listy Ireny Solskiej*, p. 44.

12 "Tak – trzeba żyć inaczej, ze słońcem, w słońcu i wiośnie" Irena Solska to Jerzy Żuławski, an undated letter, early September 1904. Department of Manuscripts, Adam Mickiewicz Museum of Literature, Warsaw.

13 "Tak Cię o to proszę jak dziecko o bajkę a Ty mi te »bajki« dajesz i dawać będziesz, a ja je ludziom, światu całemu mówić będę – zobaczysz, zobaczysz i będzie wielkie szczęście, wielka pogoda [...]" Irena Solska to Jerzy Żuławski, undated, September 1904, Abbazia. Department of Manuscripts, Adam Mickiewicz Museum of Literature, Warsaw.

This ecstatic vision of the transfer of libidinal energy into art, however, also includes the vision of sacrifice which the lovers should undertake, thus relieving others from the need to make a sacrifice and relieving themselves from the inevitability of seeing others suffer – “the thought of others’ injuries and lachrymatory eyes would torment us” – adds Solska while promising his beloved a “road strewn with thorns.”<sup>14</sup>

Ending the comments of how Solska’s letters are used in the scholarship (if at all) I am switching to the issue which is by and large ignored, namely her motherhood. For, after all, Solska has become pregnant. The letters reveal that Solska often considered leaving her husband and was preparing for a “new life” with Żuławski, which would involve radical changes in her professional career. Her plans to leave her husband tacitly acknowledged the inevitability of scandal and the subsequent need to go abroad and relaunch her career from scratch, probably as a touring theater star – a model that was starting to become outdated by the time. Her writings on the subject oscillate between enthusiasm about her future artistic partnership with her lover and the bitter admission: “but I have to live, because I am a coward.”<sup>15</sup> This “I have to live” meant that she was unable to confront public opinion and preferred to stay married to Ludwik Solski. It seems impossible to determine when exactly she came to the conclusion that her legitimate husband was also the father of her child, and to what degree this fact influenced her decision.

It is difficult to say whether the discovery of this fact also meant the end of Żuławski’s love for her. The relationship went through a deep crisis in the autumn of 1905. As can be deduced from Solska’s letters, Żuławski demanded that she would follow him “into the big world” precisely at that moment when the baby was dangerously ill. Solska reminded him that he was not free either and could hardly hope for a divorce. She refused to abandon the child and intended, for the time being, to keep her family together. She planned to leave her husband in a year’s time but wrote to Żuławski that after that she would not share her life with anybody. After this crisis, however, their relationship resumed for a while, but Żuławski then fell in love with another woman. My research on Solska’s autobiographical writings proves that motherhood played an extremely important role in her life. This holds true not only for her autobiography written in Solska’s old age.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> “Ale żyć muszę – bo jestem tchórz” – Irena Solska to Jerzy Żuławski, end of January–beginning of February 1905, Department of Manuscripts, Adam Mickiewicz Museum of Literature, Warsaw. In this letter Solska mentions the suicide of Gustaw Piotrowski and Jadwiga Brzozowska which took place on 28 January 1905, partly because of the extramarital love affair; the event had depressive influence upon the actress.

It is so already in her correspondence with Żuławski, and it becomes clear when we read the whole of it.

I already cited the letter written when Solska experienced the delay of her periods and then felt relieved that she was not pregnant and would not need to feel tortured by the entire situation. The tone changes once Solska is sure that she is pregnant. She prepares for childbirth as she would for a holiday: she speaks of it as of a sacred moment, and believes that events are guided by the hand of fate. It is obvious that she expects a sort of a sign as to how her complicated situation should be resolved and is putting off any decision till then. She asks Żuławski for patience and understanding. The birth of her daughter in June 1905 seems to reaffirm Solska's plans to share her life with Żuławski.

Now we are approaching a fairly ambiguous matter: we do not know whether Solska told Żuławski he was the father of her child knowing that this was not true, or whether she was herself deceived in this matter. We will probably never know her motives. All we have are her letters, in which she constructed her lover as "the father" and the two of them as "parents" – in a situation when the alleged father could rarely see the baby, and could have doubts about his fatherhood. In view of the above, Solska's tone is surprisingly relaxed, inserting details regarding childcare into letters that are sometimes passionate, sometimes very rational. Also surprising is the directness with which she involves Żuławski in the everyday life of mother and baby with its little joys and sorrows. Regardless, the letters do not even presume that the birth of the child could become a problem for the continuation of the relationship. Childcare is considered here as a part of sexuality, and the letters about the baby seem to be a continuation of the previous ones in which sexual desire was expressed quite overtly. For Solska, despite her difficult situation, motherhood seems to be a source of energy much like sexual desire, as she explicitly stated in some of her letters.

To exclude these letters from the publicly available sources seems to be simply unjust in the case of a woman who seems to interest the public almost exclusively because of the nature of her sexuality – a presumably demonic one. Was this "matter-of-fact" style just a game to persuade the addressee that he was "the real father?" That is unlikely, if we take into consideration that such a mode of writing was typical for Solska and not only when she wrote to Żuławski. Instead, this relaxed manner of treating childcare as an integral part of the life, and even as an integral part of the creative life, reflects Solska's ideas about partnership – and parenthood.

In her marriage to Ludwik Solski (1855–1954), who was twenty years her elder, equal partnership was out of the question from the start. This does not mean that Solska always gave in to her oppressive husband, who first tried

to persuade her to leave the stage, then – as attested by many contemporaries – treated her more than paternalistically, for example arranging scandals at rehearsals. Irena, of course, had her own means of defense. That being said, this kind of relationship always presumes an intrinsic battle between the partners.

With Żuławski, Solska builds a relationship of equals. The two of them would inspire each other artistically. In matters of everyday life, she treats him as a partner who needs to share in the troubles and joys of childcare. Finally, she does not separate the spheres of art and life. Reading her letters, one has an impression that she instinctively inserts some lines about the baby simply to convey the joy of life which is somehow considered by her to be a source of creativity.

This model, of course, was very far from reality. Some of the letters reveal her bitterness about Żuławski's attitude: when he suddenly leaves for Italy, Solska cannot understand how he could do so without seeing her and the child. Generally, she insists that once Żuławski spends more time with the baby he will no longer doubt that a happy future awaits them. It is, however, unknown what model of living together she proposed. Whatever the case, Solska knew that she somehow had to prepare Żuławski for his role as father through her letters: and what is important is the way she does it. Her letters do not dwell upon this issue – except for the “crisis letters” mentioned above, they mostly treat the matter in a casual way.

It seems that Solska relegated the dark side of her troubled motherhood to her stage creations. In the year after the birth of her daughter (1906) she first played two roles that would remain in her repertoire for almost twenty years: Mrs. Erlynne in *Lady Windermere's Fan* by Oscar Wilde and Hedda in *Hedda Gabler* by Ibsen. I would like to draw attention, however, to another text which can easily be overlooked in this context. It is a largely unknown play. The title is *One Day in October*, written by German playwright Georg Kaiser, who played an important role in German expressionism. However, the play already belongs to his post-expressionist period (it was written in 1927), and is currently not widely known. As far as I am aware, it was never staged in Poland after Solska, who directed its Polish premiere in 1932 in the theater which she organized that year and which was named after Stefan Żeromski. The theater lasted till 1933. *One Day in October* was the only production in her own theater which Solska signed as the director. I think this choice is very symptomatic. Knowing the background, one could imagine that for Solska the text could become a sudden revelation of how her hopes for “waking up” a father in a man who was not the biological father of her child could be articulated.

In short, the heroine of the play is a girl from a well-established and morally restrictive French family who becomes pregnant, gives birth to a child,



and whose guardian conducts an investigation to find out who is the father. Giving birth to the baby, the heroine uttered the father's name, so the guardian found him and made him appear in the house. It is a noble young officer from an equally well-established family; there is no doubt about his honesty. However, he denies he ever was in the town or met the girl.

After some investigating, it turns out that he did visit the town the previous year in October, when he was forced to wait there for his train connection. Having seen him accidentally, the girl was enchanted by his appearance and followed him in his wanderings around the town. When, by chance, they touched each other's hands while looking at rings in the window of the jewelry shop, she considered it as their engagement; when they kneeled side-by-side in the temple while the priest was giving a blessing, she considered it a wedding ceremony; and finally when they sat side by side in the opera theater, she considered other spectators to be the guests at their wedding feast. It turns out, however, quite quickly, that the biological father of the child was not this supposed secret husband, but a butcher boy who that very night went to visit his lover – a servant in the same house – but was drawn in the dark by the mademoiselle into her room. Having discovered this fact, the girl's guardian is ready to leave the young officer in peace, but now the most astonishing part of the drama begins. We become the witnesses of effective education into fatherhood, because the heroine succeeds in persuading her beloved that it is him and only him who can be considered the child's father in this case. Moreover, that he also can become the father and therefore the fact that the biological father was someone else is actually meaningless, for parenthood is but a social construct. The young man undertakes the role willingly. Commentators have underlined the affinity of the play with similar plots in Heinrich Kleist whom Georg Kaiser admired. However, Kaiser's piece is quite different: besides the heroine's romanticism, which is obvious, it is namely the constructedness of fatherhood – and generally, parenthood – that is put into the center of attention.

It seems that while staging the piece Solska cut down the text considerably so the production could be played without an intermission. This surely helped to avoid the psychologization of the characters and made the performance closer to an intellectual dispute. Solska herself wrote in her autobiography: "I put the action into the public: the spectators sat among those who played. This way the performance became even more intimate, the concentration and silence accompanied every scene."<sup>16</sup> Critics, however, described the

16 "Akcję wbudowałam w widownię: widzowie siedzieli wśród grających. Intymność widowiska zyskała na tym, skupienie i cisza towarzyszyły każdej scenie." Irena Solska, *Pamiętnik* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Artystyczne i Filmowe, 1978), 171.

production more as a sparkling detective story than in the abovementioned terms. What helps to read it differently are once again the unedited letters.

My other findings in Żuławski's archive concern Kazimiera Hanicka who later became Żuławski's wife and mother of their three sons. However, here once again we deal with considerable omissions in the publications of the epistolary documents, which produce the effect that "everything has been already published" and seem to prevent scholars from further investigations. In this case, it is generally admitted, that all available letters were published in the memoirs by Juliusz Żuławski. In this edition, however, the image of Kazimiera was highly "domesticated" by her son. In fact, it is already Jerzy Żuławski himself, who, in the letter exchange with his future wife, constructed Kazimiera as "an ideal woman," opposite to "demonic" Solska – but as the archival materials show, actually failed in this. What was "censored" by Juliusz Żuławski – in the letters of both his mother and his father – tells a completely different story: about the woman who wants to rule her own sexuality and professional career. To sum up, after reading the relevant correspondences in full I understood that interpretations of the Solska–Żuławski–Kazimiera Hanicka triangle in the terms of the "demonic Solska" and Kazimiera as an "angel in the house" could serve as very convenient explanatory narratives, but in fact were very far from reality. In both cases these explanatory narratives considerably distorted the life stories of the professional women of the early twentieth century, thus the publication of the full versions of their epistolary legacy become the urgent question in spite of all moral controversies.

## Abstract

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**Natalija Jakubova**

INDEPENDENT SCHOLAR

*Constructions of Parenthood in the Autobiographical Writings of Irena Solska (1875–1958)*

In my paper I discuss what such an archival discovery as unedited letters in which a woman tries to persuade her lover about his fatherhood can add to the already known narrative about her life. Irena Solska is usually described as a “demonic woman,” thus this particular discovery seems only to add one more (monstrous) facet to this image. Paradoxically, the omission of the relevant letters both in the first edition of 1984 as well as in the recent edition which claimed to fill that gap, has worked much more for the strengthening of the stereotype mentioned above than the full edition of this correspondence would ever do. In my discussion of how Solska fashioned her sexuality in her letters during her pregnancy and the first months of motherhood I pay attention to the questions which were erased from the existing publications, primarily to the interconnections between sexuality and creativity. An unexpected context of this discussion is provided by Georg Kaiser’s *A Day in October* – a play which Solska directed few decades later in the Stefan Żeromski Theatre.

## Keywords

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epistolary writing, Irena Solska, motherhood, parenthood, social constructedness

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Anna Frączek-Czapla

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## Letters of Galician Rural Women to the Editors of the *Piast* During the First World War

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DOI: 10.18318/td.2020.en.1.14 | ORCID: 0000-0002-7770-4140

In the nineteenth century writing letters became more popular and more democratic than ever before. In ancient times correspondence was a rhetorical literary genre, while at the beginning of the twentieth century it had only use value. Sophisticated letters written by poets have become a rarity when most people, regardless of social class, started writing to communicate with their relatives over long distances because of their labor migrations. Thanks to this correspondence contemporary scholars have a source of knowledge about historical, social, and cultural phenomena, which also concern the authors of letters. The economic migration of peasants from Galicia to Western Europe, United States of America, Canada, and Brazil in the nineteenth century made postal communication within their social class more popular. The collections of peasants' letters are the most important source for research on economic migration of Polish people in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>1</sup> Letters written by peasants

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### Anna Frączek-Czapla

– graduated from the University of Warsaw with MA degree in history and BA in Ukrainian studies. She was a trainee at the University of Ivano-Frankivsk and is interested in issues of social history, especially the history of women and the culture of everyday life in Poland and Ukraine in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. She works in Royal Łazienki as an archivist.

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1 Witold Kula, Nina Assorodobraj-Kula, Marcin Kula, eds., *Listy emigrantów z Brazylii i Stanów Zjednoczonych 1890–1891* (Warszawa: Muzeum Historii Polskiego Ruchu Ludowego, Instytut Studiów Iberyjskich i Iberoamerykańskich UW, 2012).

to the editorial offices of newspapers and magazines in this time, when gathered and collected, make up a rare and invaluable *opus magnum*, and were therefore studied by many Polish and Russian historians and Slavic philologists.<sup>2</sup> Despite some defects of the sources, scholars included peasants' private correspondence and letters to editors in the group of reliable historical sources because, akin to memoirs and journalism, they describe the world from the perspective of a particular social class without clichés common in the broader society.<sup>3</sup> The main purpose of the authors of letters was documenting particular facts concerning family, farm, sometimes neighbors and friends, and municipalities to a lesser extent. What characterizes the letters is their repeatable structure and content,<sup>4</sup> but these repetitive and schematic (paternalistic) written thoughts can nevertheless provide scholars with knowledge about the effectiveness of state propaganda that shaped the patriotic attitude, peasants' activities, and also a range of social changes in the countryside.<sup>5</sup>

Contemporary Polish scholars of practical communication theory have different approaches to the generic classification of these letters. Tatiana Szczygłowska places the letters between non-private (because the sender and the addressee did not know each other) and official correspondence (because authors adopt conventional structures, language, and topics in order to be published).<sup>6</sup> Maria Wojtak claims that letters to editors are characterized by many paradoxes and places them between private and open utterances. This form of correspondence exhibits the features of writing and speech at the same time. Therefore, it can concurrently exhibit conventional patterns and contain original statements or convey a professional message while relying on expressive speech. The nature of communication – dissemination of statements, relations between participants of interaction, and basic goals of

2 e.g., Maria Klawe-Mazurowa, Marcin Kula, Jan Molenda, Danuta Piątkowska, Adam Walaszek, Maria Krisań, Florian Znaniecki, Thomas Williams.

3 Maria Klawe-Mazurowa et al., "Metoda Znanieckiego oczami historyków," *Przegląd Polonijny* 4 (1983): 40–41.

4 Roch Sulima, *Dokument i literatura* (Warszawa: Krajowa Agencja Wydawnicza, 1980), 80.

5 Florian Znaniecki and William Thomas, *Chłop polski w Europie i Ameryce*, vol. 1: *Organizacja grupy pierwotnej* (Warszawa: Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza, 1976), 138; Jan Molenda, *Chłopi, naród, niepodległość: kształtowanie się postaw narodowych i obywatelskich chłopów w Galicji i Królestwie Polskim w przededniu narodzenia Polski* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo "Neriton," 1999), 9–10.

6 Tatiana Szczygłowska, "List do redakcji jako pograniczny gatunek dziennikarski," in *Media i społeczeństwo*, ed. Jarosław Janicki (Bielsko-Biała: Akademia Techniczno-Humanistyczna, 2011), 87.

expression – are all a source of paradoxes.<sup>7</sup> Primary features of letters to editors, as in the case of other texts of ordinary usage, are: structurally – schemata; pragmatically – persuasion; and stylistically – diversity.

The weekly magazine *Piast*, published by the governing body of the political people's party PSL in West Galicia, had a regional reach but was printed in as many as eighty-one thousand copies per issue in 1917. The *Piast* was very popular among peasants, especially during the First World War, because it published information on fallen Polish soldiers and on the current political situation. Furthermore, the editorial board of the *Piast* opened its office to the public, offering assistance to those in need.

Rural women were present in the press both directly and indirectly: they either wrote articles themselves or the magazine published texts about them. The *Piast* not only employed professional writers (e.g., Maria Konopnicka) and journalists (e.g., Zofia Wygodzina) but also amateur authors who wrote reports on the activities in the countryside. Moreover, a lot of female readers of the magazine wrote letters to the editors, which were published weekly and sometimes commented on by the editorial board or by other readers. Since 7 March 1915 the *Piast* introduced a section titled *Z powiatów i gmin* ("News from the counties") and on 13 June 1915 invited women to write letters to the weekly, exhorting them: "Peasant Sisters! If you want to enquire about your husbands and sons on the battlefield or into the war situation and the most important matters, you need to read the *Piast*. If you need help or advice, write to the editorial board and you will get it."<sup>8</sup> Accordingly, on 1 August 1915 replies to women's letters first appeared in *Editorial Responses*. Two issues later, the section *Especially for Women* was introduced and then from 5 September 1915 to 12 September 1917 women's letters could regularly be read in a separate section called *The Letters from Female Readers*. The archival material comprises almost three thousand letters from 1915 to 1917 written by male and female readers and published by the weekly. Among them five hundred were written by rural women. Roughly the same number of letters can be found in the short form of registers in the *Editorial Response*. This means that about seventeen percent of all reprinted letters were signed by women. Admittedly, from the point of view of modern parities this is not a high score, but before the First World War, the voice of rural women had not been so widely represented in the press.

7 Maria Wojtak, "Stylistyka listów do redakcji na przykładzie poczty redakcyjnej miesięcznika »błogosławie«,«" in *Synchroniczne i diachroniczne aspekty badań polszczyzny*, ed. Mirosława Białoskórska and Leokadia Mariak, vol. 8 of *Materiały X Kolokwium Językoznawczego. Pobierowo, 18–20 września 2000 r.* (Szczecin: Wydawnictwo Naukowe US, 2002), 198–204.

8 Editorial announcement in *Piast*, June 13, 1915, 12.

Almost all rural women in Western Galicia were illiterate at this time. At the beginning of the twentieth century certain groups of women decided to learn how to read and write either on their own or in rural school, offering one year of basic learning, which was enough to be considered educated in rural settings and allowed one to subscribe to the weekly *Piast*. During the First World War, Galician women “inherited” the subscription after their husbands, fathers, and relatives who were sent to the battlefield, or decided to buy the weekly on their own, seeking information about the soldiers in the trenches. Thus, female authors of letters, encouraged in this by the editors, became involved (aware or not) with the PSL political movement. Rural women supported *Piast* and wanted to change and modernize the Galician countryside, hoping to achieve this goal through access to education for themselves and their children.

As previously mentioned, letters to the editors can be categorized by their structure, style, and persuasive devices and should be positioned somewhere in-between speech and writing. Peasant letters from the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century document a period when previously illiterate Polish peasants took the first steps towards education. At that time in the Polish countryside peasant tales were replaced by written narratives. According to the educational program at first peasants learned to read, then write and count, but formulating thoughts in written form was something each of them had to learn on their own. The ability of writing letters was grasped intuitively – peasants could acquire this skill by reading local magazines or by studying specific letter-writing handbooks. This learning process explains the schematic structure of peasant letters. The initial and the final segments included *pokłony* [salutations] – phrases from peasant customs, characteristic for oral communication; for example “praise his name forever and ever”<sup>9</sup> – and also greetings, such as, “Dear Editors,” “Dear Readers,” “Dear Members of the Public.” In the main body of text writers used clichés to make sure they were understood and accepted. At first women’s letters constituted only a small part of the magazine (sometimes only one letter per issue). Later they took up as much as five pages (as many as twenty-three letters in one issue). These letters varied in volume – from short, few-sentence-long ones, which presented one or two problems, to long articles (sometimes broken up and published in two issues). Most of them had stencil form. Moreover, from the perspective of a scholar, the author’s signature provides highly valuable insight as almost all of the letters include the name, surname, and place of residence of their author (which was a publishing requirement set by the editorial board).

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9 Thomas and Znaniecki, *Chłop polski*, 238.

Writing by Galician inhabitants of the countryside to specific peasant presses and answering them by editors of magazines was common before the First World War. The popular weekly *Zaranie* was printed in eight thousand copies before 1914 and its subscribers sent in one hundred fifty letters per week. As was mentioned earlier, the circulation of *Piast* reached eighty-one thousand copies and, as Wincenty Witos wrote in his memoirs, the editorial board received near seven hundred letters per week in 1917.<sup>10</sup> Therefore the editors of weeklies had at their disposal a vast trove of letters to choose from. Unfortunately, the original writings did not survive and scholars have at their disposal only those letters which were published in *Piast*, therefore gaining insight into the intricacies of the selection process is impossible. On the other hand, modern-day scholars can read letters written by people from rural areas who were knowingly (or by chance) involved in political issues and therefore the topics of their letters reveal the policy of the Galician people's party, the PSL "Piast." Published articles were not only a form of dialog between the people and politicians, but also a kind of report to people's representatives on the political activities and identity in the Galician countryside. Certainly, the letters required editorial interventions due to the many mistakes made by peasant writers. According to one editor, Józef Rączkowski, peasant letters were often too long and were written in an inappropriate stylistic form characteristic of spoken language, thus the *Piast* always edited these texts for publication.<sup>11</sup> Because of the wartime censorship the editors of *Piast* felt the need to curate the published content themselves. They showed the consequences of the Russian occupation from the Austrian side. The editorial board of the *Piast* also encouraged subscribers to send in optimistic letters in spite of the bad conditions in the Galician countryside and recommended writing articles about rebuilding farms from ruins, actions of environmental or political activists, and positive changes in the villages.<sup>12</sup> Despite the obvious shortcomings of these source, scholars accept the credibility of peasant letters because all of them bear their authors' signatures.<sup>13</sup> There was a likely chance that readers from villages will examine the fidelity of the printed text and, therefore, the editorial board could not change the message of the letters beyond recognition.

10 Wincenty Witos, *Moje wspomnienia* (Warszawa: Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza, 1988), 348; Molenda, *Chłopi, naród, niepodległość*, 19–20.

11 Witos, *Moje wspomnienia*, 348.

12 e.g., "Od Redakcji," *Piast*, July 14, 1918, 11.

13 In the "Editorial Responses" – "Unsigned letters included unwise comments or stupid jokes *Piast* did not publish. Letter signed by "Girls from Brzeźnica" certainly was not written by girls." "Odpowiedzi Redakcji," *Piast*, November 28, 1915, 19.



Reminiscent of spoken communication, the women's letters to the editors of *Piast* were characterized by stylistic diversity,<sup>14</sup> as their authors intuitively implemented varying rhetorical strategies to persuade listeners. For example, overcoming girlish shyness an author from Ropa, signed L., frankly wrote: "I write little for now, but if I find more confidence, I will write again."<sup>15</sup> In turn, Julia Wojnarska from Stróżówka explained her motivation to write a letter to the editors this way: "We can read in the *Piast* about rundown villages destroyed by war, but nobody even mentioned the countryside where I live, as though nothing happened."<sup>16</sup> The most common forms of these letters were: acknowledgments, citizen's reports (called deletions), complaints, requests to the deputies for some kind of intervention, and appeals. Female subscribers wrote acknowledgments to the editors of *Piast* in order to express gratitude for the opportunity to comment on the magazine's pages as men could, and for being allowed to co-author the magazine with similar editorial rights. Women were thankful for all practical and instructive articles – mainly about housekeeping, hygiene, and raising children. Readers also thanked the *Piast* for existing at all because, according to them, the magazine became the only source of reliable information (and leisure) available in villages.

Citizens' reports (in other words, deletions) had the longest and the most differentiated forms. Women wrote about the Russian army, which was stationed in West Galicia for the period of eight to twelve months and devastated almost all the villages in the region. They mentioned the objects whose loss was most painful or surprising for them – for example, the confiscation of cows, pigs, hens, agricultural crops, construction boards, and straw was frequently mentioned in this context alongside looting of house elements, such as, doors, windows, and even roofs. Almost everything was an object of theft, and as Teresa Kruczkiewicz wrote: "everyone was afraid even to undress because of looting. We clothed ourselves in the autumn of 1914 and did not undress until May 1915. Nothing was left. On the altar of the homeland, we put everything that we had. A single bench remained of the whole farm. Field mice have destroyed all our crops. Nowadays we know neither where to live nor what to eat."<sup>17</sup> "They were looking for money in ashes, stoves, kilns, one woman even found some in a hole with fertilizer" – wrote one reader.<sup>18</sup>

14 Szczygłowska, "List do Redakcji," 79.

15 L. from Ropa, "Listy od Czytelniczek," *Piast*, March 12, 1916, 17.

16 Julia Wojnarska from Stróżówka, "Listy od Czytelniczek," *Piast*, March 12, 1916, 17.

17 Teresa Kruczkiewicz, from Zarszyn, "Wołanie o ratunek," *Piast*, September 19, 1915, 17.

18 Józefa z Glinka Polskiego in Jasielskie, "Listy od Czytelniczek," *Piast*, July 9, 1916, 23–24.

They experienced fear caused by endless gunfire, unexpected attacks on their farms, regular pillaging, drinking, and raping by soldiers, and forced migrations to families in neighboring villages. For example, Julia Wojnarska from Stróżówka counted forty-eight explosion grenades and shrapnel that detonated near her house during two months of battle. She spent the entire time with her family in the basement waiting for the fighting to stop.<sup>19</sup>

Women oftentimes mention in their letters the poverty and the scarcity of provisions, problems with food rationing, and high prices of clothes, shoes, and fuel. "We received half a kilogram of sugar per person (although food cards equated to three-quarters of a kilogram) and it had to be enough for two months! [...] At the end of August we got three kilograms of flour per person. They told us they would come in two weeks but they arrived with the flour nine weeks later,"<sup>20</sup> one of *Piast's* readers wrote. People were starving. Rozalia Jarosz pleaded: "four hundred grams of bread might be enough for people who sit at work, but for us, who have to work twice as much now as we did before, because of lack of people; for our children, who also have to work beyond their strength, such a small piece of bread is not enough."<sup>21</sup> Women also referred to the lack of hands to work the fields, caused by the absence of men because of war. They mentioned that they worked beyond their strengths, but they were still unable to do all necessary chores on the farm, as those previously performed by men became their responsibility. For example, F.J. from Twierdza wrote: "So any woman who has even a six-hectare farm cannot cultivate it alone (her son and husband are in the army), she is unable to do anything, even if she wanted to,"<sup>22</sup> women "have to perform their own work, that of their husbands, and even that done before by horses,"<sup>23</sup> which had to be handed over to the army.

Another topic they frequently wrote about concerned women's social activities in associations whose work focused on organizing charity events during which they raised money and collected goods for orphans and wounded soldiers. One of the women's leagues joined with the parish to set up a Catholic shop, where high prices could not be imposed.<sup>24</sup> Additionally,

19 Wojnarska, "Listy od Czytelniczek," 17.

20 Reader of *Piast* from Rzędzin in Tarnowskie, "Listy od Czytelniczek," *Piast*, December 10, 1916, 14.

21 Rozalia Jarosz from Polanka Wielka, "Listy od Czytelniczek," *Piast*, September 5, 1915, 19.

22 F.J. from Twierdza, "Listy od Czytelniczek," *Piast*, February 27, 1916, 14.

23 Julia Bohm from Pława ad Mielec, "Listy od Czytelniczek," *Piast*, September 19, 1915, 17–18.

24 e.g., Bieńkowska from Kaszów, "Listy od Czytelniczek," *Piast*, September 19, 1915, 18; "Z powiatów i gmin," *Piast*, October 17, 1915, 13.

women complained about the abuse of power by town mayors and Jews. Women blamed them for high prices and the lack of goods in the villages. They could not stand that mayors dishonestly appropriated requisitions and profited from them,<sup>25</sup> therefore they asked: "who is in the wrong – us, who try to get money for rebuilding farms and feeding the family, or our mayor, Karol Kwiecień, who withholds loans from peasants?"<sup>26</sup> Teresa K. added and forewarned: "mayors need to remember they will be assessed after the war by people who will come back. Certainly their behavior would be different if they considered, at least for a moment, the upcoming elections."<sup>27</sup>

In the opinion of rural women Jews made money on alcohol sales and the high prices of necessity goods, despite the fact that the law explicitly forbade it.<sup>28</sup> "The conclusion is that as result of the war we are getting poorer and the Jews get richer. We need to stop this practice," a reader from Biskupice wrote.<sup>29</sup> Thanks to the letters we can see the antagonism between the town and the country, which was expressed through the descriptions of arguments occurring in the marketplace about product prices and about making money during the war (who was gaining and who was losing).<sup>30</sup> Let us, once again, hear the women speak: "an egg cost 9 Hellers before the war, the same as now, but a piece of cloth for a child's dress costs 4 Kronen nowadays and before the war it went for 48 Hellers; cloth for a shirt is 1 Krone 60 Hellers now but it was 24 Hellers before, shoes 40 Kronen, and firewood 80 Kronen. Where to get so much money? I have two children and I receive an allowance in the amount of 1 Krone 16 Hellers."<sup>31</sup> The poor women from Górna Wieś in Myślenickie admitted that they "were not able to bear the excessive greed of the Jews anymore and rushed to their shops to steal the cloth they needed."<sup>32</sup> Stefania Ekiert from Haczów summed it up this way: "the result is that the farmer has to sell his crops at prices set by the government and cannot afford shoes and

25 e.g., Marya Drozd from Łęki Dolne in Pilznieńskie, "Nasze bolączki," *Piast*, May 14, 1916, 19.

26 Women from Pałuszyce in Dąbrowskie, "Z powiatów i gmin," *Piast*, January 7, 1917, 10.

27 Teresa K. from Swoczowic in Podgórskie, "Listy od Czytelniczek," *Piast*, December 10, 1916, 13.

28 e.g., Petronela Wicher from Facimiech, "Listy od Czytelniczek," *Piast*, December 26, 1915, 18.

29 Readers from Biskupice in Wielickie, "Z powiatów i gmin," *Piast*, November 12, 1916, 13.

30 e.g., Katarzyna Horabik from Dolna Wieś, "Listy od Czytelniczek," *Piast*, February 20, 1916, 17.

31 A.Ł. from Głogoczów in Myślenickie, "Listy od Czytelniczek," *Piast*, July 9, 1916, 23.

32 The Poor Women from Górna Wieś in Myślenickie, "Z powiatów i gmin," *Piast*, December 1, 1918, 12.

clothes because sellers set prices themselves. Why does the government not help farmers who are really in needed and are starving?"<sup>33</sup> The most popular addressees of the complaints were the leaders of the PSL "Piast," namely, Wincenty Witos and Władysław Długosz, who were perceived as deputies with great influence. MPs were asked to rationalize the relief effort by imposing maximum prices on agricultural products and by raising financial support rates for women,<sup>34</sup> as the implementation of these postulates was supposed to remedy the problems of devastated villages, according to the authors.

Generally, the letters call for advancing education, building libraries, schools, and community centers.<sup>35</sup> Women advocated reading books and the *Piast* magazine regularly as a means of furthering personal development.<sup>36</sup> "We rural women, despite best efforts, will achieve nothing alone. After all, there are women's organizations! If rural women have not been attracted to the associations of Polish women before, let the war become an impulse to unite in mutual learning, advice, and help."<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, some authors pointed out the need for raising children in a modern way, that is, with proper concern for books and formal education,<sup>38</sup> while others called for thriftiness and modesty in this difficult period.<sup>39</sup>

What new information do the letters of rural women to the editors of the *Piast* bring into the research of *herstory*? First of all, I think the letters open up the space for research on this collective source. During the four years of the ongoing war there were about one thousand pieces of women's writing published in the weekly. Unfortunately, the *Piast's* archive has not survived, so we cannot confront original letters with the print version but there are indications that the published letters have credibly preserved the original message. Furthermore, as I said, all the letters were signed by their respective author's, providing an opportunity to identify female activists in West Galicia who have been anonymous so far. These women from the countryside, who wrote to the

33 Stefania Ekiert from Haczów, "Listy od Czytelników," *Piast*, February 20, 1916, 15.

34 e.g., Zofia Rybczyk from Sękowa in Gorlickie, "Listy od Czytelniczek," *Piast*, March 26, 1916, 16–17.

35 e.g., Anna Staniszevska from Świerka in Nowosądeckie, "Listy od Czytelniczek," *Piast*, April 23, 1916, 17–18.

36 e.g., Wiktoria Głodowska from Sudziwoja in Rzeszowskie, "Z powiatów i gmin," *Piast*, January 21, 1917, 15.

37 Górkalka, "Niewiasty, łączmy się!," *Piast*, August 29, 1915, 16–17.

38 e.g., Górkalka, "O wychowaniu," *Piast*, September 19, 1915, 15–16.

39 e.g., W. Zaucha, "Siostry włościanki!," *Piast*, August 15, 1915, 16.

editorial office of the *Piast*, belonged to the rural intelligentsia. They were better educated and manifested the desire to improve the fate of rural society as a whole, to promote education among both male and female peasants, to build schools for children and youth, to change the methods of raising children, to introduce technical innovations in housekeeping, to improve the quality of hygiene in homes, and so on. Therefore, through these letters we learn about the political importance of women. It turned out that rural women were not only capable of replacing men on the farm, but were also up to the task of representing household and community interests in public. This is evidenced by the aforementioned requests addressed to the people's deputies, concerning the imposition of maximum prices for agricultural products, the reduction of prices for urban manufacturing, and the rise of allowance rates for single women, widows, and orphans. These were rational and courageous postulates.

## Abstract

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**Anna Frączek-Czapla**

*Letters of Galician Rural Women to the Editors of the Piast During the First World War*

In spite of the fact that almost all rural women in West Galicia were illiterate at the beginning of the twentieth century, there was evidence in the weekly magazine *Piast* of increased writing of women. Female peasants wrote letters to the editorial board of the weekly, which was published by the Polish political party PSL "Piast", in order to contact the deputies who supported the case of the rural poor after the First World War. We can find almost one thousand letters from the period of 1915 to 1917 written by female rural activists who managed to write to the magazine about problems of rundown Galician villages on equal basis as men. The letters had stencil form and stylistic diversity but their contents were similar. Authors wrote about their fear of gunfire, hunger and scarcity of provisions, depopulation and lack of people able to work. They also complained about neglect of duties by mayors and officials. On the other hand, women involved in political undertakings of Galician PSL "Piast", sent appeals to readers to actively participate in the reconstruction of villages after the war and to prepare themselves and the young, through education and betterment, to life in the modern country.

## Keywords

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peasant letters, "Piast" weekly, rural women, West Galicia, First World War

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Karolina Krasuska

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## Mina Loy and the Function of the Autobiographical: Revisiting the Long Poem "Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose"

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DOI: 10.18318/td.2020.en.1.15 / ORCID: 0000-0003-1693-3377

Within past thirty years Mina Loy (1882–1966) has entered the Anglo-American modernist canon. I learned about Loy in an anecdote in an undergraduate class on modernist poetry in Warsaw in 2001. A painter, a poet; with a CV that could easily be the material for a film: born in England, to an English mother and Hungarian Jewish immigrant father, educated partly in Germany, then living all over Europe, with stays in the US, and finally settling there; with complicated and sometimes dramatic romantic and family entanglements; with networking skills that link her Italian Futurism, New York Dada, and US expatriate artistic circles in Europe. When I wanted to learn more about this "feminist" and Gertrude Stein's friend, as I heard during the class, it turned out, to my chagrin, that Roger Conover's then still relatively fresh 1996 *The Lost Lunar Baedeker*, a selection of Loy's poem, was not a part of English Institute of the University of Warsaw holdings.<sup>1</sup> In fact the library had nothing by her or on her. But this was not very difficult then: talking about booklength publications, in 2001 all it could have had was the said volume by Conover, his earlier 1982 edition of her poems, *The Last Lunar Baedeker*.

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**Karolina Krasuska** is Associate Professor at the American Studies Center at the University of Warsaw. She is the author of *Pleć i naród: Translokacje* (Gender and nation: Translocations) (2012) and a co-editor of *Women and the Holocaust: New Perspectives and Challenges* (2015), with Andrea Pető and Louise Hecht. Her interest include gender and queer theory, memory studies, Jewish cultural studies. Currently, she is working on a project on post-Soviet Jewish American writing.

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1 Mina Loy, *The Lost Lunar Baedeker: Poems of Mina Loy*, ed. Roger L. Conover (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1996).

*deker*, Loy's novel *Insel* (1991) edited by Elisabeth Arnold, next to the first 1980 monograph on Loy by Victoria Kouidis and Carolyn Burke's 1996 biography.<sup>2</sup> Also, it could have featured Maeera Shreiber and Keith Tuma's 1998 edited volume on Loy's literary texts, which was already heralding an intensified interest in Loy as a modernist poet.<sup>3</sup> In what seemed my hopeless query into what was then available online came in handy: a few scholarly articles, notably Marjorie Perloff's piece on "Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose," and the Modern American Poetry website – at the time a repository of early criticism on Loy and her poems.<sup>4</sup> "Parturition," Loy's early poem on childbirth, which at the time was for me (anachronistically) reminiscent of second wave radical feminism, was a most mesmerizing experience that clearly influenced the choice of my MA thesis which performed feminist readings of Loy's early texts written in Florence.

The biographical mode was characteristic of (feminist) criticism on Loy from the very start and especially in its earlier stage, coinciding with the early mode of American feminist literary criticism. The entangled, geographically mobile biography seemed to reign over Loy's texts, if not even distract from their complex textuality: it showed an artist variously involved with multiple avant-gardes whose place needed to be regained. It seems that Loy's unpublished autobiography appeared in this earlier criticism but their thorough examination as a autobiography needed to wait their turn after the official status of this modernist artist gained broader recognition through the ascent of feminist criticism. As Nancy K. Miller formulates: "The challenge that faces autobiographers is to invent themselves despite the weight of their family history, and autobiographical singularity emerges in negotiation with this legacy."<sup>5</sup> It seemed that in the 1990s Loy's criticism was not ready to view her "singularity" in these relational terms, negotiated in the

2 Mina Loy, *The Last Lunar Baedeker*, ed. Roger L. Conover (Highlands [N.C.], East Haven, Conn.: Jargon Society, 1982); Mina Loy, *Insel*, ed. Elisabeth Arnold (Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 1991); Victoria Kouidis, *Mina Loy: American Modernist Poet* (Louisiana State University Press: Baton Rouge, 1980); Carolyn Burke, *Becoming Modern: The Life of Mina Loy* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1996).

3 Maeera Shreiber and Keith Tuma, ed., *Mina Loy: Woman and Poet* (Orono: National Poetry Foundation, 1998).

4 Cf. <https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/text/modern-american-poetry-site>, accessed July 27, 2018; Marjorie Perloff, "English as a »Second« Language: Mina Loy's »Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose,«" *Jacket* 5 (1998), accessed July 27, 2018, <http://jacketmagazine.com/05/mina-anglo.html>, also published in: Marjorie Perloff, *Poetry On and Off the Page: Essays for Emergent Occasions* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1998), 193–207.

5 Nancy K. Miller, "The Entangled Self: Genre Bondage in the Age of the Memoir," *PMLA* 122, no. 2 (2007): 543.

private realm of the family, however broadly conceived, which was central to Loy's self-fashioning, but rather focus on her uniqueness within the public – artistic and especially social – domain.<sup>6</sup>

From this perspective, it was not surprising that during my 2003 library research trip to Berlin the most important newer scholarly work on Loy was about making her texts matter not only aesthetically within Anglo-American modernisms, but precisely socially. Also, Loy was foremost a poet. Rachel Blau DuPlessis's study, among others, focused on Loy's texts and signaled "social philology" as a mode of reading. In DuPlessis's words:

The attentiveness that poetry excites is a productive way to engage ideologies and contradictions in texts, while honoring the depth and complexity of poetry as intensive genre. So by a social philology, I mean an application of the techniques of close reading to reveal social discourses, subjectivities negotiated, and ideological debates in a poetic text.<sup>7</sup>

The clear intensity of Loy's poetic texts, her "critical cosmopolitanism" putting multiple variously located ideologies in play seems especially well-suited for this approach.<sup>8</sup> Such differently approached and executed contextual and ideological readings of her published and unpublished poetic texts followed, only strengthening this tendency in criticism. Cristanne Miller's 2005 *Cultures of Modernism* and Alex Goody's 2007 *Modernist Articulations* were emblematic of a broader trend. With these studies, the pace of scholarship picked up to lead us where we are today: single author monographs on Loy appearing every year, alongside editions of her previously unpublished work, her collection at the Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library fully digitized, and a major digital humanities project under way.<sup>9</sup> After initial research into Loy as

6 About the necessary relationality of autobiography, see Miller, "The Entangled Self."

7 Rachel Blau DuPlessis, *Genders, Races, and Religious Cultures in Modern American Poetry, 1908–1934* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 12.

8 I am borrowing the phrase "critical cosmopolitanism" from Walter D. Mignolo, "The Many Faces of Cosmo-polis: Border Thinking and Critical Cosmopolitanism," *Public Culture* 12, no. 3 (2000): 721–748, where "critical cosmopolitanism" refers to "a need to reconceive cosmopolitanism from the perspective of coloniality" (723).

9 Linda Kinnahan, *Mina Loy, Twentieth-Century Photography, and Contemporary Women Poets* (New York: Routledge, 2017); Sarah Hayden, *Curious Disciplines: Mina Loy and Avant-Garde Artishood* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2018); Mina Loy, *Stories and Essays of Mina Loy*, ed. Sara Crangle (Champaign: Dalkey Archive Press, 2011); cf., [https://brbl.library.yale.edu/vufind/Search/Results?lookfor=YCAL\\_MSS\\_6&type=CallNumber;http://mina-loy.com](https://brbl.library.yale.edu/vufind/Search/Results?lookfor=YCAL_MSS_6&type=CallNumber;http://mina-loy.com).



a poet, DuPlessis, Miller, and Goody created constellations of Loy and other modernist poets to show her cultural significance, for instance in the context of ethnic/racial and gender/sexuality discourses. Loy, combining formal experimentation and often astute cultural diagnosis, started to function as a poet useful to the cultural turn in literary studies and transnational modernist studies crystallizing since the early 2000s, which was also the dominant approach in my Polish language 2012 monograph.<sup>10</sup> Since then three new trends in Loy's criticism seem significant: the focus on her prose, including her autobiographical texts, exploration of her visual output, and the general mainstreaming of her work.<sup>11</sup> Loy's 2007 inclusion into the seventh edition of *The Norton Anthology of American Literature* may be read as a sign of her ascent into the Anglo-American canon.<sup>12</sup>

This lengthy personal introduction illustrates the parallels between Loy scholarship in general and my intellectual biography, the discovery of and engagement with, her work that began with her early poetry and feminist literary criticism, with what we could call a feminist excavation project, and later shifted toward cultural readings of her work, including the autobiographical. In what follows, I will revisit sections from Loy's long poem to think about the intersection of the autobiographical and poetry. This essay will review the history of publication of this long poem, which shows the paradox of women's (autobiographical) long poem as a genre, and then read initial sections of this poem with an eye on its function in the narrative constitution of the self and as meta-autobiography.

Mina Loy authored several autobiographical longer prose works which – apart from the already mentioned novel *Insel* – all till now remain in manuscript. They include earlier works, connected to Loy's stint in Florence, "Bron-tolivido" and "Esau Penfold," as well as later narratives written at the height of her writerly activity in the 1920s and 1930s, which are largely focused on her genealogical family: "The Child and the Parent," "Goy Israels," and "Islands in the Air." Also, her correspondence remains in manuscript and, in contrast to these longer autobiographical narratives, has not been extensively

10 Karolina Krasuska, *Płeć i naród: trans/lokacje*. Maria Komornicka/Piotr Odmieniec Włast, Else Laske-Schuler, Mina Loy (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IBL PAN, 2012).

11 Because of the scope of this essay I am focusing on this first tendency. The interest in her visual output is visible, e.g., in Jessica Burstein, *Cold Modernism: Literature, Fashion, Art* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2012), and Kinnahan, *Mina Loy*. The most significant mainstreaming of Loy is through the publication of the *Salt Companion to Mina Loy*, eds. Rachel Potter and Suzanne Hobson (Cromer: Salt Publishing, 2011).

12 Cf. Nina Baym et al., eds., *The Norton Anthology of American Literature* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2007).

examined beyond being used as material for Carolyn Burke's biography.<sup>13</sup> In this context, "Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose," a text of over one thousand eight hundred lines long, divided into twenty mostly titled sections of different length, occupies a singular position as a larger autobiographical work written in verse. The poem focuses on the *Bildung* of Ova, but also portrays her parents, future romantic partners, as well as provides a larger social panorama of the late Victorian London. There is content overlap between the poetry in "Anglo-Mongrels" and these prose narratives, especially with "Goy Israels" and "Esau Penfold," which at times may clarify the dense and jagged narrative in the poem.<sup>14</sup>

Critics stress the ambivalent position of poetic autobiographical texts. Early literary criticism on auto/biography – notably Philip Lejeune in his foundational theorizing of the "autobiographical pact" – stressed that, among other characteristics, it is a work written in prose.<sup>15</sup> "Poetic autobiography" has been also used by William Spengemann metaphorically as a designation of a certain stage of development of autobiographical writing characteristic for the twentieth century, its landmark being the "truth subordinated to »poetic self-expression, poetic self-invention.«"<sup>16</sup> Such categorization effectively excludes poetry as such as a medium for autobiography. With the expansion

13 Cf. Sandeep Parmar, *Reading Mina Loy's Autobiographies: Myth of the Modern Woman* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

14 Parmar compares "Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose," Goy Israels, and Goy Israels: A Play of Consciousness. Parmar, *Reading*, 111ff. For the need of biographical clarifications, see: Alex Goody, "Empire, Motherhood and the Poetics of the Self in Mina Loy's »Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose," *Life Writing* 6, no. 1 (2009): 61–76.

15 Cf. Lejeune's classic definition of autobiography: "a retrospective account in prose that a real person makes of his own existence stressing his individual life and especially the history of his personality" (qtd. in James Olney, "Autobiography and the Cultural Moment: A Thematic, Historical, and Bibliographical Introduction," in *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, ed. James Olney (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 18. Olney also comments as follows, suggesting that Lejeune conceives of this definition as dynamic and thus for its expansion as it has been taking place in the past three decades or so: "In his final chapter Lejeune escapes somewhat from the self-imposed rigidities of generic definition when he makes the intelligent point that one should not think of a specific genre as an isolated or isolable thing but should think in terms of an organic system of genres within which transformations and interpenetrations are forever occurring" (ibid.).

16 William Spengemann, *The Forms of Autobiography: Episodes in the History of the Genre* (New Haven: Cornell University Press, 1980), quoted in: Margaretta Jolly, *Encyclopedia of Life Writing: Autobiographical and Biographical Forms*, vol. 1 (New York: Routledge, 2013 [2001]), 76.

of auto/biography studies and broadening of its field into various forms of life writing, poetic texts have been studied as autobiography, as indicated, for instance, by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson's significant inclusion of "poetic autobiography" within their *Fifty-Two Genres of Life Narrative*.<sup>17</sup> Importantly, however, these early statements mentioned above point to the poetic form as rather complicating and denaturalizing our thinking about autobiography for both critics and general readers. Yet, this denaturalization is also precisely what helps to theorize the intersection of the autobiographical and the poetic today. Thinking about autobiographical acts, Jo Gill and Melanie Waters point to the similarities between the type of necessary constructedness and – we could add – performativity, of the lyric "I" and subjectivity in autobiography: "We need to think about autobiography as textual and about subjectivity as an effect, not as a point of origin. [...] How the "I" is constituted, what it stands for, and how it is placed historically, politically, and culturally."<sup>18</sup> The generic markers of lyric poetry and autobiography with their lure of inherent, assumed directness and authenticity thus become in formally different ways the loci of the tacit textual work revealing how subjects are created to be perceived by the readers as existing before their textual creation.

The mode of formation of the autobiographical "I" is what James Olney singles out as characteristic for what he calls poetic autobiography. The also introduces the conceptual distinction between autobiography and autobiographical. Specifically, for Olney, using the example of T.S. Eliot's *Four Quartets* suggests that:

[what makes the poem] "an autobiography" (in contrast to an "autobiographical" poem) is not a matter of content but of form: it is through the formal device of "recapitulation and recall" that Eliot succeeds in realizing his bios as poet and spiritual explorer.<sup>19</sup>

"Not a matter of content but of form" for Olney means that it is not the self-referentiality of the lyric "I" that is the marker of autobiography – this merely indicates for him that the poem may be autobiographical. An autobiography, on the other hand, means a certain relation to time and memory – or for

17 Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 200. Smith and Watson refer here to James Olney to whom I will return later in this essay.

18 Jo Gill and Melanie Waters, "Poetry and Autobiography," *Life Writing* 6, no. 1 (2009): 4.

19 James Olney, "Some Versions of Memory/Some Versions of Bios: The Ontology of Autobiography," in *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, ed. James Olney (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 252.

Olney “recapitulation and recall.” Even though he formulates the boundaries of autobiography quite narrowly, in relation to formal characteristics used to “redeem time,” we can broaden it up to encompass other formal characteristics of a text. Most importantly, apart from formal considerations and more or less useful taxonomic logic, this distinction illuminates different ways of reading, going beyond the straightforward referentiality to the author.<sup>20</sup>

These formal considerations constitutive of autobiography in poetry – that in different ways are underlined by the critics cited above, notably Gill and Waters, and Olney – come to the fore centrally in the context of the long poem that Loy’s “Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose” is an example of. Namely, in a long poem, being “on the edge of genre,” as Smaro Kambourelli theorizes it,<sup>21</sup> we encounter an interplay of lyric and narrative elements, which also modifies its relation to poetic autobiography as described above, usually when thinking about lyric poetry. In addition, Susan Stanford Friedman adds here another cultural coordinate and historicizes the genre of the long poem with regard to gender. For her, the modernist long poem “has broken the conventions of narrative poetry through reliance on lyric sequencing, fragmentation and paratactic juxtapositions,” but preserved the “narrative mode as its central moment.”<sup>22</sup> She adds: “The dialectical play between narrative and lyric in the woman’s long poem is overdetermined by a need for a narrative based in traditional Western exclusions of women from subjectivity and from the discourses of both myth and history.”<sup>23</sup> The poetic autobiography as a long poem is then able to juxtapose the conventional narrative mode of life narratives and defamiliarize or denaturalize the narrative by the use of techniques characteristic for lyric poetry.

20 Accordingly to redeem the time is one of the autobiographer’s prime motives, perhaps the prime motive.” But because time is essentially unredeemable, the form of autobiography is the means through which it can be textually successful by making “all time either perpetually past or perpetually present.” Olney, “Some Versions,” 252.

21 See Smaro Kambourelli, *On the Edge of Genre: The Contemporary Canadian Long Poem*, Theory/Culture (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991).

22 Susan Stanford Friedman, *Mappings: Feminism and the Cultural Geographies of Encounter* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1998), 230. Because the form of the long poem adds only yet another coordinate to thinking about autobiography, I am not invoking here the existing rich conceptualization of the long poem itself.

23 Friedman, *Mappings*, 230. Friedman’s general formulation about the exclusion of women asks for nuancing with regard to the differences among women and hegemonies within them, but simultaneously points to an important structural example of historical gendering of a genre.

Previous discussions of “Anglo-Mongrels” point to some extent toward reading “Anglo-Mongrels” at the intersection of the long poem and a u t o b i o g r a p h y. Notably, Melitta Schaum has called it a “female autobiographical epic,” and as an automythography,<sup>24</sup> thus underscoring the poem being a remedy to what Friedman has called “exclusions of women from subjectivity and from the discourses of both myth and history.” Yet, because of the publication history of “Anglo-Mongrels” up till now, the analysis and popularization of the long poem as a whole, with its lyric techniques within the narrative mode, as autobiography, has been stalled.

The publication history of “Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose” hints at Mina Loy’s tentative position within the institutions of modernism in its making, and illustrates the ambiguity that accompanies the women’s long poem. Namely, as critics have underscored, the poem was never published as a whole during Loy’s life. A fragment, “English Rose,” appeared in 1923 in Loy’s first poetry book, *Lunar Baedeker* by Contact Publishing Company, run by the well-networked among the expatriate literati American in Paris, Robert McAlmon.<sup>25</sup> Almost simultaneously *The Little Review* – a well-established American literary magazine in New York City, focusing on transnational modernism and known for serializing Joyce’s *Ulysses* in 1918, published the initial part of “Anglo-Mongrels,” devoted to a Jewish immigrant from Hungary to the British Isles.<sup>26</sup> The following issue of *The Little Review* included its two more sections: “English Rose,” a much longer version of the poem already published in the collection *Lunar Baedeker*, and “Ada Gives Birth to Ova.”<sup>27</sup> Further installments, however, never appeared in this magazine. The rest of the poem was featured in *Contact Collection of Contemporary Writers* produced more than one year later, in 1925, by a publishing house associated with McAlmon, Three Mountains Press.<sup>28</sup>

24 Melitta Schaum, “»Moon-Flowers out of Muck«: Mina Loy and the Female Autobiographical Epic,” *Massachusetts Studies in English*, no. 10 (1986): 254–276. As Alex Goody documents, “Anglo-Mongrels” has been previously read autobiographically, especially by Rachel Duplessis and Cristanne Miller, a task that she also continues with a different accent in Alex Goody, “Empire, Motherhood and the Poetics of the Self in Mina Loy’s »Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose.«” *Life Writing* 6, no. 1 (2009): 61–76.

25 Mina Loy, *Lunar Baedeker* (Paris: Contact, 1923). The misspelling of the title is the printer’s error.

26 Mina Loy, “Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose,” *The Little Review* 9 (1923).

27 Mina Loy, “English Rose,” *The Little Review* 9, no. 4 (1923–1924); “Ada Gives Birth to Ova,” *The Little Review* 9, no. 4 (1923–1924).

28 Mina Loy, “Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose,” in *Contact Collection of Contemporary Writers* (Paris: Three Mountains Press, 1925), 137–194.

While the anthology included subsequent parts of the poem, only selected and partly arbitrarily arranged five sections were published thirty-three years later under the rubric “Poems from Contact Collection of Contemporary Writers” in Jonathan Williams’ *Lunar Baedeker and Time Tables* in 1958.<sup>29</sup> Only in 1982 did Roger Conover publish the entirety of “Anglo-Mongrels” in *The Last Lunar Baedeker*, which – in the context of expanding feminist criticism – successfully regenerated the critical interest in the text.<sup>30</sup> As Marisa Januzzi and Marjorie Perloff noted, Conover pursues an editorial strategy that “normalizes Loy’s dramatic spacing” and expressive punctuation.<sup>31</sup> The newest, and currently the only available, edition of Loy’s poems, Conover’s 1996 *The Lost Lunar Baedeker*, restores the text of many poems and includes detailed notes, but omits “Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose” because of the “publisher’s parameter’s for this edition”; as Conover explains, he did not want to include mere excerpts, “trading in the architecture for a few bricks.”<sup>32</sup> Marissa Januzzi has prepared a critical edition of “Anglo-Mongrels,” but it remains a part of her PhD thesis.<sup>33</sup> Today, Conover’s 1982 *The Last Lunar Baedeker* is out of print.

Lyric sequencing and the fragmentation that Loy uses in “Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose” works against a stable constitution of the narrative self. It illustrates that autobiographical subjectivity is, as Seyla Benhabib puts it, a “fragile achievement of selves in weaving together conflicting narratives and allegiances into a unique life history.”<sup>34</sup> “Anglo-Mongrels” have been read as realizing the ethnically mixed status of Ova – who has been self-referentially

29 Mina Loy, *Lunar Baedeker & Time-Tables; Selected Poems*, Jargon (Highlands [N.C.]: J. Williams, 1958).

30 Mina Loy, *The Last Lunar Baedeker*, ed. Roger L. Conover, Jargon (Highlands [N.C.], East Haven, Conn.: Jargon Society 1982), 111–175.

31 Perloff, *Poetry On & Off the Page: Essays for Emergent Occasions*, 344. See also Marisa Januzzi, “»Reconstru[ing] Scar[s]«: Mina Loy and the Matter of Modernist Poetics” (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Columbia University, 1997).

32 Loy, *The Lost Lunar Baedeker*, 171. For the discussion of “Anglo-Mongrels” in terms of individual elements and overall structure in context of other modernist poems, notably Bunting’s, see Jim Powell, “Basil Bunting and Mina Loy,” *Chicago Review* 37, no. 1 (1990): 6–25.

33 Marisa Januzzi, “Reconstru[ing] Scar[s].” Further references to “Anglo-Mongrels” use Januzzi’s critical edition with page numbers indicated parenthetically in the text.

34 Seyla Benhabib, *The Claims of Culture: Equality and Diversity in the Global Era* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), 16; I borrow the use of Benhabib’s ideas in the context of autobiographical writing from: Gillian Whitlock, *Soft Weapons: Autobiography in Transit* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), 11.

interpreted. For Loy in her other writings, notably in the essay “Modern Poetry,” this ethnically mixed status linked to immigration has functioned as a necessary locus for the poet for the “renaissance of poetry.”<sup>35</sup> Before Ova, the product of intermarriage, appears in the poem in the third section out of twenty, Loy draws highly contrasting images of Ova’s parents. In this way she stabilizes the normative make-up, a Jewish immigrant and native English-woman, which later in the text produces an apparently intercultural space for Ova. The fragility of this apparently sutureless construction especially comes to the fore through poetic techniques applied here, which produces a competing tendency to the narrative strategy stabilizing the ethnic positions of the parents. Namely, striving to establish his subjectivity within the categories of hegemonic Englishness, Exodus, Ova’s father, is presented as trying to dissociate himself from his Jewish attributes. Similarly, his wife, an imaginary feminine figure of idealized Englishness that should function as a guarantor of his “English masculinity,” does not fully correspond to the ideal he strives for. And, as a result, the text seems to expose these “pure” ideal positions as phantasmatic. This functions not only as a commentary of slippery constitution of narrative self through relations with only apparently stabilized, narratively created others but also plugs itself into broader collective narratives – gendered, racialized regimes of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century imperial Britain – through which the self is interpellated and constituted. In what follows, I revisit the two initial sections of “Anglo-Mongrels,” the earliest in its publication history and best known, to show the dynamics of the constitution of the narrative self in relation to the genealogical family. By destabilizing their positions through poetic techniques, pointing to larger socio-historical subjectivizing structures, Loy may be read as commenting on how to construct the self “despite the weight of their family history.”<sup>36</sup> Moreover, it leads us beyond referential autobiographical reading and toward seeing “Anglo-Mongrels” as a poetic meta-autobiography of a specifically circumscribed gendered self at this particular time and place within modernity.

In sketchy fragments, a series of images that are connected through montage and the use of assonance, punning, and experimental typography – all of which is her signature – Loy stages Exodus’s otherness in relation to male and female Londoners.<sup>37</sup> Exodus’s insecure and dynamic position has to be

35 Cf. Loy, *The Lost Lunar Baedeker*, 158–159.

36 Miller, “The Entangled Self,” 534, emphasis added.

37 For a useful differentiation between collage and montage in modernist writing, see Marjorie Perloff, *The Futurist Moment: Avant-Garde, Avant Guerre, and the Language of Rupture* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), 246.

guaranteed and stabilized within a British context so that he becomes recognizable within its peculiar terms. Loy describes this process as “acclimatization” (383). Exodus’s attempts at acclimatization take place within the domain defined by sexualized gender ideals that condition both Jewishness and Englishness.

First, we see Exodus before he immigrates to England. Shortly before he leaves “Buda Pest,” Exodus appears in a highly satirical image defining his initial position: he loses a fight with a bee that woke him up. The poem with its slow movement renders the sleepy atmosphere and the approaching “danger”:

An insect	from an herb
errs on the	man-mountain
imparts	its infinitesimal tactile stimulus
to the epiderm	to the spirit
of Exodus (378)	

The protagonist’s reaction is disproportionate: panic, high pulse. Loy, mocking full empathy, explains:

He is undone!	How should he know
he has a heart	The Danube
gives no instruction in anatomy - - (379)	

Unfortunately, he does not succeed in killing the bee and the narrator encapsulates Exodus in a phrase that suggests his cowardice and physical fragility: “This lying-in-state of a virility” (379). But as the poem proceeds to contrast Exodus from the active masculinity, it also implies his lack of sexual experience. Indeed, the poem’s descriptions of London’s Sunday rituals show that it is not religious practices of English gentlemen that are at issue. Loy describes the festive sexuality celebrated by “lower classes,” England’s “silent servants” with “lurching lovers / along the rails of parks” (381). The floral metaphor contributes to her rendition of the sexual act:

The high-striped	soldiers of the swagger-stick
tempting the wilder flowers of womanhood	
to lick-be-quick ice cream	
outside the barracks. (381)	

The accent placed on sexuality is by no means a coincidence: apart from the economic, it is in precisely this sphere that Exodus, as an immigrant of ethnic



and religious outsider status, can promptly achieve recognition. But at this point his leisure takes a very different form:

The london dusk  
 wraps up the aborted entity  
 heeding Salomon's admonishing          spends  
 circumcised          circumspect  
 his evening          doing lightning calculations  
 for his high pleasure          Painting - - - -  
 feeling his pulse - - - - (382)

In these fragmented sentences we see Exodus's main traits: Jewish ritual ("Salomon's admonishings" and "circumcised") merges with economy ("calculations" and the double meaning of "spends"), his still mysterious anatomy ("feeling his pulse"), and, finally, art ("painting"). All of them taken together are supposed to signal his difference. Whereas his economic success – "Lord Israel" "speaking fluently »business-English,«" (380) as Loy writes earlier in this section – has a positive influence on his social status, it marks him as a stereotypical Jew, however already anglicized. If he wants to destabilize the mark of difference, the whole set of features that now result in his "high pleasure" has to be quickly modified – at least on the surface.

Yet, the "acclimatization" within England's gender regime cannot be realized just by imitating the Sunday scenarios that Loy graphically presents. For Exodus, it is not enough to win for himself "the wilder flowers of womanhood" (381, emphasis added). If it is social recognition that is at stake, he must realize the maximal scheme of empowerment: in front of the Christian God and British state, he has to marry a woman who incorporates Englishness, the English Rose. After Exodus learns that his anatomy is not different from that of the native inhabitants of Albion, he is ready to leave behind everything that has defined him in order to become intelligible within the categories of his new country. At least this is what we are told at the end of part one:

Exodus knows  
 no longer father or brother  
 or the God of the Jews,  
 it is his to choose  
 finance or romance of the rose. (384)

Loy seems to allude playfully to *Roman de la Rose*, a popular and widely translated thirteenth-century dream allegory presenting the hero falling in love with and successfully seducing the Rose held captive in a castle. This reference

is important here only in so far as the fresh Rose, the ideal of feminine sexuality from *Roman de la Rose*, mutates into a symbol of the empire, of the “civilisatory mission,” which functions as the basis for England’s national identity. A short passage from “Anglo-Mongrels” shows that the grand symbol has lost its glory and now tends toward decadence:

Conservative Rose  
storage  
of British Empire-made pot-pourri  
of dry dead men making a sweetened smell  
among a shrivelled collectivity (385)

This is one of numerous examples in which the Rose becomes disenchanted in Exodus’s eyes. Yet, while the English Rose stands metaphorically for the British nation and resonates with the Wars of the Roses, it overlaps seamlessly with the symbol of (sexual) love.<sup>38</sup> Accordingly, the next stanzas stress this second meaning and present the courtship of the Rose by Exodus. It is a comedy of opposites; Loy renders Exodus’s sexual fantasies, as well as the first sexual act, with shrill inventiveness and extreme pompousness, but all of this experience leads only to “nevrose,” a pun suggesting that neurosis is essentially linked with the phantasm of the English Rose, and final disappointment:

Deep in the nevrose  
night he  
peruses this body  
divested of its upholstery  
firmly insensitive  
in mimicry  
of its hypothetical model  
a petal  
of the English rose (390)

The ideal of the English Rose is revealed as phantasmatic, a “hypothetical model,” that is distant from the historical reality that can be summarized as a necessarily failed “mimicry.” This is how the story of Exodus and the English Rose ends. They stand not quite as opposites, and their union terminates

38 The interdependence of these two planes on which women signify within a nationalist discourse (a cultural, communal symbol and a reproductive force) is well researched, see, e.g., the classic theorization: Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender & Nation* (London: Sage Publications, 1997).

Exodus's attempts at Anglicization. Accordingly, in the next section of the poem, the English Rose appears as Ada, formally stripped of the bulk of her allegorical burden, and Exodus functions as Ova's father.

"Autobiographies [...] may reveal as much about the author's assumed audience as they do about him or her, and this is a further reason why they need to be read as cultural documents, not just as personal ones,"<sup>39</sup> writes Robert Sayre in the introduction to his *American Lives: An Anthology of Autobiographical Writing*. By "cultural documents" Sayre means the implicit autobiographical conventions that the autobiographer follows, which – as he notes – gives us insight into the projected contemporaneous audience and their own literary or textual assumptions about the spectrum of narratives acceptable for a credible narrative constitution of the self. In this context, the women's long poem, such as "Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose" occupies an ambivalent position that has been visible in the publication history as well as its reception of this particular text. The cultural documentation that is going on in the autobiography may be also read more expansively, for instance, as cultural modes of representation that may be affirmed, but also contested in a narrative of the self. As I was trying to demonstrate, from this point of view, it may be worth re-approaching "Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose" not only as autobiographical self-fashioning per se, but also as a critically cosmopolitan poetic meta-autobiography or as a larger commentary on the possibilities and impossibilities of writing an autobiography within an ethnically mixed family of a late Victorian London.

The path of Loy's scholarship to a large extent corresponds to my intellectual trajectory. Loy's (poetic) texts and the scholarship on Loy, often even implicitly applying intersectional analysis within a particular location, contributed to my own awareness of the positionality I write from. As I recall the undergraduate class on modernism during which Loy was fleetingly mentioned, I think about this quotation on the plurality of modernities: "I like how the term *polycentric* posits each modernity as its own center, with others as their peripheries. I also like how the terms *uneven* and *discrepant* invite analysis of unequal power and privilege, both between differently located modernities and within a single location."<sup>40</sup>

39 Robert F. Sayre, *American Lives: An Anthology of Autobiographical Writing* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994), 13.

40 Susan Stanford Friedman, "Planetarity: Musing Modernist Studies," *Modernism/modernity* 17, no. 3 (2010): 480–481.

## Abstract

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**Karolina Krasuska**

AMERICAN STUDIES CENTER, UNIVERSITY OF WARSAW

*Mina Loy and the Function of the Autobiographical: Revisiting the Long Poem "Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose"*

The article revisits the two initial sections of Mina Loy's modernist long poem "Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose," the earliest in its publication history and best known, to show the dynamics of the constitution of the narrative self in relation to the genealogical family. By destabilizing their positions through poetic techniques, pointing to larger socio-historical subjectivizing structures, Loy may be read as commenting on how to construct the self "despite the weight of family history." Moreover, it leads us beyond referential autobiographical reading and toward seeing "Anglo-Mongrels" as a poetic meta-autobiography of a specifically circumscribed gendered self at this particular time and place within modernity. This reading of the poem is performed within the context of Mina Loy's scholarly reception vis a vis auto/biographical studies.

## Keywords

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Mina Loy, "Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose," poetic autobiography, gender, modernity

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Katarzyna Nadana-Sokołowska

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## Anna Iwaszkiewiczowa: Fear of Writing as Fear of...?<sup>1</sup>

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DOI: 10.18318/td.2020.en.1.16 | ORCID: 0000-0003-4207-414X

### An Extraordinary and Unfulfilled Wife

Anna Lilpop (1897–1979), the daughter of a Warsaw based factory owner, married Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz – a Polish poet and writer, who after the end of World War I was associated with the Skamander poetry group and the prestigious milieu gathered around the literary journal *Wiadomości Literackie* – in 1922. Iwaszkiewiczowa – a writer's wife, the mother of his two daughters, and the lady of Stawisko (a palace near Warsaw, in which she was allowed to live during the communist era by the authorities of the time) – was always admired as a beautiful, socially active, and artistically talented woman, in texts published on the subject of her husband's legacy.

Iwaszkiewicz very much valued his wife's talents, for she was the first person to read the works he was

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### Katarzyna Nadana-Sokołowska –

literary historian,  
literary critic,  
lecturer in gender  
studies, graduate  
of the Faculty of  
Polish Studies at  
the University of  
Warsaw. Since 2015  
Assistant Professor  
at the Institute of  
Literary Research of  
the PAN, member of  
the interdisciplinary  
team of the Women's  
Archive. Author of  
the book *Problem  
religii w polskich  
dziennikach  
intymnych: Stanisław  
Brzozowski, Karol  
Ludwik Koniński,  
Henryk Elzenberg*  
(2012).

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<sup>1</sup> This article is an expanded and modified version of the text titled "Anna Iwaszkiewiczowa: lęk przed pisanem jako lęk przed lesbizmem" (Anna Iwaszkiewiczowa: Fear of writing as a fear of lesbianism), which was published in the volume *Arachnofobia: metaforyczne odsłony kobiecych lęków. Peregrynacje w przestrzeni kultury*, ed. Beata Walęciuk-Dejneka, Beata Stelingszewska (Siedlce: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Humanistyczno-Przyrodniczego w Siedlcach, 2013).

working on. He did not spare her encouragements to write, and more precisely – to focus on literary criticisms, translations, and on her diaries. In spite of being encouraged to write by many of those around her, Anna Iwaszkiewiczowa suppressed her desire to create, and after World War II stopped writing her diary altogether, convinced that it was not an adequate use of her time. Even so, this humble sized set of diaries, irregularly produced between 1915 and 1951, was republished three times and attracted substantial attention.<sup>2</sup>

Piotr Mitzner, who wrote the life stories of both Iwaszkiewicz and Iwaszkiewiczowa, was convinced about the uniqueness of her voice – in the biography he wrote, he drew attention to how interested she was in art, the role she played as the first reviewer and critic of Iwaszkiewicz's writing, as well as to something perhaps not perceived by even those closest to her, yet evident from readings of her diaries: to her inner life, and religious beliefs.<sup>3</sup> The essays she wrote, the translations she produced, and most of all the writings on art she published are also covered in a book by Małgorzata Cieliczko.<sup>4</sup> In the year 1997, on the hundredth anniversary of Anna Iwaszkiewiczowa's birth, the Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz Museum published a volume titled *Almanach Iwaszkiewiczowski* (Iwaszkiewicz almanac), dedicated wholly to Anna Iwaszkiewiczowa.<sup>5</sup> The texts it contains, based on essays, memoirs, and diaries written by Anna Iwaszkiewiczowa, markedly set her apart from the public figure her husband had become. Meanwhile, Marta Wyka,<sup>6</sup> Hanna Kirchner,<sup>7</sup> and Grażyna Borkowska<sup>8</sup> draw attention to the sense of creative dissatisfaction expressed in Iwaszkiewiczowa's diaries. They try to explain it,

2 See Anna Iwaszkiewiczowa, *Dziennik*, ed. Maria Iwaszkiewicz (Warszawa: "Twój Styl" 1993); Anna Iwaszkiewiczowa, *Dzienniki i wspomnienia* (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 2000, 2012). The first edition covered only the years 1915–1935; the edition published in 2000 contains the integral version of the diaries, spanning the years 1915–1951.

3 See Piotr Mitzner, *Hania i Jarosław Iwaszkiewiczowie* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2008).

4 See Cieliczko Magdalena, *"On jest mistrzem, ja to wiem" – pisarka, tłumaczka, edytorka, żona* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IBL, 2013).

5 See Stawisko. *Almanach Iwaszkiewiczowski. Tom 3: Anna Iwaszkiewiczowa – w setną rocznicę urodzin*, ed. Alina Brodzka et al. (Podkowa Leśna: Muzeum im. Jarosława Iwaszkiewicza, 1997).

6 See Marta Wyka, "Zapiski Anny Iwaszkiewicz," in *Stawisko*, ed. Alina Brodzka et al., 19–24.

7 See Hanna Kirchner, "Stłumiona. O dzienniku Anny Iwaszkiewiczowej," in *Stawisko*, ed. Alina Brodzka et al., 25–44.

8 See Grażyna Borkowska, "Dziennik Anny," in *Stawisko*, ed. Alina Brodzka et al., 61–82.

rather coherently, using her conservative views on the nature and the calling of women, which are directly expressed in the diary, and also with her surprising ability to be selfless when the fulfilment of her own desires could collide with the children's wellbeing, or with moral and aesthetic values.<sup>9</sup>

Interestingly, each researcher also notes something else contained in Iwaszkiewiczowa's diary: the tale of her unrequited and unhappy love for Maria Morska, an orator and journalist of *Wiadomości Literackie*, stressing the important part it played in Iwaszkiewicz's life. She herself, being married to a homosexual, treating (at least in the early years of their marriage) his "ailment" with some consideration, suppressed her passion for another woman in order to remain faithful to her husband and child. Should we admire her moral resolve or rather see in it the most serious cause of the depression she would come to suffer, including her mental breakdown? My own opinion is that the contents of her diaries and letters written to her husband, as well as the contents of his diaries, lead us to such a conclusion.

In the following article, I would therefore like to suggest a new way of reading her biographical legacy that is inspired by psychoanalysis.<sup>10</sup> This way of reading biographical documents relating to Anna Iwaszkiewicz leads to the hypothesis that the stereotypes relating to the submissive nature of women in society and the conviction that women's creative output is less valuable than that produced by men, which are often repeated in her diaries, are not enough to completely explain her decision to abandon her art. Moreover, the inherited tendency to suffer from depression – or bipolar disorder, which would most likely be the current diagnosis – does not explain all of the circumstances and reasons of her descent into serious depression at this particular point in her life.<sup>11</sup> Rather, I suggest that we look at the problem of

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9 Ibid.

10 Meaning projection, identification, and denial as described by psychoanalytical writings.

11 Such a judgement of Iwaszkiewiczowa's psychological troubles in the 1930s and her later neurotic symptoms is found in Mitzner's biography, as well as in the biography of Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz penned by Radosław Romaniuk (See Radosław Romaniuk, *Inne życie. Biografia Jarosława Iwaszkiewicza tom 1* (Warszawa: Iskry, 2012) and Radosław Romaniuk, *Inne życie. Biografia Jarosława Iwaszkiewicza tom 2* (Warszawa: Iskry, 2017). This judgement was also repeated by many others, probably out of concern for the discourtesy towards Iwaszkiewicz that would arise from the attempts to ascertain the causes of the illness and from blaming Iwaszkiewicz for his wife's condition, as did Anna's family at the time. Radosław Romaniuk is also the author of a biographical chapter about Anna Iwaszkiewicz, covering in greater detail the question of her illness, yet without at all analyzing its causes. See Radosław Romaniuk, "Anna od Aniołów," in *One: Nadzieja Mandelsztam, Anna Iwaszkiewiczowa, Zofia Tołstojowa, Maria Kasproviczowa* (Warszawa: Twój Styl, 2005), 73–140.

self-denial in a different, dualistic context, which is represented by homosexual longing revealed in the diary – one that cannot be satisfied without going against the author's religious beliefs, thereby causing a powerful inner conflict – and by the understanding of women's creativity as a manifestation of their "manliness" that is accompanied by a perverse form of sexual drive, a view which was typical for modernist psychiatry. From this perspective, her decision to deny herself delight flowing from a union with a woman turns out to have a lot to do with her rejection of her own creative output, and the inner transformation she undergoes at the time also changes her attitude to homosexuality, and even to her husband's literary works. From a high-minded partner she becomes – as we can infer from her husband's own diaries – a judge of both the man and his oeuvre. This development can be defined as a withdrawal of her initial identification with her husband, which allowed her to satisfy her desire for expressing her inner creativity and homosexual desires, identifying the ego with a punishing superego and the masochism resulting from this, something which is a key component in Anna Iwaszkiewicz's religiousness following "her crisis" or, in other words, her mental breakdown.

I will now try to present material which will support this – as I am aware – controversial thesis. The works of Anna and Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz, especially their memoirs and shared correspondence from the period 1926–1939, present us with an image of their incredible friendship and commitment that lasted through fifty years of living together in the cultural center of Poland, meaning their home in Stawisko. Reading these documents arouses an irrefutable admiration for the richness of their lives, the incredible sensitivity of both, as well as the multidimensional power of the bond between them. I am aware that my interpretation can seem to lack delicacy, especially when confronted with their own expressions of mutually complimentary affection, as well as the key roles they played in each other's lives. And yet I will allow myself to address the tensions and conflicts between them – oftentimes ameliorated after the fact by their own comments – in search for a deeper understanding of "the case of Anna Iwaszkiewicz."

### **The Absolute of (Masculine) Art**

In the case of Anna Iwaszkiewiczowa, as early as in her young adult years – according to her diary – the cult of the arts was for her connected with the "mystical arts." Creativity, and especially music, was for her a manifestation of the Absolute, and so it is not surprising that she began to see it as a privileged route towards it. Anna Iwaszkiewiczowa's diaries indicate the remarkable scale of her artistic sensitivity and depth of religious



experience, but they are also a testimony to her personal tragedy, which was the desire to create and at the same time a conscious decision to renounce it. "The need to create, if it is not to be satisfied, is a great torture. I know it well," she will write in her diary on 13 April 1923.<sup>12</sup> This complaint is repeated in her diaries numerous times, as she dreams of creating "great" art, envious of "real" artists, while at the same time depreciating her own creative efforts, such as the writing of a diary,<sup>13</sup> which she will eventually abandon in 1951, explaining: "I have come to the conclusion that this sort of writing is pompous, and in any case is something unnecessary. One has to be »someone« in order for it to make sense, for it to be of use to others."<sup>14</sup> Even when in the year 1978 her memoirs titled *Nasze zwierzęta* (Our animals) were published, a masochistic shadow was cast over that event. In his diary from the time, Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz seeks out a connection between this success and Anna Iwaszkiewicz's crisis. In his opinion, she experienced at this time, after forty years, a return of mental illness, which led to inner turmoil as a punishment from God: "She no longer enjoys this, does not comprehend, only finds herself in the hell of guilty thoughts, suffering for some imagined faults and is really struggling and making us suffer awfully," he wrote.<sup>15</sup>

Her diaries leave no doubt that what she considered standing in her way were, first of all, stereotypical perceptions of women's nature, and then the religious fervors she felt deepening with time. In line with the perceptions of the time – that women were intellectually inferior and that their destiny was focused on biological destiny (motherhood), for Anna a woman is no longer capable of being creative. Women's creative output is according to her impossible, meaning inevitably repetitive and inferior when compared to that produced by men. It is her opinion that women are unable to express through art forms those feelings which constitute artistic matter, even if they experience them.

Understanding art as an Absolute, Anna Iwaszkiewicz bows before it, denying herself the right to even attempt to achieve artistic fulfilment. Creating, knowing that one is condemned to write worthless things, is

12 Anna Iwaszkiewiczowa, *Dzienniki i wspomnienia*, ed. Maria Iwaszkiewicz and Paweł Kądziała (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 2000), 27.

13 See Iwaszkiewiczowa, *Dzienniki*, 27, 40, 63, 93, 106, 108, 172, 225, 235, 272, 293, 308, and others.

14 Iwaszkiewiczowa, *Dzienniki*, 480.

15 See Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz, *Dzienniki 1964–1980*, ed. Agnieszka and Ryszard Papiescy, introd. Andrzej Gronczewski (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 2011), 574.

according to her deepest convictions simply sacrilege. She goes on to write about women's creativity: "In all epochs, there have been women who had all sorts of talents, but what does this mean compared to male geniuses, to name but a few being enough to instantly understand that women will never be able to reach certain limits?! A woman's physical life kills her morally."<sup>16</sup>

Between 1926 and 1931 Iwaszkiewiczowa attempted to translate her beloved Proust, and yet, in spite of encouragements from those around her, she discontinued this work. In 1928 she wrote:

It would be a dream come true for me to be able to do this for real. Unfortunately, I have no such illusions. And here I approach once again the heart of my pain. Both Jarosław and Aubry, whom I met in Paris, by encouraging me more and more, are only making this pain worse, something permanently lodged within me. The inability to create, and even this sort of semi-artistry is something I was afraid of tackling. Overall, I understand that only great writers should translate great writers, or at the very least an artist.<sup>17</sup>

In the early 1930s, she wrote two essays about him.<sup>18</sup> In spite of receiving much encouragement, at the start of the 1930s she abandons both essay writing and translations. In 1929 she writes about translating Proust:

I will not do this, because it is simply against my "rules" [...]. I always hold that only a really good writer can translate well, and especially when it comes to Proust this should not be just anybody.<sup>19</sup>

She writes ever more infrequently her diary, which she will eventually abandon in the 1950s. She understands this rejection as a religious duty, meaning the battle with a sinful "I," one which must eventually be humiliated and destroyed.

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<sup>16</sup> Iwaszkiewiczowa, *Dzienniki*, 205.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 225.

<sup>18</sup> See Anna Iwaszkiewiczowa, "Conrad a Proust," *Pamiętnik Warszawski* 6 (1931), 37–45; Anna Iwaszkiewiczowa, "Sztuka Prousta," *Wiadomości Literackie* 40 (1932), which was published under the pseudonym Adam Podkowiński. What is more, four parts of Proust's *In Search of Lost Time* were published in her translation at the time. Also, in 1942, she finished another essay on Conrad: Anna Iwaszkiewiczowa, "Sztuka Conrada," *Życie Literackie* 1–2 (1946).

<sup>19</sup> Iwaszkiewiczowa, *Dzienniki*, 335.

### Writing and Lesbianism

In Anna Iwaszkiewiczowa's diaries, as well as her letters to her husband, we will find moments which allow us to see her rejection of her own creative self as driven by fear of her own lesbian "coming out": as a rejection of delight, which is not just a refusal to delight at being oneself, but also a refusal to draw joy from creating and sexual pleasures.

Let us at first turn our attention to the complex attitude Anna Iwaszkiewicz had towards women who tried to become artists: fascination mixed with fear and disdain. She certainly did not know many women-artists, nor did she make any attempts to seek them out in order to become inspired through their example and thus build up belief in her own potential. Interestingly enough, the observations she makes in writing about the work created by George Sand and Zofia Stryjeńska<sup>20</sup> (and to a lesser extent that of Irena Krzywicka and Aniela Zagórska) seem to suggest that she associates creative talents in women with a masculine aspect of their identities, which for her is a form of pathology, a departure from the norm, transgression and madness. Women's genius emerges from a so-called "male mind," which in itself is worthy of praise, though it does hint at degeneration.

Anna Iwaszkiewiczowa's views about the madness of creative women (she assigns such a condition to Stryjeńska<sup>21</sup>) are consistent with a modernist understanding of this question. As is shown by, among others, Lilian Faderman,<sup>22</sup> in line with the views propounded by psychiatry and sexology at the turn of the centuries, represented by the likes of Carl van Westphal, Havelock Ellis, Richard von Krafft-Ebing, who classified sexual pathologies, Magnus Hirschfeld, who created the theory of a "third sex," Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, who coined the term "Uranianism" to describe sexual orientation, a woman who has intellectual and artistic aspirations, and

20 Cf. Iwaszkiewiczowa, *Dzienniki*, 203–205.

21 Iwaszkiewiczowa admires her art for its "masculine" form, while also claiming she was mad as a result of transgressing the nature of her own gender: "The only woman whose talents, I think, has no female characteristics, being totally male in its power, reach, and lack of all emotionality, is Stryjeńska. [...] It is Stryjeńska, funny, hysterical, small woman, who is an exceptional odd-one-out in my whole theory. But it is also this creativity which "exploded her." She is, after all, a half normal woman, reputedly having been in a hospital for those who suffered nervous disorders." Iwaszkiewiczowa, *Dzienniki*, 205.

22 See Lilian Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendship and Love between Women from the Renaissance to the Present* (Morrow: Women's Press, 1981); Izabela Filipiak, *Obszary odmienności: Rzecz o Marii Komornickiej* (Gdańsk: Słowo/obraz terytoria, 2006), 289–305.

is thus talented, is a unique entity, one who might simply be pathologically damaged – her male mind located in a female body connected for them inherently with sexual perversion, resulting in attraction towards other women. A woman who is intellectually active is a “natural anomaly,” a monster which arouses feelings of aesthetic and moral repulsion.<sup>23</sup> Interestingly enough, this very lack of “male” form in writing becomes for Anna Iwaszkiewicz an argument against George Sand’s “masculinity” (read: lesbianism?). Iwaszkiewiczowa writes about her, clearly associating creativity with a disturbance in women’s sexual and gender identity:

I am arriving at the opinion that the legend of her “masculinity” is merely a legend. Can there be anything more womanly than a worldview which contains love as the starting and end point, the highest ideal, idealized happiness above all. No woman, not even one as undoubtedly talented as Sand, is, nor can ever be, an “artist” in the broadest, truly great sense of this word. Women cannot find it in themselves to see things in a creative context, in a way which is beyond this earth (...). Women can, through deeply religious states, intuitively reach this world, can live in it in an inner sense, but cannot give these experiences form.<sup>24</sup>

Sand, according to Iwaszkiewiczowa, was not “masculine” (perverse?<sup>25</sup>), because she perceived a completely traditional, heterosexual form of love as the aim and meaning of (a woman’s) existence. Meanwhile, a woman who achieves real success as an artist, a woman capable of giving “form” to experiences, proves she is somewhat “masculine,” and so can be suspected of lesbianism – this seems to be the hidden logic which governs Anna Iwaszkiewiczowa’s thinking about the creative output of women artists. And yet did Iwaszkiewiczowa have personal reasons to fear a similar judgement? Did she really associate her own creative fulfilment with forbidden sexual delights?

23 Filipiak, like Faderman, shows a certain emancipatory potential in seeing the otherness of “Uranian females” and makes reference to a novel by Aimée Duc *Sind es Frauen?*, as well as to comments made by another writer and emancipatory activist, Anna Rueling, as examples of women affirmatively referring to their “masculinity,” being a sign of both intellectual superiority to “ordinary women” as well as homosexual longings (See Filipiak, *Obszary*, 289–305).

24 Iwaszkiewiczowa, *Dzienniki*, 203.

25 For Iwaszkiewiczowa this perverse aspect relating to creativity and masculinity is found in her use of the word “legend,” suggesting a certain element of biographical gossip (as related to suspicions of a romance between Sand and the actress Maria Dorval, did indeed exist).

Her diary and letters, which record a subtle and unfulfilled romance with Maria Morska, seem to confirm such a hypothesis. Iwaszkiewiczowa becomes better acquainted with Morska in the spring of 1925 in Beaulieu – a seaside resort in the French Riviera. They spend some unforgettable moments together – no more than a few days – which leave Iwaszkiewiczowa fascinated by Morska's personality and beauty. Both the diary records as well as the mentions of Morska in Anna's letters to Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz, betray the depth of this fascination, being so very different from her descriptions of other persons in writing. The terminology she uses to refer to Maria connect their relationship with "another dimension," a way of experiencing reality which is different to normal: Maria is "odd," "magical," "incredible," "charming," "mysterious."<sup>26</sup> Iwaszkiewiczowa summarizes her feelings as being "charmed and seduced," and the few days they spent together by the seaside a "dream." She is aware of the uniqueness of her feelings, and yet denies them a sexual dimension. In spite of this "lack," the language she uses to describe this relation is clearly that of someone in love.

Anna Iwaszkiewicz will see Morska only after several months, in October 1925 in Warsaw. She will meet with her regularly, until she breaks off the relation in May of 1926, having returned from a second springtime stay in Beaulieu. Between these two visits to the Riviera, she will often recall Morska in her diaries, and dream her dream in the strangest possible way – as a confidante of Antoni Słonimski, another poet associated with the Skamander group, in his love for Maria, becoming his best friend and almost lover in the course of this involvement. It is Słonimski, and not Morska, that her husband will be jealous of at this time. In this configuration of desires we find a triangle characteristic for those, who while denying their homosexual longings transfer them onto people who are a subject or object of heterosexual desire of (to) their beloved. Similar homosexual triangles, according to German Ritz, are characteristic of the prose penned by Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz himself, who is always sublimating this drive in his writings.<sup>27</sup>

In the first few days of April 1925, having taken an unforgettable walk along the seafront with Morska, Iwaszkiewiczowa writes a letter to her husband, who is in Paris at the time, in which she admits to having written a poem:

Towards the end of a strange day yesterday, something happened which I feel was unheard of, phenomenal – I wrote a poem. This should not terrify you, it is

<sup>26</sup> In relation to these and subsequent characteristics referring to M. Morska, cf. Iwaszkiewiczowa, *Dzienniki*, 109–114.

<sup>27</sup> See German Ritz, *Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz. Pogranicza nowoczesności*, trans. Andrzej Kopacki (Kraków: Universitas, 1999).

sure never to happen again, for even without writing rubbish I seem ridiculous to myself.<sup>28</sup>

It appears that in experiencing this state of being “seduced and charmed” by Morska, Iwaszkiewiczowa allows herself momentary permission to be a creative woman (let us note she makes use of the most ennobling literary form, that is, poetry). Of course, this permission is partial and conditional – in this letter, she instantly performs the act of self-chastisement, denying the poem any sort of worth, describing it as “rubbish” (“graphomaniac”) and almost apologizing for this usurpation. Is being creative the equivalent of being a “manly woman”? Something she mentions in a letter sent a year later seems to suggest so.

In March 1926, Anna Iwaszkiewicz will once more travel to Beaulieu – this time in a state of emotional distress, caused by her inner conflict. She dreamt of meeting Maria there, but it turned out that the other woman had rescheduled her stay to the summer, when her husband would come to be on holiday. Even more importantly, a few days before leaving, Anna Iwaszkiewicz decided to talk to her confessor about the doubts she was having as to the nature of her feelings towards Morska. The confessor shocks her, singularly interpreting them as an introduction to a perverse sexual union and warning her off the female friend. Iwaszkiewiczowa, troubled by moral dilemmas, makes contact with Maria’s sister – Alicja Eber, permanently based in Beaulieu. Her humorous aside about Maria’s lesbianism, and at the same time her weakness for Anna, will lead the latter to make the dramatic decision to conclusively end their association. Even so, during her stay, on 7 April, and so exactly a year on from writing her letter, the one in which she mentions writing a poem, Anna writes to her husband – somewhat provocatively – about cutting her hair:

I have cut it very short at the back (only the sides and front are longer) and it is not layered, which looks completely boyish. [...] People tell me the look suits me. [...] I don’t know if you will approve, for you do not like it much, as a rule you think that a woman should be fully feminine, without any troubling associations.<sup>29</sup>

Let us note that both the use of a literary form reserved for male-artists, as well as the cutting of her hair, can at this point be read as temporary permission to allow herself the delight of being in a loving relationship with

28 Anna and Jarosław Iwaszkiewiczowie, *Listy 1922–1926*, ed. Małgorzata Bojanowska and Ewa Cieślak, introd. Tomasz Burek (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 2012), 339. Letter dated 7 April 1925.

29 Iwaszkiewiczowie, *Listy 1922–1926*, 518–519.

another woman and simultaneously as a reaching for the attributes of a masculine woman, meaning a lesbian: a male mind and male appearance. Both also represent a veiled confession to her husband, who can either grasp or ignore the indicators of insubordination and otherness. Repeating the gesture of insubordination, precisely a year after the first such statement, allows us to also suppose that this day was special to Iwaszkiewiczowa, and that in this way she celebrated the anniversary of meeting her friend, even if she now had the intention to end this “dangerous” association.

Iwaszkiewiczowa will pay for this decision with a lengthy period of depression, something she admits to in her diary. She mentions its end around the spring of 1927 – meaning her period of “mourning” lasted at least a year. Iwaszkiewiczowa will during these years repeatedly mention this curtailed fascination and the pain her decision caused her. Hanna Kirchner talks rather accurately about her “killing” her feelings for Maria.<sup>30</sup> The following year, Iwaszkiewiczowa keenly listens to gossip about Morska’s romance with the poet Maria Pawlikowska. Having decided to end their friendship, her notes become even more marked by deliberations of a religious and moral nature. Sometime later, she becomes pregnant for a second time, a period she describes in her diary as being very painful. She clearly goes through a deep depression during this time, something both she and those around her put down to simple physiology.

In the late summer of 1928, in spite of the birth of her child and declarations of happiness arising from this event, her mental condition is serious enough for her to seek psychiatric consultation. This brings about periods (infrequent, by the way) of stay in sanatoriums specializing in nervous disorders, and treatment by Dr Gallus in Tworki. Her nervous condition will from now on constantly worry Iwaszkiewicz, until it turns into a form of nervous breakdown in Copenhagen in the spring of 1935.

Let us note one more thread in the correspondence between the Iwaszkiewicz couple, and a key aspect of Anna’s life before her crisis: delight at reading Marcel Proust’s *In Search of Lost Time*. According to her diaries and letters, random attempts at translating fragments of Proust’s masterwork cause her exceptional pleasure. Interestingly enough, she reads first volumes of *In Search of Lost Time* in 1925 in Beaulieu, the very same period during which she meets Maria Morska. Mentions of her reading the subsequent volumes – what is noteworthy, borrowed from Maria – come from the winter and spring of 1926, once again spent in the Riviera, without Maria, while thinking about her constantly. Iwaszkiewiczowa writes letters to her husband asking him to send her a copy of a volume devoted to Albertine, which worries him somewhat,

30 See Kirchner, “Stłumiona.”

because it turns out that she finds it herself – at Alicja Ebert's, and so once again in a place connected directly with Maria. In the meantime she translates her first fragment of Proust's masterpiece.

In diary entries dated 1928, Iwaszkiewiczowa reminisces about translating Proust as a form of self-therapy.<sup>31</sup> She was recommended to take this sort of "cure" by Dr Flateau, for he was convinced that being busy with creative work would channel her energies and reduce the symptoms of her nervous disorder. The pleasure she derives during these years from translating Proust seems rather connected with an inner permission to allow herself to remember the incredible events of the spring of 1925 and winter of 1926.<sup>32</sup> Is this not in some way a very Proustian work with the imagination, which Anna, being an aesthete, is still able to allow herself? Unfortunately, she will not permit herself to think that she is worthy of such a pleasure, or else it perhaps arouses in her too much unease and a sense of guilt caused by all those memories. She gives up on any further attempts at translations: "I am rejecting this temptation, though it is great, and I know that this is my fountain of joy, my escape from the misery of nerves, which continues to oppress me so...."<sup>33</sup> In such words, she herself connects creative work with experiencing delight, with pleasure, and also with forbidden realms of "temptation." On 16 September 1931, Anna will write to her husband about working on her essay on Proust: "If only I could keep on writing, I would be reborn."<sup>34</sup>

31 See also Anna and Jarosław Iwaszkiewiczowie, *Listy 1927–1931*, ed. Małgorzata Bojanowska and Ewa Cieślak (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 2012), 312.

32 Iwaszkiewiczowa seems to attach a great deal of importance to fragments in this volume, in which the protagonist meets a beautiful stranger in the vicinity of Balbec, and his first meeting with Albertine at a seafront pavement. Parts of her letters similar to these sequences lead us to think that both fragments were for Anna associated with her meeting Maria for the first time. These fragments talk about the impression Morska had made on her from afar and the first time their eyes met. It is possible that Maria's lesbianism also made Anna think of Proust's Albertine, such as the mention in her letters about Albertine's "*ambiguität*" by which she possibly meant her gender fluidity (the group of girls Albertine surrounds herself with behaves with boyish abandon, dressed in sports clothing, active, giving the impression of having "lost their virtue"). The same day she declares to her husband that she has cut her hair short, Iwaszkiewiczowa also mentions to him that she keeps seeing a girl who reminds her of the Proustian Albertine on the beach in Beaulieu – but that she imagines her with short hair. This hair cutting gesture can also be received by him as a gesture of her associating herself with a certain group identity, as attempts to adopt a lesbian identity before the final abandon.

33 Iwaszkiewiczowa, *Dzienniki*, 235.

34 Iwaszkiewiczowie, *Listy 1927–1931*, 467.



### Homosexual Desires – From Projection to Expulsion

Though it would be far too simplistic, especially from someone who is not an expert, to talk about a single cause of Anna Iwaszkiewicz's complex condition, it does not seem excessive to see her denial of pleasure which came from her contact with Morska, and then denying herself the right to creative expression, as being key in the way in which her depressive state deteriorated. If we look at creative activities as, aside from sexuality, the most explicit form of self-affirmation and expression, then her self-enforced denial can be treated as a manifestation of a full denial of the self. This complete denial can only partly be understood as her increasing reliance on religious asceticism and radicalizing moral views, because both of these two aspects of her life seem not only to be the cause, but also the effect of denying herself these pleasures.

It seems that in connection with this denial, the formula according to which the Iwaszkiewicz's marriage worked over the years undergoes a transformation. Her unusual marriage can better be understood in the light of her denying her own lesbian desires, which Iwaszkiewicz himself directly and rather condescendingly assigned to her in his diary.<sup>35</sup> Iwaszkiewiczowa fell in love with her future husband, admiring his writings, but also admiring the fact that he did not treat her in some masculine fashion, which seems to suggest a lack of desire for clear manifestations of sexual interest from men. "You know very well how I detest manly males," she writes to him on 14 February 1928.<sup>36</sup> She agrees to marry him in spite of knowing about his homosexuality and, with understanding, she accepts his past and present romantic dalliances, making friends (for an example) with Mieczysław Rytard and his wife. A condescending tone, leading to jealousy and a note of condemnation, only enters her discourse with him later on, very discreetly at first.<sup>37</sup>

35 Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz, *Dzienniki 1911–1955*, ed. Agnieszka and Robert Papiescy, introd. Andrzej Gronczewski (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 2007), 209.

36 Iwaszkiewiczowie, *Listy 1927–1931*, 218.

37 Krzysztof Tomasik suggests Anna Iwaszkiewicz denied homosexuality on the whole – both that of her husband and her own fascination with Morska (Krzysztof Tomasik, "Anna Iwaszkiewiczowa," in *Homobiografie* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2008), 57–62), though this seems unconvincing. The ruminations on the possible marriage of her friend, Irena Malinowska, to Karol Szymanowski, that can be found in the diaries, paint a fascinating picture of Iwaszkiewiczowa's attitude towards a woman's marriage to a homosexual. In them, to a certain degree, Anna Iwaszkiewiczowa takes the side of the man by stressing that this would be a good life decision for him. She does not, however, show empathy for the woman who will either live knowing she is unloved, or be deceived. See Iwaszkiewiczowa, *Dzienniki*, 212.

Iwaszkiewicz himself will sparingly treat the first agreement by Anna, before their marriage, as an agreement which is wholly conscious, and so binding in a future sense. This is confirmed by the fact that he then uses it as an argument against those who thought that her mental crisis in the 1930s was a result of her being dissatisfied with their marriage.<sup>38</sup>

Hania knew, of course (and not from gossip, but from mine own lips) who she was marrying. [...] How does Hania's illness look in the light of this? "They" of course know nothing about this. But I do not think I have anything in this respect to be apologizing about. That which I hear from Borejsza, that Hania fell ill once she heard I was a pederast – is, in actual fact, ridiculous. Even if I wanted to hide the fact, [...] this would be impossible.<sup>39</sup>

Iwaszkiewicz was convinced that women were innately insane, which had nothing to do with psychologically external causes. He treated his wife's mental illness as a result of her inherited emotional baggage (he thought her mother was mad, for she had left her husband for a lover and in this way denied her daughter contact with her), or possibly of her physical qualities – being underweight, having a weakened organism. In 1935, Iwaszkiewiczowa spends much of the year in the psychiatric hospital in Tworki,<sup>40</sup> which is when her husband returns from a diplomatic mission and begins to visit her, and then provides careful care for her at home. Indisputably, Iwaszkiewicz had the right to claim credit for helping cure her of mental illness,<sup>41</sup> but it is hard to overlook the fact that in the first period of her mental crisis he doubted whether his presence would have any influence on her well-being, and he therefore left in June 1935 to a diplomatic mission in Paris.

Anna Iwaszkiewicz herself was also likely to put down the causes of her illness to a weak physical constitution and the way her body had been damaged by pregnancy, but let us note that the clearly depressive signs (almost complete withdrawal from contact with people, a refusal to lead a normal, everyday life, her suicidal tendencies, and other psychological obsessions) are described rather – as Jungians might say – as a "loss of soul," meaning a loss of connection to life; the loss of ability to experience any sort of feelings. This seems to suggest a deep inner conflict, something she was unable to deal with

38 See Romaniuk, *Inne życie* (2012), 492.

39 Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz, *Dzienniki 1956–1963*, ed. Agnieszka and Robert Papiescy, introd. Andrzej Gronczewski (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 2010), 209.

40 She experienced a crisis in March, but she spent the first part of it in a sanatorium.

41 See Iwaszkiewicz, *Dzienniki 1964–1980*, 520.

in any way other than to completely cut herself off from all emotions. Also her obsession with eternal damnation, something Iwaszkiewicz mentions numerous times in his diary and writes in a fictionalized way in his *Matka Joanna od Aniołów* (Mother Joan of the angels), can be related to her sense of guilt relating to her husband and daughters, including her lack of satisfaction with leading a stable family existence and the desires which go against it.<sup>42</sup>

Based on the letters between Jarosław and Anna we can see a subtle, erotic game being played in the early period of their marriage. Anna was keen to play a boyish role in relation to her husband. She would cut her hair short, and he would delight in her slim figure, lacking in any visible signs of female physiognomy.<sup>43</sup> Iwaszkiewicz, years later, claimed their sex life was very satisfying, in spite of his homosexuality. And yet it does not seem to be too idyllic from the very start – more a sort of deep friendship, sustained for long periods through letter writing, because the amount of time they spend apart seems to grow from year to year.<sup>44</sup>

This pattern of withdrawing into their own private spaces, and the tensions this entailed, clearly grows in letters during the period when Iwaszkiewicz takes up a post at a diplomatic mission in Copenhagen. Iwaszkiewiczowa, having tried to live between two homes, gives up on the role of “wife of a diplomat,” which does not suit her. Claiming to be doing it for the good of the children, she decides to stay in Stawisko, but Iwaszkiewicz holds this against her, especially seeing as her letters clearly suggest she too is more and more happy to be living apart from him. He, on the other hand, has no intention of giving up his diplomatic mission, afraid of being forced to go back to what awaits him in Stawisko.<sup>45</sup> Just before her major crisis, Iwaszkiewiczowa has a hard time coping with their daughter Marysia’s illness, which required a sinus operation, and with the growing conflict with her husband, whose demands she fulfils her “wifely duties” become ever more oppressive; his troubles at work might have also played a role.

42 As manifestation of inner conflict, repressed aggression leading to Anna Iwaszkiewicz’s fears of infection.

43 See Iwaszkiewiczowa, *Dzienniki*, 69. Iwaszkiewiczowa writes about her figure following the first pregnancy: “Jarosław thinks I now completely resemble a young boy. Naturally, we joke a lot about this.”

44 Iwaszkiewicz seems to escape to his family in Paris, the way after the war he will escape to Sandomierz or Sicily. Iwaszkiewiczowa keeps far from home, in spite of longing for her daughters and marriage as a calling, spending a lot of time in sanatoriums. They will spend a lot of time apart between 1932 and 1935.

45 He has a hard time coping with his financial troubles at the start of the 1930s and accusations by his wife’s family that he is incompetent.

From his diaries, we learn that his wife's tolerance of his "weaknesses" changes in post-World War II times into a battle which is painful to him.<sup>46</sup> In later years, it becomes even more violent, leading him to feel more isolated in their marriage. His diaries become filled with more and more vocal protests against her accusations and indifference, her nervous condition, various manias and – something also important and meaningful – her increasingly religious sense of devotion.<sup>47</sup>

One could posit the theory that Iwaszkiewiczowa – in denying herself the right to be herself, refuting the freedom to express herself and her sexuality – seems to, in her marriage to a homosexual artist, at first project upon him the creative and homosexual desires she denies within herself. Identifying with him and, therefore, at first satisfying her desires in his person, she denies herself their realization when the complex of the punishing superego takes charge at the moment when the consciousness is filled with them; and later she attempts to take these pleasures away also from her husband.

According to the poet's own testimony, his wife over the years develops an ever more patronizing attitude towards his art and lifestyle, condemning both these spheres of his activities through her religious beliefs. In notes from 1949, we find mentions of "Hania causing arguments and her religious fervor,"<sup>48</sup> her thoughts of separation,<sup>49</sup> descriptions of her as "insufferable day to day to the point of impossibility,"<sup>50</sup> or that "she is struggling so and all of us along with her."<sup>51</sup> Iwaszkiewicz thinks that ever since her time of mental crisis, his wife never truly recovered, referring to her at one point as the one who was once Anna.

In subsequent diary volumes, this topic is permanently present, concluding with a description of his wife as she rests in her coffin in 1979: "She was severe, her lips drawn tight as if castigating the world around her, dismissing me and life which was so beautiful, and yet she considered a failure."<sup>52</sup>

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46 We do not know when this change happens, because apart from his early and war years, the writer only started keeping a diary in 1949.

47 See, e.g., Iwaszkiewicz, *Dzienniki 1911–1955*, 298, 308, 328, 364, 406, 466, 495, 499, 508, 520, 529, 536, 696.

48 Iwaszkiewicz, *Dzienniki 1956–1963*, 286.

49 Ibid., 298.

50 Iwaszkiewicz, *Dzienniki 1911–1955*, 406.

51 Iwaszkiewicz, *Dzienniki 1956–1963*, 496.

52 Iwaszkiewicz, *Dzienniki 1964–1980*, 617.

Much has of course been written on the subject of Anna Iwaszkiewiczowa's original and deep religiousness,<sup>53</sup> and her moral stance during WWII was commendable, yet I would not underestimate Iwaszkiewicz's "dispassionate insight," which finds its confirmation in statements made by other people.<sup>54</sup> As an agnostic, he judges not so much "by appearances," as – in line with the Gospels – "by the fruits borne" and sees in his wife's religiousness a masochistic and thanatic component, something which became worse as the years went by, and which was especially noticeable during her psychotic episodes in the 1930s. Anna Iwaszkiewicz has access to mystical ecstasies, mostly when young, but as the years go by she experiences her religiousness as a curse of (self) chastisement, a feeling of guilt caused by sins committed against the family, that are known only to her and apparently unforgivable to her mind (which could be associated with her dissatisfaction with her husband, or else with her mourning the rejected Maria). In this sense, the way she sees God can above all include very severe and punishing Freudian superego, which she herself becomes for her husband.

### **Glossa – Denial of Homosexuality Versus Feminine Fetishism**

It might be an interesting contribution to our understanding of homosexuality, and also of Anna Iwaszkiewicz's depression, to look at Judith Butler's considerations of the innately homosexual character of the relations between small girls and their mothers – their first object of delightful desire – and female melancholy, which according to her is related to the impossibility of working through the loss of the mother as an object of adoration by adult women, connected with a cultural forbidding of representations of love between women.<sup>55</sup>

Anna Iwaszkiewicz's mother left her husband for another man, when her daughter was two years old, and was never allowed to see her child again, in spite of her attempts to do so. The daughter bore ill-feelings towards her mother, as if unaware of the role of the family in this matter. Her mother was the great Other in Anna's life – having abandoned her husband and child for

53 See, e.g., Tomasz Burek, "Inna i ta sama," in *Stawisko*, ed. Alina Brodzka et al., 5–13; Mitzner, *Hania i Jarosław*. According to Mitzner, who idealized Iwaszkiewiczowa's religiousness, it was this faith which protected her from mental crises. The researcher neutralizes in this way her neurotic personality, showing instead the Iwaszkiewicz marriage as a battle by a religious wife for morale and her husband's faith.

54 Cf. Kirchner, "Stłumiona."

55 On Butler's idea of women's melancholy, cf. Joanna Mizielińska, *Płeć, ciało, seksualność. Od feminizmu do teorii queer* (Kraków: Universitas, 2006).

the sake of a “romantic folly,” she was perceived to be a “fallen madwoman.” During her stay in Beaulieu in 1926, something else had a deep impact on her future fate: she had to then think of her own choice – choosing herself and her own “Otherness” in her romantic union with Morska, meaning allowing herself to define that relationship as a romantic one, which had a key, if not the most important, place in her future plans.

Morska’s decision to change her plans and not visit Beaulieu that April was for Anna a huge blow. She recalls: “I remember how in that moment, as banal as it might sound, I felt the ground slipping from beneath my feet, as if I was falling into some sort of abyss.”<sup>56</sup> That same day, almost running out of her friend’s apartment, she meets her mother nearby:

By a strange sort of coincidence, on the corner of Three Crosses Square, I met my mother, that odd woman whose attitude towards me I could never understand. She did not notice me and we passed each other by in the darkness, always so far apart.<sup>57</sup>

In choosing the phrase “a strange sort of coincidence,” Anna Iwaszkiewicz betrays the fact that these two women have something in common when it comes to her affections: Morska seems to resonate for her in some way with the figure of her mother – is similarly fascinating, mysterious, both close and completely distant, both referred to by Anna as “odd/strange.” In the light of what she is planning to do with her life, the mother might seem to be a *doppelgänger* of the daughter. Thus Anna shuts herself off in feminine melancholy, which externalizes what she has lost as her own fetishized femininity: she tries to fulfil her womanly duties without fail and convinces herself that the only correct way for her to express her own creativity is through motherhood:

Motherly love devours women, all that which is in them warmest, most noble, a love which creates a certain sort of miracle – allowing them to reach instantly, with great ease, the highest form of human virtue – the ability to sacrifice the self, to deny one’s own personal happiness. This is why aside from this great creation, women can make nothing more. [...] They have to give the child their time, otherwise they cannot fulfil their duties, and in relation to children our obligations are boundless; we must give to them everything without reservations.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Iwaszkiewiczowa, *Dzienniki*, 135.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 135.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 205.

The remarkable person that Anna Iwaszkiewiczowa was turns out, if the above interpretation is convincing, to be a moving example of the fate of a woman who allowed herself to be destroyed by fears flowing from an externalized cultural animosity towards the pursuit of female pleasure. Also that – and mostly that – which they can experience with other women or by becoming artists.

*Translation: Marek Kazmierski*

## Abstract

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**Katarzyna Nadana-Sokołowska**

THE INSTITUTE OF LITERARY RESEARCH OF THE POLISH ACADEMY OF SCIENCES

*Anna Iwaszkiewiczowa: Fear of Writing as Fear of...?*

This text is focused on interpreting the case of Anna Iwaszkiewiczowa – a talented “writer’s wife” married to the homosexual Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz. Iwaszkiewiczowa in her diary revealed her great desire to create and love another woman, and at the same time – she denied herself these two great passions, in order to devote herself to marriage and motherhood, which in line with her conservative views were for her the only real lifestyle options for women of the time. The author tries to show that, contrary to existing interpretations, these two acts of self-denial should be treated as interrelated: the diary and letters Anna Iwaszkiewicz wrote seem to suggest that she is afraid of artistic enterprise, because to her mind it is in the case of women evidence of sexual deviancy. The author of this text tries to prove the thesis that in the first stage of her marriage Iwaszkiewiczowa projects her creative longings and homosexuality upon her husband, thereby fulfilling her own needs, and in the second stage of her marriage she surrenders to the pressure exerted by her own superego, which shapes her religious fervor: one which demands ruthless rejection of (forbidden) delights, both from her and from her husband. The author sees this masochistic form of religious feeling as related to Iwaszkiewiczowa’s “unacceptable” drives and depression.

## Keywords

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Anna Iwaszkiewicz, Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz, creativity, homosexuality, psychoanalysis

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Grace Pundyk

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## Reading the Invisible: Letters Between the Living and the Dead

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DOI: 10.18318/td.2020.en.1.17 | ORCID: 0000-0002-9156-5757

I knew, when I found this small package in my father's belongings, what it contained. There is no manifest reason how I should have known; my father rarely spoke about his Polish past, and that included his mother, and I had spent a childhood not questioning this familial gap and an immigrant father outwardly bent on trying to forget the events that had impacted his life prior to his arrival in Australia. And yet, when I found these items, wrapped together like a memory held tight, I knew. "Here she is." I still recall speaking these words as I unfolded each page of her letters. Brittle, thin sheets of paper filled with tiny, inked words that bled through to the other sides that were equally filled with line after line after line of writing. In Polish. A language I did not understand.

Eva Hoffman would describe this "knowing" as having grown up with the uncanny, that unknown yet intuited trace of a haunted generational inscription.<sup>1</sup> Even so, what I was unprepared for, when I finally had the letters translated, was the heartache my grandmother's words generated.

There were only four letters: three written by my grandmother, and the fourth recounting the events that

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**Grace Pundyk** is

an artist, author, playwright and independent scholar based in Melbourne, Australia. Grace undertook her doctoral research at the University of Melbourne, and utilized a range of creative and scholarly disciplines to interrogate the intergenerational impact of the "unspeakable" traumas of a past war, and the perceived limitations inherent to "writing trauma." Publications include *The Honey Trail* (2010), *Sons of Sindbad: The Photographs* (2006) and the play *Steppe: a Journey of Unforgetting* (2018). She is currently engaged in postdoctoral research, utilizing Australiana textile souvenirs "Made in Poland" to explore notions of women's creaturely containment.

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1 Eva Hoffman, "The Long Afterlife of Loss," in *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates*, ed. Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 411.



led to her deportation and death in a Soviet work camp some time in the 1940s. The letters are not happy testimonies. They expose, in both what is written and not written, the tragic story of a woman – my grandmother – disappeared, absent, silenced. They reveal a history long suppressed – briefly, Stalin's World War Two invasion and occupation of Poland's eastern borderlands, the so-called Kresy, and the "erasure" of its population and culture. They are representative of how family secrets and wounds continue to resonate well and truly beyond their immediate occurrence and the difficulties inherent in surmounting such wounds. And, in their appearance, they demonstrate how haunting can manifest when the traumatic is not appropriately addressed.

The fact that these items are now in my possession is, I believe, no coincidence. (And the irony of the word "possession" does not escape me; I am also the one these ghostly artifacts continue to possess.) It is an ontological haunting that can, in part, be contextualized within the corporeal sphere of gender. After all, as Elizabeth Grosz writes, "Every body is marked by the history and specificity of its existence,"<sup>2</sup> but "one and the same message, inscribed on a male and female body, does not always or even usually mean the same thing, or result in the same text."<sup>3</sup>

Until finding these items I knew very little about my grandmother or the history that has impacted our family. There are various reasons for this – reasons that not only point to my father's silence, which I now understand as a Derridean "failure to mourn," but also due to wider silencing in both societal and political spheres. Norman Davies, for example, attributes this to Second World War's "Allied scheme of history,"<sup>4</sup> to which Stalin was aligned and about which we "remember" this particular war as one fought against Hitler and Nazism and marked by the horror of the Holocaust.

While it is not within the scope of this chapter to offer an in-depth analysis of this history, a brief discussion is still necessary in order to provide some context to the letters, and the critical analysis that follows.

### Some History

My grandmother, Zofia Pundyk, was just one of an estimated 300,000 to 1.2 million<sup>5</sup> Poles deported by Stalin to prisons and camps across Soviet

2 Elizabeth Grosz. *Volatile Bodies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 142.

3 Ibid., 156.

4 Norman Davies, *Europe: A History* (London: Pimlico, 1997), 40.

5 The number of deportees is still highly debated. The number is believed to vary due to "official but probably incomplete Soviet data." See, for example, Timothy Snyder, *Stalin and Europe: Imitation and Domination, 1928–1953* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 108.

Russia between 1940 and 1941. This event – the deportations – transpired as a result of an alliance between Stalin and Hitler. These men had, prior to Hitler's invasion of Poland on 1 September 1939, which triggered the Second World War, taken it upon themselves via a secret protocol – the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact – to “divvy up” Poland; Hitler would take the west and Stalin the east.

This invasion saw people displaced, deported, and murdered, homes and land appropriated, possessions stolen, currency canceled and replaced, education and language re-mastered, religion forbidden, governments exiled, borders shifted, ideologies enforced, and a new Polish diaspora born.

A large proportion of the deportees were women and children,<sup>6</sup> and had done nothing wrong except to be married or related to a man considered a threat to the Soviet regime. Whom did the Soviet's consider a threat? According to Katherine Jolluck in her research on Polish women exiled in Soviet Russia, categories included: “army officer, soldier, government official, administrative elite, forester, gamekeeper, railroad worker, policeman, large land owner, independent farmer, military settler, and legal expert.”<sup>7</sup> I also add to this list, teachers, university professors, writers, artists and medical practitioners. In addition, those who identified themselves as “peasants,” that is, poor farming folk with no connection to any elite or the military, were also deported. “Little mattered of a woman's own individuality,” writes Jolluck, once it was determined that her male relatives were “enemies of the people.”<sup>8</sup> However, it is worth noting that this is not entirely correct: thousands of women identified as “prostitutes” were also deported.<sup>9</sup>

“Of all the deportees,” Tadeusz Piotrowski writes, “their fate was the same wherever they were sent: slave labor in exchange for the barest necessities of life. And they died by the thousands, or rather by tens of thousands of cold, hunger, and disease.”<sup>10</sup> As for the women, Jolluck adds, they “endured

6 Around 55 per cent of the Polish deportees to Siberia and Soviet Central Asia were women. See Bonnie G. Smith in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Women in World History: 4 Volume Set* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 470.

7 Katherine Jolluck, *Exile & Identity: Polish Women in the Soviet Union during World War II* (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh University Press, 2002), 23.

8 Ibid., 99.

9 Beria's directive of 20 March 1940 states that “In addition, 2,000–3,000 prostitutes are subject to deportation.” Sourced from, Wojciech Materski, *Katyn: A Crime without Punishment* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 153.

10 Tadeusz Piotrowski, *The Polish Deportees of World War II: Recollection of Removal to the Soviet Union and Dispersal Throughout the World* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2004), 8.

physically debilitating conditions and treatment. [...] Some [...] faced sexual abuse or the prospect of forced prostitution for survival.”<sup>11</sup>

The Second World War deportations, which it must be noted were not exclusive to the Poles but included, to name only a few, Ukrainians, Belarusians, Lithuanians, Estonians, Latvians, Finns, and Jews, while following an already established trajectory,<sup>12</sup> were unprecedented. The monikers given the deportees – “enemy of the people” and “enemy of the State” – singled them out as other to the State and therefore deserving of being cast out (or abjected); later, during incarceration/exile, Polish deportees, who were singled out by the Soviets as “capitalists” and “bourgeoisie” would also be derided as “Polish dogs,” “Polish whores,” “Polish pigs,” and “Polish Lords.”<sup>13</sup> The psychology behind the deportations points to an attack on the social and ideological beliefs of the individual and the community to which it belongs. Jan Gross, for example, explains the deportations as a totalitarian regime’s method of seizing authority by destroying a society, its institutions, and thus all forms of collective identity.<sup>14</sup>

The conditions under which the deportees lived and worked were, in every way, horrific. However, it is important to note that nowhere in my grandmother’s letters, replete as they are with gaps and silences, is this clearly articulated. This limitation in the written has led me to rely on numerous other accounts to finally understand the extent of the situation. In turn, this has led me to “read” her words in a different light. For example, lines such as “I have no shoes to wear,” or “I’m freezing cold,” or “My leg is still hurting so I can’t work and this is the worst, because one needs something to keep one alive,” take on an entirely different meaning when read alongside survivor accounts, such as Jolluck outlines:

Most women toiled twelve to fourteen hours per day [...] many spent a great deal of time walking to and from the work site [...] Few possessed proper footwear; after several months of exile many went barefoot [even “during the fury of a Siberian snowstorm”]. [...] Hungry and weak, many women collapsed on the road. [...] Once they arrived at the work site, the exiles were exhorted to work harder. Women made and handled bricks bare-handed, and field workers, lacking shovels,

<sup>11</sup> Jolluck, *Exile*, xix.

<sup>12</sup> There is a long history of Poles exiled to Siberia.

<sup>13</sup> Jolluck, *Exile*, 145.

<sup>14</sup> Jan Gross, *Revolution from Abroad: The Soviet Conquest of Poland’s Western Ukraine and Western Belorussia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).

dug with sticks or their hands. Mines filled with deadly gases [...] and in winter, workers felled trees while standing in snow up to their waists.<sup>15</sup>

Certainly, the silence surrounding this history has shaped the ways in which I have approached this research. And, as custodial progeny of this traumatic, yet unknown familial past, it also exposed me to the complexities inherent to second generational witnessing. For, as Eva Hoffman identifies, how is it possible to even begin to witness that which I never had a chance to know?<sup>16</sup> Even so, this question, although valid, is something of a trick. For the reality is that I have always had a “relationship” with my grandmother: long before finding these objects I was tasked with being the carrier of her name, and thus, in a way, her memory. When considered in relation to notions of second generational inheritance of trauma, this unasked-for matronymic responsibility for the dead can be viewed as having grown up with the uncanny. By rights I should have “known” my Polish grandmother; her memory should have been celebrated and shared and cherished within the family unit. Instead, it was isolated to my middle name, like an uncanny “honorific mantle [...] draped around my shoulders,”<sup>17</sup> not where it could be recalled all the time, but where it could remain, mostly silent yet still familiar.

### Witnessing and Translation – An Ethics of Responsibility

A major impediment to this research has been in the fact that I do not understand Polish; the rich material of Polish scholarship, testimonies, documentaries, literary works, films, and the like, on the deportations and other subjects is simply unavailable to me. So, too, in not understanding Polish, I have had to rely on translations to interpret the words my grandmother has written. These translations, as a secondary source, have become my primary source, thus potentially subverting any originary meaning.

Additionally, the letters are not intended for me; they were written to Zosia's husband, my grandfather, and as such any other reader is not privy to the nuances, the intimacies, the memories, or even the possible dysfunctions that some of her words might suggest. Then there are the many absences in her text, the what-she-doesn't-say that prevent the reader from gaining a clearer picture of her experiences, and her life.

<sup>15</sup> Jolluck, *Exile*, 62–63.

<sup>16</sup> Hoffman, “Afterlife,” 410.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

It is also important to note that this “limitation” is not exclusive to language. It can also be found in the temporal, cultural and geographical distances that exist between the one absent/unknown (and long past/passed) and the one present tasked with understanding this “scene of inheritance.”<sup>18</sup>

Even so, it is worth asking: is this lack an actual limitation (as in an impediment) or does it instead encourage the original to “exceed its own limitation”?<sup>19</sup> This is not only relevant to concepts of translation and the task of the translator, but also suggests an inter-relationship at play: can one exist without the other? Who is speaking? And who and what is being silenced? This is of particular significance where intergenerational trauma and identity is concerned, and also exposes the complexities inherent to notions of witness and testimony.

The very notion of these two words is something of a paradox. Both words (and concepts) find meaning in the Latin *testis* and *testimonium* – “witness,” “evidence,” “proof.” In this definition, a level of certainty, of truth, is generally understood. However, this claim to certitude must be questioned. As Derrida rightly points out, “Testimony resists the test of translation” and therefore risks not being able to deliver its meaning.<sup>20</sup> Nor can bearing witness lay claim to “proof.”<sup>21</sup> Rather, the witness is located within an “irreducible sense-perceptual dimension of presence and past-presence,” swearing only that “I saw, I heard, I touched, I felt, I was present.”<sup>22</sup>

While my grandmother can only ever be the “only true witness” of her experiences, “by definition [she] can no longer bear witness, confirm or refute the testimony of [her letters].”<sup>23</sup> Therefore, as the one now responsible for bearing witness to her experience, as the one tasked with the responsibility of “translation,” the challenge has been to be as sensitive to the gaps, the what-can’t-be-known, as trying to find the answers in order to understand.

By their very existence, the letters are also (paradoxical) sites of memory, both in their materiality and textuality: they are at once present (I have them in my possession and can hold, touch, and see them – that is, they are objects

18 Jacques Derrida, *The Ear of the Other: Otobiography, Transference, Translation*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Schocken Books, 1985), 104.

19 Bella Brodzki, *Can These Bones Live?* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 2.

20 Jacques Derrida, *Sovereignties in Question: The Poetics of Paul Celan* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 69.

21 As per Derrida: “Bearing witness is not proving.” *Sovereignties*, 75.

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid., 90.

of the sensible) yet convey that which is past; and they are both infused with absence and presence.

Therefore, while I can never be fully witness to “what the first witness says she [...] saw,” in that I was absent and therefore “did not see it and never will see it,”<sup>24</sup> by the very fact that I am the one in possession of these artifacts, I am present and thus do engage in a kind of seeing. This is not to assume knowledge gained through vision. The very notion of “eyewitness” in relation to the letters, its author and its reader/s is obfuscated and speaks to claims that it is “the silences and the blindness inherent in the event that [...] make eyewitness testimony impossible.”<sup>25</sup>

### Unmaking the Victim's World and Destroying the Sufferer's Language – A Critical Analysis

Without doubt, Zosia's letters are constitutive of trauma and the impact of a “regime”<sup>26</sup> exercising power. The words my grandmother wrote reflect the multitude of factors outside her control. So, too, do these words and their external determiners locate her as victim and mirror how oppression, in its various forms, compromised her sense of agency and ability to act. In this way, the letters can be seen as representing the testimony of one who has become “othered by oppression and domination.”<sup>27</sup> This is not only manifest in Zosia's writing; her writing, in its performativity, is also a product of this oppression and domination.<sup>28</sup>

Clearly, a multi-layered censorship is at play in the letters: while research has shown that correspondence from “prisoners”<sup>29</sup> was subjected to censorship from both the Soviets and the British,<sup>30</sup> it appears that Zosia knew this

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>25</sup> Kelly Oliver, *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 2001), 143.

<sup>26</sup> I use this term not only in relation to Stalin and the Soviets, but also to the cultural regime at this time, which I see as shaping women's existence.

<sup>27</sup> Oliver, *Witnessing*, 93.

<sup>28</sup> That is, the letters would not have been written otherwise.

<sup>29</sup> Technically, the women and children deported to work camps were not “prisoners.” That is, they received no sentence and were not in jail. However, the reality was very different. Deportees were not free; were forced to engage in hard labor; and to take on Soviet citizenship, among other things.

<sup>30</sup> As explained by Zofia Małachek in the film *A Forgotten Odyssey: The Untold Story of 1,700,000 Poles Deported to Siberia in 1940*: “We were told that when we read the letters

and chose to be selective about what she wrote. In all three of her letters she never once writes the words “Russian,” or “Soviet,” or, for that matter, any words that directly point to her captivity – such as “guard,” “hard-labor,” “work-gang,” and the like (despite claims that suggest otherwise) – or which link her husband to the Polish military, thus potentially causing him, and his family, harm. In one of the letters, she hints at this censorship at play when she writes: “I don’t know if this letter will reach you, because I’ve written so much.” In another instance, and by way of explanation for not writing to her son, she simply writes, “I’m afraid I couldn’t answer him, however much I wanted to.”

Some of her words also suggest a censorship inherent to gender: on three occasions, she writes to her husband words to the effect of “I’m still your wife as you know me.”<sup>31</sup> Again, research suggests that although sexual abuse and forced prostitution was common among women deported to Soviet Russia, among Polish women this was rarely admitted to or, at most, alluded to only as something that was narrowly avoided or that happened to another. Katherine Jolluck states that this kind of censorship was due to a powerful and interconnected relationship with a Polish woman’s honor and that of the nation, known as *Matka Polka*.<sup>32</sup>

While I can never know whether my grandmother was subjected to this kind of abuse, I view her constant insistence on and pleas over her “chastity” and “faithfulness” as a kind of gendered performativity inscribing her identity, one that was maintained even in the deplorable situation she was forced into. So, too, her “apologies” and justifications for requests of assistance from her husband: “I’m freezing cold and that’s why I sent you a telegram asking you for some financial assistance because I had no choice,” she writes in the second letter. Then, “Just imagine what I’d have done if you hadn’t sent the

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[from Poles in Soviet Russia], which reflected in any way badly on Russia, we were either to cut or erase such passages. We did not want to do it because all this was true. But after our censorship, the letters were also censored by the British, and if we didn’t do it, they were very upset. They found it hard to believe. For instance, when we told them that [the Soviets] came and took you away from your homes, they would say: »But why did you let them in? You shouldn’t have let them in.« [laughs]” See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ILZ3NWiWMVg>

31 There are three instances where she writes as much: “I’m still your wife as you know me”; “You’ll find me the same woman as you left me”; and, “For my part I vow once again that you’ll find me the same as you left me.”

32 “For Polish women, the symbol of *Matka Polka*, virtuous, self-sacrificing, and patriotic, remained the model by which their roles in the family and the nation were valued and judged.” Jolluck, *Exile*, 98.

money," she hints in the third letter. And, as if spurred on by the "financial assistance" that he does send, she apologetically asks him to send her some much-needed items:

If possible, please send me a parcel, because some women have already got parcels from there and parcels are on their way to some others. I'm desperate for underpants, stockings, undershirts, at least one, a warm bathroom gown, any shoes on completely low, flat heels size 39, whatever you get as I have nothing to wear. I ask for bigger shoes on flat heels because my feet are hurting me so that I'll be more comfortable walking in such. And if you get some tea, coffee, cacao, soap, maybe even a can of meat, at least a little bit of each so that you can help me survive. Please don't be angry that I'm bothering you like this but these are all necessities and the committee advised me to ask you because it'd be easy for you to find it there [...] I'll be very grateful to you for this, as I have nothing to wear.

In reading this passage, even when taking into consideration possible cultural and generational differences, it is difficult to not question the kind of relationship that existed between this woman and her husband. Lines such as "Please don't be angry that I'm bothering you like this," as well as what appears to be a need to justify her requests for assistance – "because some women have already got parcels from there," and "the committee advised me to ask you because it'd be easy for you to find it there" – are perplexing, given the circumstances she was in.

Of course, it is also important to question how much her circumstances impacted her sense of agency, and how this could have come through in her writing. For example, it is clear in her letters that she viewed her pre-deportation role as mother and wife as meaningful; as a deportee to Soviet Russia, however, she became meaning-less.<sup>33</sup>

The preceding extracts are just a small example of how external determiners infected the written word. But the impact of the spatial and temporal is also revealed in other ways, such as in the materiality and formatting of the letters. For example, the writing in the first letter, written before deportation, is well spaced and on larger sheets of paper, with space remaining unfilled (Fig. 1). In contrast, the two letters written during captivity tell a different story. Both letters are written on smaller sheets of paper that appear to be torn from something akin to a child's school book. The identical tears suggest an audible and visual representation of the rupture between what once

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33 One of the lines is particularly telling: "Until then, I'd felt like a useless man whose life was not needed anymore."



was and what had since become. In these letters, each page is literally filled with text, both horizontal and vertical – and often in tiny script – along the margins and edges of the paper (Fig. 2). The final line in the third letter (the last of her letters in my possession) is prescient. It reads: “I would write more, but I have no more paper left.”

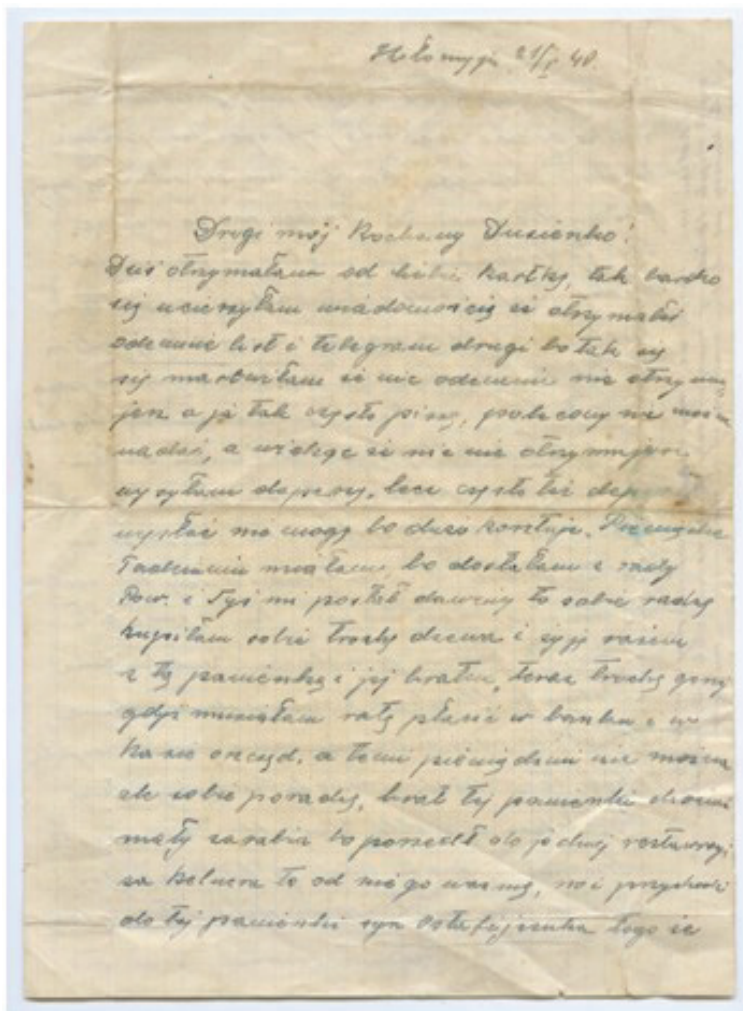


Figure 1. Page 1, Letter 1.

bo tak niezwykle ma staro, jak on sobie tego nigdy  
 nie pisał a ma niech by znalazł się w tym miejscu  
 i to by było dla niego wielką radością. Tędyż w tym  
 roku, a nie w tym, który jest teraz, bo w tym roku  
 nie mogłem mu odpisać, mimo tego, że w tym roku  
 miałem czas i miejsce, i to jest. Czyżby nie mógł  
 od razu napisać, jak to jest, tak by było dla niego  
 wielką radością. W tym roku, a nie w tym, który jest  
 teraz, bo w tym roku nie mogłem mu odpisać, mimo  
 tego, że w tym roku miałem czas i miejsce, i to jest.  
 Czyżby nie mógł od razu napisać, jak to jest, tak by  
 było dla niego wielką radością. W tym roku, a nie  
 w tym, który jest teraz, bo w tym roku nie mogłem  
 mu odpisać, mimo tego, że w tym roku miałem czas  
 i miejsce, i to jest. Czyżby nie mógł od razu napisać,  
 jak to jest, tak by było dla niego wielką radością.  
 W tym roku, a nie w tym, który jest teraz, bo w tym  
 roku nie mogłem mu odpisać, mimo tego, że w tym  
 roku miałem czas i miejsce, i to jest. Czyżby nie  
 mógł od razu napisać, jak to jest, tak by było dla  
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 jest teraz, bo w tym roku nie mogłem mu odpisać,  
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 by było dla niego wielką radością. W tym roku, a nie  
 w tym, który jest teraz, bo w tym roku nie mogłem  
 mu odpisać, mimo tego, że w tym roku miałem czas  
 i miejsce, i to jest. Czyżby nie mógł od razu napisać,  
 jak to jest, tak by było dla niego wielką radością.

Figure 2. Page 2, Letter 3.

### Effacing Time, Effacing Place

It is not only the paper and this text-as-written that conveys the changes to her situation. The formatting of the dates in each of the letters also exposes the precarious interplay between the writing, reading, representation

and interpretation of time. For instance, while all letters follow the “proper” formatting of writing the date and place in the top, right-hand corner, only the first letter is complete (i.e., gives the place/day/month/year) – “Kolomyja, 21 January 1940.” In the final two letters, the year is omitted (i.e., “[illegible], 26 December,” and “Semipalatinsk, 6 February”).

I have always interpreted this omission as akin to a suspension of time and of hope lost. If anything, the omission says more about remembering. Even so, for the reader this omission still confounds. In a way, it can be seen as speaking to the problems inherent to the untitled. As Geoffrey Bennington explains, “Inscribed on the outer edge of the limit or frame that circumscribes the text [...] the title identifies the text, and [...] permits one to talk about it in its absence.”<sup>34</sup> Thus, by omitting the year/s from the date (that is, the “outer edge” which frames the text of a letter) ascribing the “events of the text”<sup>35</sup> to any specific historical date becomes problematic. In effect, it enables a porosity to the text’s year-less borders and thus opens them to interpretation.

When I first had the letters translated, I assumed that they followed a chronology of around one year. Read as a whole, the letters encourage this.<sup>36</sup> Even after engaging in further research, or perhaps because of this, and despite evidence in the fourth letter that suggests otherwise, this assumption continued, determining not only how I “read” the letters, but also how I viewed both my grandmother’s situation and her disposition.<sup>37</sup>

However, the fourth letter, written in 1957 by the woman who had been with my grandmother, states:

Together we were forcibly relocated to Kazakhstan where we were made to work in the limestone quarries in temperatures as high as 40 degrees Celsius in summer and -40 degrees in winter. In 1943 we managed to run away from that place to the provincial capital where it was extremely difficult to find a place to live. I made a big effort though and found a little room we all shared with the late Mrs. Pundyk. She got a much lighter job there in a stocking-making factory.

34 Geoffrey Bennington and Jacques Derrida, *Derridabase* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), 242.

35 *Ibid.*, 250.

36 That is, the first letter was written 21 January 1940; she was deported on 13 April 1940; the second letter was written 26 December 1941; and the third on 6 February 1942.

37 I am ashamed to admit that in the earlier stages of this research, I had on occasion viewed her words as manipulative and overly dramatic, and her disposition as stereotypical of the victim. This exposes not only my own ignorance but also a deeper conditioning generated by the silence (and lies and resulting invalidation) surrounding this particular history.

Much of this correlates with information in my grandmother's second letter, where she writes:

In September I moved from the kolkhoz to this town with Likierska and Jasinska, because it's easier to find something here and there are more of our own people. But how can it comfort me, Tadziuniu?

But is the year given – 1943 – correct? It does not correspond with the well-documented and more popularly known narrative, which began with the 1941 “amnesty” and ended when the Soviets closed their borders in 1942.<sup>38</sup> Survivor testimonies often cite 1941 as the year they learned they were no longer legally required to engage in forced labor, and thus left workcamps and prisons to make the long journey across Soviet Russia to refugee camps in Iran. Separate to this, scholar Andrzej Szukecki identified two main “official” evacuations – from March 24 until early April 1942, and from 10 August to 1 September 1942.

With these “facts” in mind, coupled with my own prejudices/ignorance, I had concluded that this woman had made a mistake; instead of three years, these women had spent around six months to a year in forced labor before making their way to “the provincial capital.” This reading of their experiences demonstrates the problems inherent to aligning the “represented world” of a dominant history with that of a lesser-known “real world” narrative. For it is important to note that these oft-cited timelines and testimonies not only overlook another reality, but are also not a given: this particular (hi)story is filled with gaps, silences, and indeterminate and conflicting claims.<sup>39</sup>

As Jolluck explains, “Some Poles received no notification of the amnesty, while others were barred from leaving their place of exile because local authorities denied them the documents necessary for departure and

38 The amnesty, known as the Sikorski–Maisy Pact, was signed on 30 July 1941. It was, on paper at least, aimed at “all Polish citizens who are presently deprived of their freedom on the territory of the USSR either as prisoners of war or on other adequate grounds.” Although the main thrust of the “amnesty” was to establish a Polish army that would fight alongside the Soviets against the Nazis, the amnesty went beyond the definition of that army in that it saved the lives of at least 117,000 Polish citizens, those whom it evacuated in 1942.” See, Jean C. Bingle, “Labor for Bread: The Exploitation of Polish Labor in the Soviet Union During World War II.” (PhD diss., West Virginia University, 1991), 183.

39 It must be acknowledged, too, that dismissing this woman's claim as a “mistake” plays into the long-established erasure and denial of this silenced history. The confusion over “facts” is also demonstrated by the lack of clarity that surrounds this time – both then and now.

travel.”<sup>40</sup> Women faced even further restrictions – at the hands of both Soviet and Polish authorities. Jean Bingle recounts that those women sent to “the Arctic gold mines and hard labor camps of Kolyma, were not permitted to leave at all. Those still alive were most likely “prison wives” or official concubines and could not leave by virtue of their plight.”<sup>41</sup> In addition, she states, in order to be eligible for the amnesty, “it was important to be ethnically Polish and male,” and “Polish women, while ethnically Polish, were not considered to be a critical component of the Polish army.”<sup>42</sup> Bingle’s claim is not only supported by countless women survivor testimonies that attributed their escape to “strangers” (men) providing them with the necessary documents. A “Confidential Report” written in 1942 by a British official monitoring the situation from his base in Uzbekistan, also reveals as much:

“Some of these people are in prison, others in camps of compulsory work, others still, – families, chiefly without men are expelled to distant localities without the right of leaving their place of residence. They stay bewildered with what has happened to them, without any financial means, without assistance and without food.”<sup>43</sup>

The issue of forced Soviet citizenship – or passportisation – also impacted many. This was carried out in a number of different ways and periods. For instance, Bingle explains that “after the incorporation of Polish territories into the USSR in October 1939, all people in those areas were considered Soviet citizens by Soviet law and were forced to accept Soviet passports.” However, Paulina Wat also states that “the dramatic campaign to force Poles to accept Soviet citizenship [...] was carried out by the NKVD in March 1943 in Kazakhstan and wherever there were groups of Poles who had been released from

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<sup>40</sup> Jolluck, *Exile*, xv.

<sup>41</sup> Bingle, “Labor,” 155.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 156. However, it is important to also note that the “official” line was that family members of soldiers were also eligible. Whether these women and children were aware of this or granted permission to leave by Soviet authorities is also important to consider, especially given my grandmother’s supposed “eligibility” as the wife of someone in the military police.

<sup>43</sup> Colonel Hulls, “Confidential Report to the Military Attache in Cairo, 18 June 1942,” 3. Sourced from, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Poland website, <http://www.msz.gov.pl/resource/5a95b36c-12e7-4c27-a794-aaab2a886c2a:JCR>

prisons, camps, and places of exile.”<sup>44</sup> The pressure to accept citizenship for deportees was becoming “increasingly brutal” and, in some cases, resulted in interrogations, beatings, and imprisonment.<sup>45</sup> And, despite this pressure, the decision to accept or not would have been tormenting: while Jolluck explains that “apartments and jobs [loosely described] were only made available to those who accepted Soviet citizenship,”<sup>46</sup> Wat points out that “to accept a Soviet passport meant to see an end to what was probably your last hope of returning to Poland.”<sup>47</sup>

These claims do not definitively affirm that the women who wrote these letters fled the work camp in 1943. However, they do correlate with the following correspondence entries. In the second letter, for example, Zosia writes that she now has “a permanent address with [Mrs Likierska?] and Mrs Jasin-ska,” and she also reveals that she has to pay rent: “It’s terribly cold here and I have no shoes to wear, nothing to live off, nothing to pay the rent with or buy firewood.”

Her urgent plea to her husband for a passport and visa, also exposes her helplessness – as a Polish woman reliant on a husband thousands of miles away, as a Polish woman enslaved in Soviet Russia, and as a woman disempowered:

Tadziuniu, my darling, I’ve just learned that you could get me out of here only you’d have to arrange for a passport and visa. I’d wish so much that you could take me out of here by some miracle. You understand me, Dusienko, you may not be able to help me all the time, you understand me, don’t you? Therefore I implore you to take me out of here if at all possible. Other women are trying to get out too, and some are said to have left already. This hope, that you may succeed, is the only thing that keeps me alive.

As a reader of these letters, as one who is trying to piece together and understand something of what happened, of what it was like, it is important to recognize how my own position (as a Western woman living in the twenty-first century, for example) shaped how I interpreted her non-written, absent time. In addition to the limitations my not-knowing imposed on my interpretations, it was also much easier for me to comprehend that these women were

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44 Aleksander Wat, *My Century: The Life of a Polish Intellectual* (New York: New York Review of Books, 2003), 361.

45 Jolluck, *Exile*, 205; Wat, *Century*, 363.

46 Jolluck, 204.

47 Wat, 361.



incarcerated for months, not years; that it had only been months, not years, of waiting for news from their husbands.<sup>48</sup> Of course, reducing the timeline like this is not to diminish an experience that would have been, regardless of how long, abhorrent. What it does reveal are, again, the temporal-spatial complexities of the represented and the real. For the omission of time from her letters encouraged a chronology that fit not only with the more dominant narrative, but also within the safe boundaries engendered by my own understanding of time and place.<sup>49</sup>

But what happens when we challenge those boundaries? When we step outside the safety zone of our own comprehension and consider the incomprehensible? To explore this, I draw on the opening passage of the second letter, dated “[illegible] 26 December.” In this letter, Zosia reveals that she has just received a telegram informing her that her husband and son are alive. It appears, from what she has written, that she has heard nothing from them since her deportation. The letter reveals that she is no longer in the work camp, and is living in “the provincial capital,” Semipalatinsk (as per the information provided in the third and fourth letters). If the year given in the fourth letter – 1943 – is correct, then this second letter would have been written some time then.

This would mean that it has been three years since the women were deported; they would have endured three years of forced labor in a “limestone quarry”<sup>50</sup> and three Siberian winters. Zosia would have had three years of being separated from her family, and country; three years of not knowing if her husband and son were alive; and three years of debilitating deprivation. It would also mean that these women were part of the excluded, the abandoned, the uninformed: the ones who were not evacuated:

You can't imagine what joy your telegram brought me with the news that you're alive and well and that our dearest son is alive too. It lifted my spirits a little as until then I'd felt like a useless man whose life was not needed anymore. You may well imagine me alone among strangers and worried sick not knowing anything about you. It was killing me. I always say that I want or desire nothing else from life than to see you, my love, and our dearest son, to be able to look into your eyes,

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48 This interpretation was also prompted by the inclusion of dates (but not years) in her letters, as well as her admission, in the third letter in my possession that “This is my third letter to you...”

49 That is, I live in a world where connectivity and freedom is a given, and where travel is not only accessible but also fast.

50 As per identified in the fourth letter.

then I could die as I'd want nothing else from life. So when I got this beautiful telegram saying you were fine and so was Staszek I could hardly stand on my feet from happiness, tears dripping from my eyes that good God brought me such joy. All this time I've been in a kolkhoz with other women.

Despite the absence of any "proof"<sup>51</sup> of hardship in this passage, there is no denying the longing, desire and despair that the words convey. Even so, the sense of time remains ambiguous.<sup>52</sup> The omission of the year in the formatting of the date adds to this ambiguity.

It seems no coincidence that this effacement of time<sup>53</sup> corresponds with Zosia's departure from home and family (and nation and culture, etc.). After all, she was in a state of exile, which, as Edward Said explains, is akin to an "unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home, [and where] its essential sadness can never be surmounted."<sup>54</sup> Considered thus, this omission of time in place can be seen as a mark of the trace. The place in which Zosia has "ended up," and from which she is writing, resembles nothing of the place/life she once knew. She has become displaced and dislocated, and articulates this through time. Or, rather, she disarticulates it through an effacement of time.<sup>55</sup>

Do these time-less narratives change if considered within the context of a three-year period (or longer)? While I cannot speak for the writer, I imagine the answer would be "no," for how does one quantify anguish? For the reader, however, a narrative framed within the context of a specific time does impact understanding, as detailed previously. But rather than the words alone taking on a deeper significance, it is the gaps between that also deepen. For it becomes no longer possible to read her three letters as a seamless whole without

51 The notion of "proof" in itself is dubious. That is, if it is not written, or documented, or cannot be aligned with "fact," then does this mean it did not happen? This is yet another paradox generated by the many absences in this text, the what-is-not-written, and invites questions around the notions of proof, testimony and bearing witness.

52 For example, "All this time," the only reference that alludes to time, is vague.

53 The omission is a kind of effacement, of time worn away by time.

54 Edward Said, "The Mind of Winter: Reflection of Life in Exile," *Harper's Magazine* 269 (1984): 49.

55 In this notion of disarticulation, dislocation and displacement, in relation to time and place, I draw on Derrida's ideas, as articulated in *Specters of Marx*, of Hamlet's "the time is out of joint": "time is disarticulated, dislocated, dislodged," etc. Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, transl. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994), 20.



giving pause to all that is not written, and thus all that can never be read, and the possibilities inherent in this yawning gap, the what remains unsaid of “all this time”<sup>56</sup> between the first letter and the second.

### Correspondence and the Inscribed Wound

On the surface of things, as a means of transmitting information, the idea of a letter is obvious. By this I mean that a letter, as a form of correspondence, is instantly recognizable: it follows a particular format; is addressed from one to another; is used to convey a message; and is, usually, reliant on the written language. In this, the letter is both signifier and signified: in its materiality, it is complete, recognizable; there is no ambiguity involved in understanding its function to convey a message.

But what of the actual message *i n s i d e* the words on the page? In the *Grande Encyclopédie du XIX siècle* the entry for “Letter” reads:

A letter is a conversation between people who are absent from one another [...]. To succeed at it, imagine that you are in the presence of whomever you are addressing, that they can hear the sound of your voice and that their eyes are fixed on yours.<sup>57</sup>

The words that stand out for me in this entry – “absent,” “presence,” “voice,” “sound,” “eyes” – resonate on a much deeper level than a simple epistolic engagement. They not only represent so much that is inherent to the letters I am working with; they are also rich with the notion of witnessing.

It is clear from the words my grandmother penned that she is indeed following this nineteenth-century French preamble. “I have both of you before my eyes all the time, constantly see you in my dreams,” she writes in one letter, while in another, “I’d love so much to be with you.” These lines, and many others like them, not only expose her desire to be present with that which is very much absent. They also demonstrate a proactive engagement with the absent via the act of writing. Through her words, she conveys that she sees, that she hears, that she is, or desires to be, in the presence of those familiar-yet-absent loved ones.

In contrast, there is very little indication of any response from those she writes to. The many lines in the letters suggest that this absence was literal:

56 As per the line in the second letter “All this time I’ve been in the kolkhoz with other women.”

57 Roger Chartier et al., *Correspondence: Models of Letter-Writing from the Middle Ages to the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 132.

rather than her letter writing being part of a “conversation between people,” it appears to be one way.

“Couldn’t he write to me or send a telegram?” she writes in reference to the absence of correspondence from her son. Likewise, “I wish so much I could at least see his handwriting.” Then, to her husband: “I’ve written a lot to you and I would write much more if only I knew you get my letters.” And, “This is my third letter to you but I don’t know if you’ve received them.” And, finally, “I was very worried you might not have received anything from me while I keep writing to you so often.”

This is not to infer that she received no word at all from either of these men. For example, there is mention in the first letter of receiving postcards and a letter, and later she learns via telegram that her husband and son are alive.<sup>58</sup> Despite these forms of communication, the lack of the written word from these men is glaring.<sup>59</sup> Even the fourth letter, written by Zosia’s colleague in 1957, also suggests that this act of non-writing was a constant:

Dear Mr Pundyk,

After my niece’s return visiting her mother in London, I learned that you had been most interested in your wife’s life in Siberia and her death. I expected you to write me a letter so I didn’t want to do it first. Now I’ll try to describe to you in short our life and misery that became our lot.

In this act of non-writing, the sadness of this story is compounded further. It adds to the what-is-written and what-is-not-written of Zosia’s traumatic experiences, as exposed through her letters; it widens the gap between words; it raises more questions than it does answers; and, in all of these things, deepens the very woundedness that constitutes this familial narrative. For in this non-response, these words, these letters, remain as is. There is no written reply that heals or salves. The wound gapes.

Viewing this seeming absence as an act of non-writing exposes more my own position than it does the actuality of an unknown past.<sup>60</sup> After all, mail could have gotten lost, and written replies may eventually have been forthcoming. But it is worth remembering that this project is not just located in an unknown past; it seeks to bring “the recognitions of the present to bear not only on our understanding of the past, but also on the effects of the past in the

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58 Though it is not clear if it was her husband who actually sent the telegram.

59 As indicated in her letters.

60 And hence the danger in applying any definitive meaning to what is written.

present.”<sup>61</sup> And in this it is worth acknowledging how these acts of writing/non-writing have impacted *my* understanding: Zosia writes in order to be “saved”; there is no “write” of reply that saves her.

### Writing Beyond the Letter – Other Voices, Other Dead

I have often wondered what else and to whom my grandmother wrote during her ordeal. What would this narrative voice have sounded like? What were her other experiences, separate from the desperate voice of her husband-centric correspondence? It was in this wondering that I chanced upon the diary of Zofia Ptasnik.<sup>62</sup> The parallels with my grandmother are uncanny. Not only did they share the same name; they were educated well-to-do women; were deported on the same date, 13 April 1940; and were deported alone, without family. Both also had only one son, whom they had each sent away to escape the Soviets, and they were sent to forced labor in Kazakhstan, where they eventually both died, their places of burial erased and forgotten.

There are also common elements to both Zosia’s writings that reflect the reality for many of the women deportees: the “absent” men and the very present women; the obsession with food and money; the worry about distant loved ones; the constant illnesses they are plagued with; and the fact that neither had brought enough with them to survive on.

But the differences are also stark. Unlike my grandmother, who it would seem from the letters I have inherited received very little communication from her husband or her son, Ptasnik was in constant receipt of letters and packages from her son and other friends and family members.

Ptasnik’s diary captures the quotidian – from the harrowing nighttime knock on the door and forced eviction, through the traumatic journey to an unknown destination by train, to the day-to-day life of hardship on the steppe. She brings characters to life in these daily entries; creates a poetics of place, of temporality, of historically recognized fact. And, in reading her words, we are also able to witness the beauty inherent to the experience. “The steppe was so wonderful today,” she writes, “I was up at 5am to admire the beautiful sunrise and gather some flowers.”<sup>63</sup>

61 Dora Apel, *Memory Effects, The Holocaust and the Art of Secondary Witnessing* (Piscataway: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 6–7.

62 Zofia Ptasnik, “A Polish Woman’s Daily Struggle to Survive: Her Diary of Deportation, Forced Labor, and Death in Kazakhstan: April 13, 1940 – May 26, 1941,” [www.ruf.rice.edu/~sarmatia/102/221ptas.html](http://www.ruf.rice.edu/~sarmatia/102/221ptas.html).

63 Ibid.

Reading Ptasnik's diary enabled a different understanding of my grandmother's experiences and helped me imagine other possibilities of what lay between the lines I had inherited; beyond a woman's aching and longing, her silencing and loss. In this imagining, though, there is still no happy-ever-after ending. How could there be? This is one of the reasons I found Ptasnik's work so compelling. Like my grandmother, she too did not survive – and, like my grandmother, her writing did. It is also one of the reasons I have found reading survivor memoirs on this subject problematic.

The Russian writer Sergei Lebedev explains the difference between those who survived and those who did not in relation to the Gulag. He writes:

Everything we know about the Gulag we know from the eyewitness accounts of the living, the survivors. But there are also those who will never tell us anything, whose lives are not enough for a plot; they died and that's it. [This constitutes an] invisible, silent side [where] the dead have their own truth, and that is the truth of those who did NOT survive, which is more horrible than any tale of a survivor. In some sense this truth argues with the truth of the survivors, the ones who returned. The dead did not have and will not have the chance to recall, write, reflect; their world is cut off at the Gulag, they will never leave the camp, they are trapped there."<sup>64</sup>

Lebedev's claim is a poignant reminder that Russia is a land where millions remain "unburied."<sup>65</sup> My grandmother, Zofia Pundyk, and the diarist Zofia Ptasnik were also left in this land, without opportunity to recall and reflect on their experiences. Even so, there is an important distinction to make here. Their writing has survived. And in this way the dead have been able to speak to the living.

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<sup>64</sup> Sergei Lebedev, "On Yuri Dmitriev," *Eurozine* (2017), <https://www.eurozine.com/on-yuri-dmitriev/>.

<sup>65</sup> Aleksandr Etkind, *Warped Mourning: Stories of the Undead in the Land of the Unburied* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013), 17.

## Abstract

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**Grace Pundyk**

INDEPENDENT SCHOLAR

*Reading the Invisible: Letters Between the Living and the Dead*

In 2003, upon the death of my father, I found four letters. Three were written by my Polish grandmother – a woman I never knew and who was rarely spoken about – and the other recounted the events that led to her deportation and death in a Soviet work camp in Siberia in the 1940s. The letters are written in Polish, a language I do not understand. Accompanying the letters were a handful of photographs. These items are narratives of trauma: at the very least, they reveal a woman abandoned, homeless, abused and destitute – not only via the what-is-written (and photographed) but also in the what-is-not-written; the unsaid, the silenced, the breath that fills the between. In this instance then, the act of writing, rather than constitutive of a woman's "rebellion" or "emancipation", can be viewed as a futile cry of despair. This chapter explores the methods engaged to reach a deeper understanding of the messages – explicit and implicit – contained in my grandmother's letters. While it will demonstrate how these letters, both in content and materiality, have encouraged a critical response worthy of any literary analysis, it also exposes the fraught complexities inherent to intergenerational witnessing. For, as Eva Hoffman explains, how is it possible to even begin to witness that which I never had a chance to know?

## Keywords

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intergenerational witnessing, deportation, the uncanny, Polish women

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Anna Dżabagina

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## The Mourning Diaries. Hanna Nałkowska's Journal (1942–1945)

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DOI: 10.18318/td.2020.en.1.18 | ORCID: 0000-0001-9807-2114

This paper was written as part of the work on the edition of Hanna Nałkowska's Dziennik 1942–1945, which I prepare within the project "Women Archive: Writing. Continuation" (grant NPRH no. 11H 17 0143 85; head of the project dr hab. Monika Rudaś-Grodzka). Publication is planned for 2022.

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**Z**ofia and Hanna Nałkowska<sup>1</sup> create a unique sisterly duet of artists. Zofia, born in 1884, and Hanna, four years younger, came from a family of a renowned journalist and geographer, Waław Nałkowski, and his wife, Anna, also a geographer and a teacher.<sup>2</sup> The sisters were raised in the spirit of their parents' leftist views and from an early age they were surrounded by the intellectual and artistic elite. From this perspective it comes as no surprise that the sisters' life choices led them to become artists – Zofia became a writer, successful since the debut, while Hanna pursued sculpture, with accomplishment akin to her sister's. Although during the interwar period they were equally popular, history was kind only to Zofia's work; while she remained one of the most important modernist writers of the twentieth century, Hanna's work sank into oblivion. Magdalena Kasa, who recently undertook the work to restore the memory of Nałkowska's sculptures, states that Hanna's

### Anna Dżabagina

– PhD, currently a Research Assistant at the Centre for French Culture and Francophone Studies (UW). Recently defended a thesis entitled "Polish-German works and reception of Eleonore Kalkowska (1883–1937)" (written as a part of a "Diamond Grant," under the supervision of prof. Lena Magnone), soon to be published by słowo/obraz terytoria publishing house. She is collaborating with the Women's Archive research group and the "Polish Drama. Reactivation" project (IBL PAN). Contact: anna.dzabagina@gmail.com.

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1 *Primo voto* Bickowa, *secundo voto* Stefanowicz.

2 Hanna Kirchner, *Nałkowska albo życie pisane* (Warszawa: Grupa Wydawnicza Foksal, 2015), 11–13.

output “has been overshadowed by the scientific work of her father, Waclaw, and her sister’s literary career.”<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, almost all of Hanna’s pre-war sculptures were destroyed during the Second World War.

The case is similar for journals of the two sisters. In fact, Zofia Nałkowska’s diaries need no introduction. Due to Hanna Kirchner’s monumental edition, the journals, kept between 1899 and 1954, have permanently entered into the literary canon and received much attention from scholars, who consider the document to be one of the most important diaristic projects in Polish culture. Zofia’s journal has been repeatedly analyzed on its own<sup>4</sup> or compared with the works of other diarists like Witold Gombrowicz, Leopold Tyrmand, Maria Dąbrowska, or Anaïs Nin.<sup>5</sup> Even a brief reference to works devoted to Zofia’s diaries points to their established position in the literary canon, as well as in academic discourse. *Dzienniki czasu wojny* (Wartime diaries),<sup>6</sup> covering the period 1939–1944, were the first separate edition of a part of Nałkowska’s journal.<sup>7</sup> They were published in 1970 as a kind of preview of a sensational document and in the first years they reached three editions.<sup>8</sup>

3 Magdalena Kasa, “»Rzeźbię, co koń wyskoczy.« O twórczości Hanny Nałkowskiej,” *Aspiracje* 3 (2015): 36.

4 e.g. Anna Foltyniak, *Między “pisać Nałkowską” a Nałkowskiej “czytaniem siebie.” Narracyjna tożsamość podmiotu w “Dziennikach”* (Kraków: Universitas, 2004); Magdalena Marszałek, “Życie i papier.” *Autobiograficzny projekt Zofii Nałkowskiej: “Dzienniki 1899–1954”* (Kraków: Universitas, 2004).

5 e.g. Małgorzata Czermińska, *Autobiograficzny trójkąt: Świadectwo, wyznanie i wyzwanie* (Kraków: Universitas, 2000); Arleta Galant, *Prywatne, publiczne, autobiograficzne* (Warszawa: DiG, 2010); Paweł Rodak, *Między zapisem a literaturą: dziennik polskiego pisarza w XX wieku* (Żeromski, Nałkowska, Dąbrowska, Gombrowicz, Herling-Grudziński) (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2011); Lena Magnone, “Codzienny modernizm. O diarystyce Zofii Nałkowskiej i Anaïs Nin,” in *Granice Nałkowskiej*, ed. Agata Zawiszewska (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Feminoteki, 2014), 246–263.

6 All quotes refer to: Zofia Nałkowska, *Dzienniki czasu wojny*, ed. Hanna Kirchner (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1972). I will refer to this edition with the page numbers and “ZN” in parentheses in the main text (for example: ZN 5). Used fragments were compared with the subsequent critical edition of Nałkowska’s diary (Zofia Nałkowska, *Dzienniki 1939–1944*, vol. 5 (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1996). All quotes translated by the author.

7 Some smaller fragments were published during Nałkowska’s life (1936 in “Studio”; 1953 in “Nowa Kultura”) – see Magnone, “Codzienny modernizm,” 248.

8 In 1970, 1972, and 1974: Hanna Kirchner, introduction to *Dzienniki 1939–1944*, 5.

Things look completely different for Hanna Nałkowska's journal which has never been the object of interest of literary and cultural scholars.<sup>9</sup> Until now, Hanna's notes – consisting of seventeen pocket-size notebooks including a thousand pages written in pencil between June 1942 and July 1945<sup>10</sup> – remained an untouched treasure, hidden among the literary – and diaristic – legacy of her celebrated sister. Nonetheless, they constitute a unique document within the recognized diaristic practices, especially when compared with other documents from the period when, according to Paweł Rodak, “the evident pressure of the historical events encouraged a rise in writing practices (including journals).”<sup>11</sup> Still, this historical context does not seem to play any role in Hanna's journal, at least at the first sight.

The juxtaposition of the two sisters' diaries could result in a separate comparative study, also because of the fact that, despite their having been written in similar circumstances – during the Second World War Zofia and Anna lived and worked together in a tobacco shop, their only source of income during the occupation, they were also mourning side by side the death of their mother at the beginning of June 1942 – they exhibit striking differences. For the time being it is, however, important to focus on the presentation of Hanna's journal, even if her sister's *Wartime Diaries* should be kept in mind as a necessary context.

### Zofia's Unknown Prose

The literariness of Zofia's journals, which has already been analyzed repeatedly, is undeniable. The literary quality is even more evident in the case of the *Wartime Diaries* – it was published as an announcement for the edition of whole diary and it was explicitly described as the “unknown prose of the author of *Medallions*,”<sup>12</sup> which was meant to encourage the readers to reach for the next volumes of this previously hidden, but supposedly greatest work of Nałkowska. The first edition could successfully imitate a fictional novel in the form of a journal – it certainly meets some of its determinants, such as the

9 Lately the document was mentioned in works of art historian Magdalena Kasa, “Rzeźbię, co koń wyskoczy”; Magdalena Kasa, “Dwie siostry: rzeźbiarka Hanna Nałkowska w świetle powieści Zofii Nałkowskiej *Węże i róże*,” *Roczniki Humanistyczne* 65 (2017): 87–113.

10 Document is stored in the National Library of Poland (signature: Rps akc. 13716). All quotes from the manuscript refer to the above signature. The page numbers with initial HN are given in parentheses in the main text.

11 Paweł Rodak, “Wojna i zapis (o dziennikach wojennych),” *Teksty Drugie* 5 (2005): 36.

12 Publisher's note to *Dzienniki czasu wojny*, 5.



explicit, although arbitrary structure. *Wartime Diaries* has a clear composition determined by the editor. It is no coincidence that it starts on 1 September 1939, when Nałkowska fled from Warsaw under attack, and ends on an “optimistic” note, with a promise of the rebuilding of life on the ruins of the Polish capital. Hanna Kirchner wrote about this procedure:

Diaries are captured in the frame of two historical dates, that constitute a substitute composition, bringing this stream of prose closer to the form of the novel in first person. Its theme, its center of crystallization is human fate in the face of war, existence and awareness of the Polish writer in the world of total annihilation.<sup>13</sup>

All editorial procedures were concealed in order to allow the reader, as the publishers wrote, to “experience the text as a modern novel,”<sup>14</sup> and this is in fact the way how the *Diaries* were read in the era of the “fictional novel’s” crisis, as Michał Głowiński pointed out in his review.<sup>15</sup>

This “modern novel” provides substantial information on the dreadful conditions in which Zofia, Hanna, and their mother lived. At the end of 1940, three of them had to leave Zofia’s apartment distraised by the occupant and move to a cramped place on Madalińskiego Street 7 – it was so small that it could barely accommodate them. This claustrophobic situation and the struggles of living in an occupied Warsaw were intensified by the deteriorating condition of the mother. As Zofia noted, “the appalling tragedy of [mother’s] old age determines and confines the style of our life” (ZN, 160). About this period Grażyna Borkowska writes: “They are all more and more ill, weak, burned out, stricken by human and wartime misfortune. And all three of them try to hide this fact from each other, and from the world.”<sup>16</sup> The drama unfolded on the scene of the terror, which intensified with each month of the occupation, as well as of the increasing poverty of the family – the tobacco shop run by the two sisters generated income barely sufficient for them to survive. Aside from all this, Zofia’s narration includes an additional storyline – in 1941 she learned that Maksymilian Bick, Hanna’s husband, committed suicide in France.<sup>17</sup> In order to protect her sister she decided to hide this fact from her.

<sup>13</sup> Kirchner, introduction to *Dzienniki 1939–1944*, 12.

<sup>14</sup> Publisher’s note, 6.

<sup>15</sup> Michał Głowiński, “Tak jest dziwnie, tak jest inaczej,” *Teksty* 4 (1973): 9.

<sup>16</sup> Grażyna Borkowska, “Opowiedzieć umieranie,” *Teksty Drugie* 5 (2004): 38.

<sup>17</sup> He committed suicide to avoid being captured in one of the roundups of French and emigrant Jews in France (see Kirchner, introduction to *Dzienniki 1939–1944*, 10–11).

The existential burden of this tragedy suffered by Zofia in solitude, will be overshadowed only by another disaster that would befall the family – the death of Anna Nałkowska on 5 June 1942.

### The Only Threnody Like This?

The death of her mother “brings a certain period in Nałkowska’s life to an end,”<sup>18</sup> writes Hanna Kirchner, and this statement is true for both sisters. From that day, as the scholar observes, Zofia’s diaries are “entwined with a constant litany of love and sorrow.”<sup>19</sup> Kirchner describes the fragments of the *Diaries* devoted to mourning as a “lament or threnody for her mother’s death, which is unique in literature.”<sup>20</sup> Moreover, both in Zofia’s biography and in the editor’s introductions, Kirchner clearly emphasizes that “Zofia gave expression [of grief] for both herself and her sister.”<sup>21</sup> The editor claims she did not know about the existence of Hanna’s diary,<sup>22</sup> although it would not be difficult to imagine that one could as well have been aware of the document and still intentionally concealed it due to its profoundly intimate nature. In this context it is important to mention that the “threnody” written by Zofia did not survive entirely. During a house search by the Gestapo, in a fit of panic, Zofia burned the notebook that she had been filling for months, which included “everything about mother and those beyond the wall” (ZN, 11). “Those beyond the wall” is a readable allusion to people imprisoned in the Warsaw Ghetto – its walls adhered directly to the Powązki Cemetery on which Anna Nałkowska was buried. Since the funeral, every visit to the mother’s grave has become a painful reminder of the fate of “those beyond the wall.” The journal, burned by the author during the search, remained a crucial loss for her: “Entire ages of this excruciating love after death are now lost, a love which was still an existence, still a presence.”<sup>23</sup> Although, as the reason for the destruction of the

18 Hanna Kirchner, introduction to *Dzienniki czasu wojny*, 17.

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid.

21 Kirchner, *Nałkowska albo życie pisane*, 526. She repeated this statement also in 1996: “There is probably no other such daughter’s threnody in Polish literature. Zofia wrote it for herself and for her sister, who could achieve an even higher degree of exaltation in feelings for her mother,” (Kirchner, introduction to *Dzienniki 1939–1944*, 11).

22 Phone conversation with Hanna Kirchner (21 September 2018).

23 Zofia Nałkowska’s *Diary*, quoted after Arleta Galant, “Skradziony profil: Matka w *Dziennikach* Zofii Nałkowskiej,” *Ruch Literacki* 5 (2001): 564.

notebook, Kirchner gives Nałkowska's concerns about the search, this situation does not seem obvious. The writer herself did not leave a definite answer and this act of destruction (the only one during the sixty years of writing a diary!) is sometimes interpreted as an act of self-censorship, a moment of meaningful silence, in which – as Anna Foltyniak states – “the ultimate reality” (the trauma of her mother's death) took away Zofia's voice.<sup>24</sup> Also, Arleta Galant writes that “the departure of the mother means the end of the element of autobiographical creation, it forces the attempt of authenticity [...] it demands the resignation from the egotism of writing.”<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, Lena Magnone regards this act as symptomatic and points to the writer's decision to remain silent in the diary about her father's death.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, not only was it not necessary for Zofia to give Hanna a voice to express her grief (as Kirchner stated): paradoxically, it was the moment when the writer chose silence, while her sister decided to narrate.

### **“She is Like a Wound”**

Insofar as during Anna Nałkowska's illness Hanna does not appear often in Zofia's journal,<sup>27</sup> the fragments of the *Wartime Diaries* written after their mother's death point to the state which her younger sister was in. On 7 June she notes: “Hanna sleeps here in my unmade bed in her clothes, unconscious after several sleeping pills. Her grief is bottomless” (ZN, 245). On 17 June, Hanna “is pale and thin, she cries constantly, she despairs and cannot live” (ZN, 249). Another entry in Zofia's *Diary*, from 27 June, about this seemingly mute tragic heroine:

She is like a wound [...] I extract tentative consolation for her from my own tenderness, from my own material of mourning. [...] It seems to me that I have never been so persistently kind to anyone in my life – but it is all in vain. There exists no way of appeasing her. (ZN, 251–252)

24 Anna Foltyniak, “Zapis i niewypowiedziane: Milczenie i rozpacz w *Dziennikach Zofii Nałkowskiej*,” *Teksty Drugie* 8 (2008): 147.

25 Galant, “Skradziony profil,” 565.

26 “I won't write about it here” noted Nałkowska in 1911. Zofia Nałkowska, *Dzienniki 1909–1917*, vol. 2 (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1976), 181. See: Magnone, “*Codzienny modernizm*,” 254.

27 Grażyna Borkowska states that in her journal Zofia treats her mother's illness and death as a matter “between herself and the world, in loneliness, without the significant participation of other people,” Borkowska, “Opowiedzieć umieranie,” 39.

After the funeral Zofia sent her unappeasable, grieving sister to their close friends in Wołomin, probably with the hope of improving her state. It is there that on 14 June, on the eve of her return to Warsaw, Hanna began writing.

I hesitated to state that she “began writing her journal.” Despite the characteristic structure with strictly indicated dates, the genre of this intimate narration is highly ambiguous (even for a diary). The author herself does not call her text a diary<sup>28</sup> – she refers to it as a “notebook” due to its physical form, while the textual dimension of the notes seems to be a hybrid matter, especially as an addressee, her mother, is omnipresent from the first sentence, transforming the document into a kind of a journal-letter.<sup>29</sup> It is obvious that the presence of an audience of the journal – intended or implied – is an important element of the textual structure of the diary.<sup>30</sup> But in Hanna’s notes, the significance of the addressee is all the more visible, because of the fact that it influences not only the form of what is said, but interferes with the genre of the text itself. At several points Hanna openly states that she is writing a letter to her mother. On 3 August 1942 she noted down: “My beloved Mother, only now did I set to write to you. Mamma, it seems to me as if I was writing a letter to you” (HN, 105). And although that illusion was not sufficient – on the contrary, on several occasions the author admits that it is a tragic attempt of deceiving herself – the form of this quasi-letter remains largely unchanged over the years. On the other hand, the notes also include points at which the mother is spoken of in the third person – in those places it seems that the author means to write a memoir about the departed. But after all she could

28 The issue is further complicated by the fact that the National Library has also preserved another manuscript by Hanna Nałkowska from the period of World War II – *Dzienniki domu 1943–1945* (Diary of the house; title written by author; sign. Rps akc. 14.103). In contrast to the mourning notes contained in seventeen identical books, *Dzienniki domu* is a collection of loose pages on which Hanna recorded current expenses and purchases – the more astonishing this genre “declaration” seems.

29 For the genre of a journal-letter, see, e.g., Helen M. Buss, *Mapping Our Selves. Canadian Women’s Autobiography in English* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1993), 37–60; Rayshelle Dietrich, “Everyday epistles: the journal-letter writing of American women, 1754–1836” (PhD diss., Texas Christian University, 2008); Emilia Kolinko, “[...] ja wzięłam się do pisania listu do Ciebie i tych parę wierszów: Dziennik-list Heleny z Wolskich Krukowieckiej (1831–1833) na tle dziewiętnastowiecznych praktyk diarystycznych,” in *Epistolografia w Dawnej Rzeczypospolitej*, vol. 5, *Stulecia XVI–XIX: Nowa perspektywa historycznoliteracka*, ed. Piotr Borek and Marcei Olma (Kraków: Collegium Columbinum, 2015), 339–352.

30 See, for example, Margo Culley, “Introduction to *A Day at a Time: Diary Literature of American Women, from 1764 to 1985*,” in *Women, Autobiography, Theory. A Reader*, ed. Sydonie Smith and Julia Watson (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), 217.

not keep this resolution, which often became yet another source of her guilt: "In this memoir I was supposed to write about mother, but I only write about myself and my suffering" (HN, 55).

Throughout this narrative hybrid, written over the course of three years, mourning remains the main theme. In the first weeks after the death of her mother, the weight of mourning and the fact of coming to accept the loss entirely structure and (dis)organize the substance of the text. Hanna's notes are a vividly rough material. Unlike her sister's output, carefully transcribed and put into print by Hanna Kirchner, they lack editorial interference and still remain in their untouched, material form of pocket-sized, pencil written notebooks. First few subsequent entries, apart from some fortuitous commas, lack punctuation, and the words are just a continuous, disorganized stream of repetitions, which point to the magnitude of grief and isolation. Hanna's experience seems to resist the attempts of narrativization – mourning disintegrates the text and escapes verbalization. One of such painful, indescribable experiences was the packing and putting away of her mother's possessions – in her notebook Hanna writes: "It was very difficult, I cannot write of this, everything seems artificial to me" (HN, 13). This artificiality recurs throughout the journal, as does the inability to write: "It all keeps returning to me all over again, oh, to become dull, now I think about myself, I cannot write" (HN, 13). However, at the same time it seems as though the mourning does not allow her to abandon the attempts of textualization. Even when Hanna's body wants to surrender, to become dull, to sleep, the writer cannot permit it: "How I wish to comfort myself by taking eripazm but I also wish to be with you, not with you but to think of you and to suffer your agony, but if I take it, I will fall asleep" (38). But she cannot do it – falling asleep would interrupt her writing.

Hanna's notes are a narration of deep mourning and ultimate alienation. As before Zofia struggled alone with her mother's illness on the pages of her journal, so now Hanna, in textualized loneliness, faces her mother's death. The most painful and perhaps the most telling expression of this loneliness can be seen on the very first of more than a thousand pages, where Hanna notes: "I search the world for a daughter who has just lost her mother, who would embrace me and with whom I would cry" (HN, 1). The magnitude of the grief appears to obscure the fact that such a daughter is closer than Hanna expects. Why did she not notice such a daughter in her sister, Zofia? Only after two months, rereading what she wrote, did she make a note on the margin, explaining, perhaps with surprise: "I wrote this because it seemed to me that Zofia has many close friends and is not alone like me, and besides, she is stronger than me and she has literature, while I cannot think of sculpture" (HN, 2). This alienation may have been enhanced by the fact that Hanna decided to write in secret. Was she hiding from Zofia? In April 1943 she writes: "Yesterday, when

I was writing, Zosia came in and I stopped, because I feel ill at ease when she sees me writing" (HN, 360). Although – as can be concluded from the notes – Zofia knows that Hanna writes about their mother, she should not witness it. Even though keeping dairies was common writing practice, perhaps there was an additional fear in this gesture, connected with the fact that when writing, Hanna entered the unknown realm of her sister's art? Or was writing itself intimate enough to cause her to be ill at ease in the presence of any observers? Hanna not only kept her journal in secret, but also hid the notebooks. On 31 December 1942, after a break of two weeks, she writes that she hid the notebook so well that she could not find it herself – the very fact of not being able to write caused discomfort and intensified the feeling of loneliness. In this strange, hostile world, abandoned by her mother, writing became, on the one hand, the substitute to spending time with her, and, on the other, a creation of space for the sole fact of her absence:

Nothing has changed, people come and talk, we wash ourselves and dress, but all the time, without a pause, this terrible thought that you're not here, you're not here, you're not here, you're not here, oh, Mother, Mamma, it is good, that I'm writing, I do not feel so alone. (HN, 3)

Without losing sight of the material form of the diary, it is important to mention the specific postscript to the journal, written without a date on a separate piece of paper, which further complicates the issue of this document's composition and genre status. A postscript in which the form and – above all – the addressee of the text changes radically for the first time. This last note's addressee is Hanna's sister, Zofia. However, it is unknown when this fragment was written or attached to the diary, its presence behind the back cover of the last notebook seems symbolic.

Do you remember our room  
And these pansies on the balcony  
Do you remember the bouquets  
And this view by Ruisdael  
Do you remember our books  
Do you remember our piano  
Do you remember our work  
Do you remember our old age  
Do you remember our Mother Dearest  
Do you remember Her singing  
Do you remember Agnus Dei  
[...]

Terrible was Her illness  
 Terrible was Her death  
 Terrible was Her funeral  
 Terrible is Her grave.<sup>31</sup>

What is this note? Its shape and the recurring repetitions suggest a lyrical form. What was its purpose? Is it a kind of compositional brace, corresponding with the initial search for another daughter, who lost her mother, as if the writer finally found this daughter in her own sister? Is this an attempt to establish a dialogue with Zofia? Or maybe it was a kind of introduction, left to the sister before she reads the mourning notes? Does this mean that through writing – through literature – Hanna tried to reach out to her sister, the writer? Or perhaps this is a reproach? *I r e m e m b e r, d o y o u?* This piece of paper proves once again how unobvious the document is.

The adverse conditions, in which the diary was written, left their mark on Hanna's writing practices. In order to write in secret, she often did it at night. The restrictive time record in Hanna's notebooks is not only expressed in exact dates, but above all else in the hours, accurate to within a quarter. The time is also described further in the narration itself, which is filled with indications of every hour that Hanna spent since she put pencil to paper. The consistency and precision of this gesture is extraordinary: it seems that this strictly measured and defined temporality allowed the diarist to find a kind of an anchor to reality. Maybe it helped her to persevere? "The hours pass, it is now nine – she writes on 26 June 1942 – so many hours left to a quarter past two [a.m.]" (HN, 13). A "quarter past two" in the morning is a crucial time: it is the time of Anna Nałkowska's death. In the first months it was the chronology of the mother's passing that determined the rhythm of the narration and directly influenced the substance of the text. On the first anniversary of mother's death, which Hanna, in fact, acknowledged every month, but often referred to as "anniversaries," she notes: "I want to go through her death once again, it's midnight, she was already dying, yes I should wait until a quarter past two" (HN, 38). Since then, every fifth day of the month was governed by its own, repetitive chronology. A chronology which, in the most vivid way, reveals the greatest (un)present of the journal – the War.

31 "Czy ty pamiętasz nasz pokoi/ I te bratki na balkonie/ Czy pamiętasz bukieciki/ I ten widok Ruisdala/ Czy pamiętasz nasze książki/ Czy pamiętasz nasz fortepian/ Czy pamiętasz naszą pracę/ Czy pamiętasz naszą starość/ Czy pamiętasz naszą Mamę Tą najdroższą/ Czy Ty pamiętasz Jej śpiew/ Czy pamiętasz Agnus Dei[...] Straszna była Jej choroba/ Straszna była Jej śmierć/ Straszny był Jej pogrzeb/Straszny jest Jej grób" (529).

### (Un)presence of War

Also in Zofia's *Wartime Diaries* history was relegated to the background, only subtly marked in the narration, creating an "intimate herstory" of the author. However, in Hanna's notes, this (un)presence (or in fact absence) has yet another dimension. Although the dates and place of the writing can remind us of the context, the diarist herself does not reference the reality which surrounds her. Hanna's notebooks do not point to the extent risk that was involved with living in Warsaw between 1942 and 1945, although it is evident from Zofia's *Diaries*, that even the visits to the Powązki Cemetery, described in much detail by both diarists, was life-threatening. In 1943, the terror was so widespread, that, as Hanna Kirchner notes, each time civilians left the house, they could "be arrested, have [their] lips plastered, or be put against the wall of any tenement house before a firing squad."<sup>32</sup> Zofia wrote: "It is the most dangerous in trams, because one can never come back."<sup>33</sup> Here, she means the tram passing through Chłodna Street, under a footbridge which connected both parts of the Warsaw Ghetto. Hanna's narration seems to suggest that the war – which was so close and inconceivably tangible – was for her overshadowed by mourning: "I am torn out of the torment of your death, by the torments of what is happening now, of the bomb raids" (HN, 380). On the other hand, the immensity of the personal loss desensitizes her to the horrors of war:

Mamma, life is so dark without you, and not because of the war, no, I am numb to its horrors, but because of what befell me, [...] because I lost you, it was so difficult and so profound, that I can barely feel anything else [...] now I am frozen. (HN, 368)

This seeming (un)presence in Hanna's narrative involves a constant tension between personal and collective trauma – the second one, although it is not verbalized in the substance of the text, at the same time serves as its inseparable part: it is inseparable from the chronology and the dates, which we, as readers, can decipher.

The most striking fragments, in which the historical facts overlap with the narration, were written during the two uprisings. On 19 April 1943, an uprising broke out in the Warsaw Ghetto, and lasted for four weeks, until it ended on 16 May, with the liquidation of the ghetto and the destruction of the Great Synagogue of Warsaw. For the diarist this event was both distant and close – despite the fact that it happened behind the wall, it also happened in

<sup>32</sup> Kirchner, *Nałkowska albo życie pisane*, 534.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 535.



the same city. Merely several entries were written at the time of the uprising, but only on 25 May – after the liquidation of the ghetto – can we find a symptomatic comment, which suggests that Hanna was fully aware of the uprising's fate: "Why am I not a Jew, maybe then I would be too afraid for myself to grieve after you" (HN, 382). This striking declaration is in no way mitigated or commented upon – it is also not obscured. Did the author truly believe in what she wrote and in how she wrote it? This shocking fragment points to a rupture, which demands a reconsideration of the significance of mourning in the whole journal. Similarly, the Warsaw Uprising is seemingly absent from the journal, although in a different way. The *Wartime Diaries* indicate that the sisters were in confidence warned of the potential outbreak of the uprising, and in 1944 they escaped to the countryside to stay with their old friend, Zofia Zahrtowa, in Adamowizna. Despite the distance, the sisters constantly received the news about the course of the uprising, which was doomed to failure ever since it started on 1 August. The first mention of the event dates to as late as 5 September, when the author states: "Mama, I missed the anniversary in August, there are such terrible things happening in Warsaw" (HN, 475). Although here, unlike in the case of the Ghetto Uprising, Hanna explicitly mentions the "terrible things" occurring in the capital, they are not the intended premise of the content of the entry. In the wave of reports about the failure of the uprising, the ruptures in the narrative structure seem to be revealed:

Every day someone comes and says grim, terrible things about the poor people in Warsaw, but I am dull [...] only once, when I heard about a girl whose face was all bitten, I was frightened by her fear and my suffering was eased, and also they flooded the sewers and then filled them with gas [...] I am wondering why I have not lost my mind, why I behave normally. After what happened to me, Mama, 27 months ago, I feel nothing, nothing touches me. Only this girl and those sewers, I cannot think about it. (HN, 475)

Those news also prompted other reflections: although Hanna writes, that the information that Warsaw ceases to exist seems not to affect her, that she only feels compassion for the people, while "everything else is [...] not important, what I will come back to, Nowy Świat [the street on which Hanna's sculpture studio was located] burns, the sculptures, small, made of bronze, I feel sorry for all this, but only slightly" (HN, 475). And although the author insists it is "not important" for her and that she feels "sorry, but only slightly," it is no coincidence that the thought of her life's work occurs to her at that particular moment. Perhaps Hanna's textualized, overshadowing mourning played a kind of metonymic role? After all it was not only the mother that she has

lost during those years. From today's perspective, when we know that practically all of the sculptor's works were destroyed during the Warsaw Uprising, those words are even more moving – even though Hanna herself “restores order” to her narration, by adding: “Why do I write of those strange things, when it all seems unreal to me, and only one thing is painful, the fact that you are not here” (HN, 477). This significant characteristic of Hanna's diary – not mentioning the war explicitly – remains unchanged over the course of three years. Even when the war is over, instead of relief and joy, the fact raises concerns – the end of the war meant that “Mak's mystery”<sup>34</sup> would finally be revealed.

Hanna's text is a frail and delicate matter, intimate to such an extent that it is difficult to formulate critical questions in connection to it. However, the seeming absence of war and the overwhelming presence of mourning, call for a deeper reflection. Is it therefore true, as the diarist asserts, that the immeasurable magnitude of personal tragedy overshadowed the terror of the constant and grave danger of the occupied city? Or that the ruins of personal life clouded the image of the ruins of obliterated Warsaw? Finally, did the wall of the Powązki Cemetery truly conceal the wall of the Ghetto? Or maybe the mourning, expressed on the pages of her secret journal, and unfolding in a continuous monologue to her absent mother, with all its despair, became a means of escape, a safe haven for the author? When discussing the diaristic practices of the Second World War, Paweł Rodak concludes: “The act of writing the journal itself, the motivation and the realization of it in the form of repeated attempts to write, are as important as the final product. [...] [It is those] attempts, that determine or uphold that which is human in the face of the inhuman.”<sup>35</sup> It is possible that in Hanna's notes this maintaining of “the human” would be precisely the mourning. Perhaps in the face of the inhuman reality, the process of mourning itself would not be accessible without the medium of the notebook. On the other hand, mourning for her mother may have a metonymical function – after all Hanna lost almost everything – not only her mother, but also her husband, her home, her studio, and her life's work – which is all the more painful considering that, unlike her sister's literary legacy, the medium of Hanna's work was singular and material.

However, maybe those aspects are not mutually exclusive? The diary ends, in fact, in a thought-provoking way. Hanna's last entry was written at half past one a.m. on 5 July 1945, when she was still in Adamowizna, where they took

34 She called her husband “Mak.” At the time Zofia still guarded the secret of his death, and for many years she hid from her sister the fact that it was a suicide.

35 Rodak, “Wojna i zapis,” 39.

refuge with her sister almost a year before. Hanna mentions that she cannot write for long, because Halinka is asleep in the room (we can assume that she means her friend and also a writer, Halina Maria Dąbrowska). Hanna is to visit Warsaw soon, and she informs her addressee that “The war is over.” Hanna has still not received any news of her husband, and she senses that she is “left alone in this world.” The last sentence of the journal is “Halinka is waking up, I have to go” (HN, 526).<sup>36</sup> Does the diary finish at that point by coincidence? Does “I have to go” only refer to that particular time on 5 July and to the unease caused by the awakening of the intruder? Or, on the contrary, perhaps the ending is not a coincidence? The last sentence occupied the last line of the last page of the seventeenth notebook. The war has ended. And so could the narrative.

## Abstract

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**Anna Dżabagina**

UNIVERSITY OF WARSAW

*The Mourning Diaries. Hanna Nałkowska's Journal (1942–1945)*

This paper is a presentation of reconnaissance on unpublished journals of Hanna Nałkowska (1888–1970) from the years 1942–1945. Hanna is an acclaimed but forgotten Polish sculptor of the interwar period, the younger sister of the renowned modernist writer and diarist Zofia Nałkowska (1884–1954), author of the canonic *Wartime Diaries*. The article presents the fundamental characteristics of Hanna's journal, which she started to write after her mother's death in 1942. Despite the associations imposed by chronology, it is notable that experiences of everyday life in occupied Warsaw or traces of the two uprisings are almost absent from the diary. Her journals are a scrupulous record of overwhelming grief. Mourning becomes a burden that structures and (dis)organizes the matter of Hanna's text. This seeming (un)presence of the war and overrepresentation of grief is one of the essential theoretical problems of this paper.

## Keywords

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diaries, World War II, mourning, Zofia Nałkowska, Hanna Nałkowska

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36 It could be also translated as “I’m finishing” – [Halinka się obudziła, kończę].

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Maria Prussak

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## Anna Minkowska – A Duty to Remember

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DOI: 10.18318/td.2020.en.1.19 | ORCID: 0000-0003-1432-8368

**T**wo copies of notes written by Anna Minkowska between 20 February 1950 and 28 March 1955 in Słupsk, and later retyped by an unknown person have survived: one in the University of Warsaw Library (inventory number 2661) and the other in Cracow, at the house of the author's sister, Janina Raszka. The family copy, made available to me by Joanna Walaszek, the author's grand-niece, became the base for a book published by the Pope John Paul II Institute as part of "Father Zieja Year," the Institute's celebration of the 120th anniversary of his birth. No one had been interested in printing the memoirs before.<sup>1</sup> The anniversary influenced the character of the publication and when editing the text, I had to agree to the publisher's terms, namely, the necessity to shorten it.<sup>2</sup> The

### Maria Prussak –

Head of the Center for Philological Research and Scholarly Editing of Literary Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences. She published in *Pamiętnik Teatralny*, *Dialog*, *Pamiętnik Literacki*, and *Teksty Drugie*. She writes theater reviews for *Didaskalia* and *Teatr*. She was the Head of the Redefining Philology project and the editor-in-chief of the Philology XXI series, postulating a return to philology understood as a discipline combining a wide range of issues related to textual scholarship. As part of this series she published the book *Od słowa do słowa* (From one word to another. On the margins of textual criticism). She is the editor of correspondence between Maria Renata Mayenowa and Roman Jakobson.

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1 The typescript in the University Library was restricted until 1975. Fragments of the memoirs, coming from yet another copy belonging to Father Zieja, were published in years 2009–2013 in the periodic *Bunt Młodych Duchem* (<https://bunt.com.pl/>).

2 I fully agree with Philippe Lejeune's address: "Every diary is a whole. Its editor should be patient." Philippe Lejeune, *Les brouillons de soi* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1998), 412 (citation translated by Jan Prussak). In this case, however, the mitigating

manuscripts have not survived, therefore it is impossible to verify the reliability of the copy. Handwritten notes, most likely the author's, are an authorization of sorts, but a number of obvious errors have remained, also in names. Apart from the dated section, the surviving typescript includes annexes dedicated to certain people and events; there probably were more (the author mentions them several times in different places), but not all have been found, and some are obviously incomplete. Nobody can therefore ask, like Lejeune, if it is still "the same text"<sup>3</sup> the author had left. One can also disregard the question and see the text mainly as a historical document and less of a personal one. Therefore the filters applied to the edited text leave untouched the basic premises of the text that shall be discussed further.

We decided not to include any of the annexes save one – we would have been unable to incorporate them in the main narrative. So, the book contains the choice of Anna Minkowska's memoirs focused on the figure of Father Jan Zieja, his activity in Pomerania and later stay in Warsaw. The accounts of the interwar activity of the author's husband, Lieutenant Colonel Anatol Minkowski (born in 1891, died in 1939 on the Eastern Front), and his brothers – Eugeniusz (living in France) and Mieczysław (working in Switzerland), both European scientists – are not included. The biographies of the Minkowski brothers, including Paweł Minkowski (the fourth of the brothers who was a member of the interwar Sejm) and Anna Minkowska are to be found in *Polski słownik biograficzny*, and the omitted accounts overlap. Preparing the text for publishing, the descriptions of some of the author's meetings in Switzerland, her thoughts on writing and, closely related to them, the fragments about contacts with Jerzy Zawieyski, as well as notes on her own spiritual experiences were removed.

Because of this editorial endeavor the book was entitled *Pamiętnik: Wspomnienia o księdzu Janie Ziei* (Diary: Memories of Father Jan Zieja). Father Zieja's nonconformist evangelical path, a fragment of which the author of the memoir describes from up close, made the preparation of this book possible. The only argument for publishing comes in the form of Father Zieja, who started organizing religious and social life in Pomerania. He asked a number of exceptional people to join in the effort, especially women, who were trying to find some reasonable motivation, having lost their homes, possessions and loved ones. From this point of view, the author, who was one of those starting their life

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circumstance is that the main character of Anna Minkowska's notes is Father Jan Zieja, and the many layers of the records mean we do not deal with the journal in the traditional meaning of the word.

3 Philippe Lejeune and Catherine Bogaert, *Le journal intime: Histoire et anthologie* (Paris: Les Éditions Textuel, 2006), 24.

anew, is not as relevant. Therefore, the publisher abandoned the side plots, less important to the Institute and, especially, to the main story, and focused on the post-war years and on the consequences of the tragic war for the people appearing in the memoirs.

Anna Minkowska, née Zand, was born in 1891. She came from a well-known Jewish family in Łódź. Her father was a director of a bank. Her mother was Florentyna née Wolberg, whose father was a famous doctor. At the age of sixteen, Anna Zand decided to get baptized – in her memoirs she describes how she came at that decision. She passed her high school exams in Zurich and she studied history there. There she also met her future husband, Anatol Minkowski, the son of a Warsaw Jewish family. Anatol joined the Legions, while she became a nurse and worked for the underground Polish Military Organization. During the war their children were born. After Poland had re-gained her independence, they settled in Warsaw.

Under Marcelli Handelsman's supervision, Anna Minkowska wrote a dissertation on the events of 1848 in the Kingdom of Poland. After that she worked as a history teacher. She was involved in Father Władysław Korniłowicz's *Circle*. Anatol, her husband, was baptized in the 1930s. They were both members of the Warsaw elite and led a rich social and cultural life. In September 1939 her husband died, her son, Jan Minkowski, was taken to a POW camp, and her daughter, Antonina, went to Vilnius. She did not go into hiding and taught in the underground education system. After the Warsaw Uprising she and her daughter, who had come back to Warsaw after 1941, arrived in Cracow. At the first opportunity her daughter crossed the "green border" to escape to Western Europe, and her son, after being released from the camp, decided to continue his studies in Zurich. Of a large family the only ones to stay in Poland were her sister Janina Raszka, who lived in Cracow, and her grandson Andrzej, born after Jan had been taken prisoner, who lived with his mother's new family.

Without hesitation Anna Minkowska responded to Father Jan Zieja's request, who already in 1945, continuing his pre-war activity, decided to organize a popular university in Wytowno near Słupsk, mainly for the repatriated people arriving in Pomerania from all around Poland. She went to help him in various educational and social enterprises. Apart from the popular university, she worked in Słupsk schools, taught Polish to the native population and helped the needy at the local *Caritas*. Above all, she tried to record the work that was made harder and harder by the state administration. She started to write down the more recent memories fully aware of both the goal of writing and her own fate. As she was writing, she realized that her life was typical for a certain elite social group, and therefore decided it was worthwhile to remember the past as well as describe the present, as they were two different

ages and two different challenges her peers faced. She rightly thought that both she and the people around her exemplified the fortunes of women who, since the beginning of the twentieth century, had been consciously shaping their family, professional, and intellectual lives by choosing to study abroad and then work in Poland. That is not all. Most of the women who, starting at the ground level, joined in social work in and around Słupsk, were in their fifties and, standing in the ashes of their past, were starting life as if anew in a completely unfamiliar social environment. This dynamic beginning allowed them to find themselves again after another defeat, which came when they had to leave Słupsk and look for something else to do and for new motivation. They were a social group that is now almost forgotten and not spoken about. Some of these women, as one may learn from their biographies, returned to a nineteenth-century social work ethos and became teachers. Thanks to them, the first generations of postwar students received proper education and avoided blunt indoctrination.

Anna Minkowska dedicated a lot of her memoirs to yet another part of that community, usually not noted or described in historical works – I mean the part of the Jewish intelligentsia that chose Christianity. The head of the Słupsk home for single mothers was Aniela Urbanowicz née Reicher, the founder of the Catholic Intelligentsia Club. Słupsk was often visited by a friend of the author's, Leonia Jabłonkówna,<sup>4</sup> a theater director and the author of excellent theater reviews, who helped to put on amateur plays. In Warsaw, Anna Minkowska met with Sister Katarzyna (Zofia Steinberg), a Franciscan nun from Łaski, her friend from before the war. In her memoirs she included stories of other people coming from polonized non-religious Jewish families, who decided to get baptized.

As a professional historian Anna Minkowska knew how important were the descriptions of events she witnessed, and recorded them almost instantly, from the remove of a few years, at the moment when the administration practically blocked all the fields of activity for Father Zieja and his associates, at the same time forcing the whole community to search for new life challenges after another history-provoked defeat. She was conscious of the decisiveness of the events of which she was a part. Based on her account, one may infer the course of the conflict between an authoritarian government and an autonomous community and the resulting violation of autonomy. Bizarre confrontations occurred. Anna Minkowska, who had written her doctoral dissertation

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4 In August 1946, after the Kielce pogrom, Jabłonkówna sent a letter to the editor of *Tygodnik Powszechny*. In the letter she described how many people had selflessly hidden her during the German occupation. Not wanting to endanger them, she gave no names. Maria Leonia Jabłonkówna, "Świadekstwo prawdy," *Tygodnik Powszechny* 35 (1946): 7.

on revolutionary movements of the nineteenth century, knew Karl Marx's works better than the political instructors sent to schools by the Department of Education. The prewar teacher, astonished by their level of knowledge, tried to reason with them. From a twentieth-century perspective one may retrace the careers of those dedicated liquidators of Father Zieja's works.

Anna Minkowska's notes are therefore composed around a clearly outlined topic. She began her text with this declaration:

Why am I beginning to write? I am at the end of my life – and yet there are things and matters I have witnessed, some in which I have partaken, and I feel a duty, a desire for them to be remembered.

Maybe someone who picks up these pages will learn what actually happened to us, who have survived two great wars, women who used to have independent jobs or their own intellectual life, often on the margin of their family lives. Like a hurricane, harsh experiences destroyed our homes, in some cases also our families, made us live on, wrenched from the roots, with what was a part of our existence: our talent, professional work, studies. That was in my opinion a unique answer to the question of whether a woman can work independently. Of course, I am not one of those women like Hanka Pohoska, who lost everyone. My children – a son and a daughter<sup>5</sup> – survived, but they are far away. And we love each other so much! If I want these diaries to be of any value, to simply be useful to someone in the future, they obviously must be truthful and simple throughout. And that is something which may be possible when life has torn off all the masks.<sup>6</sup>

Minkowska was fully aware that she was writing in a post-cataclysmic time, in the ruins of a world which needed to be built anew. A creator of an

5 Jan Minkowski (1916–1991) – physicist born in Zurich. He studied at Warsaw Technical University, served as an officer in the army. In September 1939 he was interned by the Russians but later escaped. Arrested by the Germans, he was placed in an Oflag in Bavaria. After the war he finished his studies in Zurich. In 1950 he moved to the USA. In 1963 he finished his doctorate and in 1981 became a professor at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore. Author of memoirs *Through Three Wars: The Memoirs of Jan Michael Minkowski* (Baltimore: Gateway Press, 1991).

Antonina Minkowska Domaniewska (1917–1979), following the beginning of the war she escaped to Vilnius, when the Germans captured the city in 1941 she returned to Warsaw and lived with her mother. In 1946 she crossed the "green border" and went to Paris. Later she worked in Brussels, since 1951 she lived in the USA, working as a clerk. In 1953 she married Świętosław Domaniewski.

6 Anna Minkowska, *Pamiętnik: Wspomnienia o księdzu Janie Ziei*, ed. Maria Prussak (Warszawa: Instytut Papieża Jana Pawła II, 2017), 7–8.



environment that was an alternative to official structures – which was made up of outstanding people of excellent education, ready to help others – Jan Zieja seemed to her as one of the great rebuilders. That is why she began her tale and presented the plan of what she would include in it:

I have decided to divide memories of my time with Father Jan into 4 parts: 1) Our stay in Wytowno, 2) Orzechowo, 3) Słupsk, 4) Father Zieja and my inner life. This period lasted since 13 September 1946 until April 1949 – actually until 24 June of that year, when Father Jan left Słupsk for good.<sup>7</sup>

She was making notes on a few parallel temporal and topical planes. She knew that all the institutions created over these three years – the home for single mothers, the popular university, and even the dynamically developing Słupsk parish – had ceased to exist. She started writing in February 1950, when she was alone in Słupsk and worked only in the Minor Seminary until her retirement. Although notes are dated, the text is not a journal. It is not about her loneliness in Słupsk nor about the hardship of declining living conditions. The main topic is the previous four years, when it still seemed possible to recreate the life with one's own concepts of how to order the world around oneself. Once all had ended, all that was left was the duty to perpetuate the endeavors, chronicling the behavior and further fortunes of the people who joined in the work. A marginal recurring motif is the fortunes of Germans who initially were unwilling to leave Pomerania.

The foreground of the memoirs is perforce the recent past, initially reported systematically and chronologically. Much of it is dedicated to recollecting the tradition of popular universities. Minkowska also visited courses for popular university activists organized by the still existing Rural Youth Organization “Wici,” where she witnessed the shift in mindset, the acceptance of the new rules of the game. She relates Father Zieja's schedule and his ecumenical actions in detail, but she also watches closely as he is visited by Bolesław Piasecki's emissaries and their failure to secure his cooperation. Her memories of the initial years in Słupsk are interjected with long digressions about the priest's prewar activities, about his family, his education. Briefer interjections refer to stories of people appearing in the memoirs, often tragic fortunes of lost families. At the end there also appear her own memories of distant past, evoked by associations with current events – those reach to the school strike in the Kingdom of Poland in 1905 and break off on 6 September 1939. Going by bus across *Saska Kępa* she recollected:

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7 Ibid., 9.

Going from Saska Kępa, on Obronców Street I passed the house where we had lived before the war. A house with beautiful balconies, blooming with flowers on the day of the outbreak of war. I caught a glance of the wide street, where, on 6 September 1939, stood the car in which Anatol went to war. "You are a very brave person," he said as we were saying goodbye. These were the last words he ever spoke to me. A week later, on 13 September, he died near Złoczów as a liaison officer trying to get from Lwów to Sosnkowski, who was staying in Brzuchowice. Today in that house at 33 Obronców is the Belgian embassy.<sup>8</sup>

She hardly mentions what happened to her during the war, apart from the information about having to move to her friends in Żoliborz and teaching at the underground school.

Deep in the background lies the present, described ever more often and in greater detail in succeeding notes. However, it does not touch upon the mundanity of Słupsk, but focuses on the days when Anna Minkowska left Słupsk; in Warsaw she reunited with Father Zieja and wrote of his short stay at a parish in Wola, later – of meetings in Visitandines convent at Krakowskie Przedmieście. Finally, after the sermon following the arrest of Primate Wyszyński, Father Zieja moved to Alina Raue's private home outside Warsaw. (Alina Raue was Emil Młynarski's daughter.) Anna Minkowska did not lose touch with her old friends – in Warsaw she visited her cousins and friends from before the war. Those accounts present the reality of living in that time; the city rising from ruins, so difficult to recognize, dominated by the "House of Culture and Art."<sup>9</sup> It was January 1954, Alina Raue, suffering from a serious heart condition, earned her living making rosaries from seeds of a bush growing in her garden. She could take in Father Zieja (advised to leave the city as quickly as possible) as, "the villa survived the accommodation »operation« because it is over two kilometers of rough road away from the suburban railway station and is therefore unfit for commuters."<sup>10</sup> Anna Minkowska was very apt in catching details like that. She noted not only events but also the conditions her friends were living in and trying to cope with. She dedicated a lot of her notes to her thoughts and she analyzed her spiritual development as she returned to her initial fascination with Christianity. She did not resign from her sociological commentary of people's behavior, especially when the people being described supported the authorities introducing the new order.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 263.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 261.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 263.

In late 1953 to early 1954 Anna Minkowska focused on the story of essentially the most important event of her postwar life – on her stay in Switzerland and meeting her children between 24 August and 16 October 1948. Getting a passport was possible thanks to the intercession of a few influential people: her friend from Professor Handelsman's seminar group, working in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and presented only by his first name and the initial of his surname, and Mieczysław Minkowski, a professor of neurology, who had been treating the wife of Polish ambassador Julian Przyboś. The ambassador sent a letter of recommendation. She was able to afford the journey thanks to her brother, Stefan Zand, a pilot engineer and inventor living in the USA since the 1920s.

The Swiss tale connects a variety of times and places; memories of the author's and her husband's studies before World War I, as well as her son's stay in the Oflag, and the harsh conditions of his studies just after the war, the problematic situation of Polish emigrants using Nansen passports, and the question of the western Polish provinces, the so-called Recovered Territories, from where she had just come. As a result, Switzerland became the scene where so many different worlds met and so many important decisions were made.

Anna Minkowska's memoirs reach across several complementary points in time – from the acute observations of new phenomena of the dramatically changed postwar reality to the memory of the past being lost all over again due to choices made, such as her heroic and surprising decision to leave her children and return to Słupsk in 1948. One may wonder what was the leading cause for the return, but the author gives no clear answer as for her it is the natural choice, as obvious as loyalty and keeping one's obligations. The five years of notes have a clear ending. The author returns to the main character of her memoirs and the effects of his work, interrupted again and again by outside factors. Separating the course of events from their far-reaching, unobvious effects, she simply states: "This time of my life was more beautiful, more intense, and more real, despite the shortcomings and struggles we shared. The results of this work may be found only in human souls and are a fruit unknown to most."<sup>11</sup> That is the final sentence from 28 March 1955. The historian's work is done. No other notes have survived. It may be assumed that Anna Minkowska wrote no memoirs after leaving Słupsk. And if she did, she did not care if anyone would ever read them.

*Translation: Jan Prussak*

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 380.

## Abstract

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**Maria Prussak**

THE INSTITUTE OF LITERARY RESEARCH OF THE POLISH ACADEMY OF SCIENCES

*Anna Minkowska – A Duty to Remember*

The article addresses memories of pre-war teacher (DPhil) Anna Minkowska, née Znad, who remained in Poland in complete solitude after the war, as her husband Colonel Anatol Minkowski had died in September 1939, and her children have emigrated. In 1946 she decided to go to Słupsk to organize, together with priest Jan Zieja, the Uniwersytet Ludowy (People's University) and run Polish language courses for people who did not intend to leave Pomerania. Minkowska describes the post-war life in Słupsk and her impressions of visiting her son in Zurich, she also mentions events of her own youth (studies in Zurich), and pre-war Warsaw. These memories illustrate the history of women who, after losing their family, consolidated their former environment and engaged in social activities right after the war, trying to give meaning to their lives again. The author shows, step by step, how the new authorities blocked and eventually liquidated all civic initiatives.

## Keywords

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diary, war, family, social work, displacement, authority

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 Andrea Pető
 

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## Revisiting the Life Story of Júlia Rajk

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DOI: 10.18318/td.2020.en.1.20 | ORCID: 0000-0002-7525-2582

I had spent three years of my life, between 1998 and 2001, writing the life story of Júlia Rajk. The reason I have chosen her life as the subject of my work is that in the post-World War II period (1949–1989) there were two names which were silenced in Hungary. These names, after the execution of their holders, were erased from documents and history. They were airbrushed from photographs and those who knew them in person might fear imprisonment and execution for pronouncing these names loudly. The first name was László Rajk (1909–1949), whose rehabilitation and reburial on 6 October 1956 proved to be a rehearsal for the Hungarian Revolution of 23 October 1956. The second name was Imre Nagy (1896–1958), the Prime Minister of the Hungarian Revolution, who was also executed by the order of János Kádár (1912–1989) in 1958. Milan Kundera characterized the resistance against communism as a fight with the power of memory against forgetting. In twentieth-century Hungarian history we cannot name anybody else who fought with such eloquence against the official versions of forgetting as Júlia Rajk. She had to fight to save from obscurity her own name, the name of her son, and the name of her husband. Júlia Rajk fought fiercely and

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**Andrea Pető** is Professor in the Department of Gender Studies at Central European University, Budapest, Hungary and a Doctor of Science of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. In 2005, she was awarded the Officer's Cross Order of Merit of the Republic of Hungary by the President of the Hungarian Republic, and the Bolyai Prize by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in 2006. She was awarded the 2018 All European Academies Madame de Staël Prize for Cultural Values.

bravely for the reburial and rehabilitation of these two men who are now present in every history textbook. She, on the other hand, is not. She was forgotten until 1989 for, besides being a woman, not being communist enough, and then after 1989 she was omitted from the canon because she was too much of a communist. That was a good reason to write her life story in the hope of writing her back into history.

My book about her life was published in Hungarian, in German, and in Bulgarian.<sup>1</sup> I also published two peer-reviewed articles based on the monograph, in English and in French, as I was commissioned to contribute to a special issue on history of women during communism and to a book on the de-Stalinization process.<sup>2</sup> These two topics, which already frame her life story, open up a space to talk about the importance of women from Central Europe before a larger audience.

Writing the book was emotionally demanding as it was a story of betrayal, surveillance, violence, and death. I interviewed the only son of Júlia Rajk for the book, László Rajk (born 1949). After the last interview I told him I had planned to complete the manuscript because I want to let him go on with his life as quickly as possible. He smiled at me bitterly and told me that now I know how he felt his entire life. This smile actually was very informative when I was writing the book as it reminded me that I can never be an insider or understand the feelings of the protagonists. Also, reviewing the changes in writing women's history of the past fifteen years proves how wrong I was when I thought I could disentangle myself from my subject quickly. In this paper, I will discuss the possible frames of narration of life story of a communist woman, the processes for how the intersection of different frames of narration make her life story invisible. I will also discuss what has changed, as far as sources and narrative frameworks are concerned, in the past fifteen years, that is, since I sent off the proofs with the hope that the book would have been finished. As a biographer you always remain inside the life story of your subject and you follow whatever happens after with the subject of your book: she always remains a point of reference but without the illusion of understanding her life story.

1 Andrea Pető, *Rajk Júlia* (Budapest: Balassi, 2001), in German: *Geschlecht, Politik und Stalinismus in Ungarn. Eine Biographie von Júlia Rajk* (Herne: Gabriele Schäfer Verlag, 2007), in Bulgarian: *Julia Rajk* (Sofia: Altera, 2010).

2 The chapters are: "De-Stalinisation in Hungary from a Gendered Perspective: The Case of Júlia Rajk," in *De-Stalinising Eastern Europe. The Rehabilitation of Stalin's Victims after 1953*, ed. Kevin McDermott, Matthew Stibbe (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, 46–67); "Hongrie 1956, Julia Rajk ou le pouvoir de deuil," *Clio. Femmes, Genre, Histoire* 1 (2015): 153–165; "Hungary 1956: Júlia Rajk or the Power of Mourning," *Clio. Women. Gender History* 1 (2015): 153–164.

### Júlia Rajk, a Biography Written in 2001

There was only one woman in the Hungarian history whose destiny it was to have as personal enemies the two most influential Hungarian politicians of the post-WWII period, Mátyás Rákosi (1892–1971) and János Kádár. Together they masterminded the execution of her husband, László Rajk, after the first Hungarian show trial in 1949. Her husband, a legendary fighter in the Spanish Civil War and the leader of the home-grown communist movement in Hungary, was the iron-fisted Minister of Interior, who introduced the decree banning women's organizations in the country, among other things.<sup>3</sup>

Júlia Rajk was born Júlia Földes in 1914 in a lower working class family with a strong communist tradition. In the 1930s she lived for a while in Paris and became active in promoting Red Aid for Spain. She re-entered Hungary at the beginning of the Second World War. She saved the lives of Jewish communists by providing false papers. She worked illegally for the Communist Party before being arrested in December 1944 with her partner whom she had to take care of (as a Party task). That partner was the leader of the illegal Communist Party in Hungary, László Rajk. It was quite common to assign communist women a caring role for important male comrades by the Party independently of their emancipatory ideology. Between 1945 and 1949 as a wife of the famous communist minister of interior, Lászlóné Rajk (Mrs. László Rajk) was a member of the party elite as she worked as a leading functionary in the communist-controlled Democratic Association of Hungarian Women (MND SZ). The couple was living the life of a busy professional couple. Júlia was eager to have a child and she gave birth to one in January 1949. The godfather of László junior was János Kádár, who has been the successor of László Rajk in the seat of Minister of Interior, when László was appointed to the unimportant place of Minister of Foreign Affairs of a country which did not have any foreign policy other than a friendly relationship with the Soviet Union. László Rajk was not a Muscovite, he did not speak Russian, so he was lacking the qualifications required for this job and therefore became an ideal first victim of the Stalinist show trials in Hungary.

In Júlia's trial, which took place in March 1950, nine months after her arrest, she received a five-year prison sentence, having been convicted of supporting her husband's so-called "subversive policy." The son of Júlia and László, also called László, was a five-month-old baby when his mother was arrested in June 1949. The infant was taken to an orphanage and renamed István Kovács, the most common name in Hungary.

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3 See on this: Andrea Pető, *Women in Hungarian Politics 1945–1951* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).

After she served her sentence and was released from prison as Lászlóné Györk (Mrs. László Györk), her name, and also her son's name, were changed without any consultation to erase the name of her husband from memory. Her appeals for official rehabilitation to the leaders of the Communist Party were signed by both names Rajk and Györk. She knew that her husband needed to be rehabilitated, having been recognized as a victim of a Stalinist show trial in 1949. In 1955, during Júlia's rehabilitation process, she fiercely fought for the right to use her own name: Ms. László Rajk. Júlia used her unquestionable and uncontested moral power as a widow of the innocently executed hero of the Hungarian communist movement to force the Communist Party leadership to begin and complete the rehabilitation of political prisoners, and her husband was buried with all possible official honors on 6 October 1956. The photo of the widow and her son taken at the funeral became famous throughout the world as a symbol of the victims of Stalinism.

The "language of grief" is first and foremost a women's language, and this gave Rajk her confidence. Standing up for her executed husband gave meaning to her own years in prison. As a wife fighting for the honorable burial of her husband, she was also raised above the controversies and dividing lines of Hungarian politics more generally. The struggle, however, did not end with the graveside photograph of Júlia accompanied by her son, taken at her husband's reburial at the Kerepesi cemetery in Budapest and published in the international press. The fact that a reburial was held inspired the leaders of the Hungarian Revolution, who saw that it was possible to mobilize hundreds of thousands of people for a "cause," using only the telephone. The implacability of Júlia Rajk and her insistence on the broadest publicity for her husband's reburial on 6 October 1956 rendered the event a psychological dress rehearsal for the 1956 Revolution.

On 4 November 1956, when the Soviet Army occupied Hungary, she asked for political refugee rights at the Embassy of Yugoslavia together with Imre Nagy, the Prime Minister of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, and the members of Nagy's cabinet. Ms. Rajk was subsequently kidnapped and taken to Romania by the Soviets, together with Imre Nagy, and she spent two years there till she was given permission to return to Hungary as Júlia Rajk.

She was granted permission to return to Hungary in October 1958, and gradually became a key figure in the opposition movement, demanding the rehabilitation of Nagy and his fellow martyrs. After 1958, she became the Júlia, a real institution who always protected the weak against those who were abusing their power, negotiating with the Party leadership to protect anti-communist intellectuals. She organized the first NGO in Hungary, a dog shelter, after the ban on such associations in 1951. She also gathered signatures supporting the Charta 77, and campaigned against strengthening the abortion



law. She offered the compensation she received for the loss of her husband for a fund supporting talented university students, at a time when individual charity was not widely accepted. She worked as an archivist in the Hungarian National Archive till her retirement. She died of cancer in 1981 in Budapest.

### **Frames and Sources of Writing Life Stories of Communist Women**

The life stories of women who joined the communist movement before WWII can be told in different frames, driven by the insight and politics of the historian and the aim of constructing a gendered political subjectivity. As there were very few women who actually held important positions in “politics proper,” they are described either as ruthless and savvy manipulators or as victims who believed in the good cause (i.e., communism), but allowed themselves to be misled by antidemocratic practice even as they were full of good intentions in promoting women’s rights.<sup>4</sup> I based my work on the analysis of memoirs and interviews of Hungarian communist women active in the illegal movement before 1945 to show how they were silenced or confined to the narrative frames that did not challenge the patriarchal frame.<sup>5</sup>

When writing Júlia Rajk’s life story I had several options to choose from. I decided to base the narrative frame on the fight for her name, following the basic feminist fight for one’s own name.<sup>6</sup> The political success and influence of Júlia Rajk was due to her explicitly non-political use of language. She spoke publicly as a mother and as a wife, undermining the disenchanting political discourse using Stalinist newspeak. Júlia was also the first practitioner of “anti-politics,” who built separate institutions in the semi-public sphere: ran a saloon discussing politics and recent gossip, a dog shelter, brought children of imprisoned comrades to cake shops, and the like.<sup>7</sup> She institutionalized the informality and created institutions, as in Romania, as part of the Imre Nagy

4 Nanette Funk, “A Very Tangled Knot: Official State Socialist Women’s Organizations, Women’s Agency and Feminism in Eastern European State Socialism,” *European Journal of Women’s Studies* 4 (2014): 344–360.

5 Andrea Pető, “A Missing Piece: How Hungarian Women in the Communist Nomenclatura are Not Remembering,” in *Eastern Europe: Women in Transition*, ed. Irena Grudzińska-Gross, Andrzej Tymowski (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2013), 145–155.

6 Denise Riley, *Am I That Name?: Feminism And the Category of ‘Women’ in History* (London: MacMillan, 1988).

7 Andrea Pető, Judit Szapor, “Women and the »Alternative Public Sphere«: Toward a New Definition of Women’s Activism and the Separate Spheres in East-Central Europe,” *NORA. Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research* 3 (2004): 172–182.

group organized school (1956–1958), the “Júlia tours” bus tours to the “West,” and used the power of conversation as a force of resistance.

At first glance it looks like an excellent life story that is easy to narrate. However, there are problems only the biographer encounters.

The first problem, as always, is related to sources. The first difficulty in writing life stories is the family as the gatekeeper of information. Her son, a well-known architect, stage designer, and prominent member of the democratic opposition, has the right to remain silent and to select what to share and what not to share with the researcher. His selectivity has changed during the past fifteen years. Furthermore, my heroine was not an intellectual, and there are no written sources apart from her handwritten prison testimony – political action was her self-writing. I could not get access to her private archive: her son said there is a big trunk in the attic consisting of all her papers but he does not want to open it.

The second issue is the iconoclasm of communists. Her husband, László Rajk, was a ruthless and talented communist who without a moment of hesitation destroyed the remaining democratic fabric of the Hungarian society, imprisoned opposition figures, and sent them to the Gulag. Therefore, sources about him, the minutes of his trial, and surveillance records have all been destroyed. And that impacted her as well.

The third issue is that Júlia was not a lovable and kind public personality as she was tall, harsh, and she knew everything better than anyone in public conversations. The major source of the biography I have written are oral history interviews which are more about changing narrative frames and self-representation of the interviewees than the couple themselves. By now, all the interviewees are dead, so there is no way to ask further questions.

The fourth problem is the framing. Usually, women's life stories are narrated as *Bildungsroman*, as how the heroine is becoming more and more determined and ideologically more convinced. Julia Rajk's life story should be presented differently. It is not a *Bildungsroman*, a story that developed out of her childhood experiences (her socialization) in a leftist working class family – her father was a soldier during the short lived communist revolution of 1919 and was on the watch list of the police after that. She was a committed social democrat, and a member of the underground Communist Party, and she remained so until her death in 1981. She always used her power – the power of a widow – as a victim of the show trials, to achieve what she wanted: from the rehabilitation of her husband to obtaining passports for dissidents. Her life story was an *Unbildungsroman*, a process of un-learning and of adapting to changing political circumstances while not giving up values. Her life story moved from illegal Communist Party activist to wife and widow and mother. It is also difficult to fit her life into the post-1989 feminist framework as she

was interested in and supported different issues such as freedom and democracy, not necessarily those which are labeled women's issues today, like domestic violence or LGBTQIT rights. However, in the last sixteen years major changes happened and they have altered the way Júlia Rajk's story can be written as far as sources and framing are concerned.

### New Sources

As far as the sources are concerned, access to primary sources became easier during the past few years, but at the same time it became more difficult. Definitely in the past sixteen years more and more material has become available online as a consequence of the digital turn. Researchers do not need to travel to the archive anymore. Journals, newspapers, and documents about Júlia Rajk which I had no idea had covered her story, showed up on my screen after I have googled her name. This technical development will have a major impact on research. The primary sources which have been digitized will be used in research, like in this paper, while the non-digitized, like most of the Hungarian journals and newspapers published in the past decades, will be omitted and forgotten by researchers.

When I did my research for the book at the end of the 1990s I was sitting in the archives literally for years. Now I could not physically do that as recently the Hungarian government has relocated the collection of the national archives from the historical Castle District to a new archive to be built in the uncertain future. Due to the relocation no archival research can be done on documents produced after 1945 and no date has been set when it will be again possible. Therefore, the internet and digital sources will remain available for research as of now with their specific politics of selectivity. The digital archives of major international journals such as *Der Spiegel*, *La Repubblica* are searchable and their reporting on Júlia Rajk is now accessible on-line.<sup>8</sup> The subject file collection of the Open Society Archives has been digitized too, so there is no need to sit in their cozy research room anymore. However, major sources in Hungarian, both archival and secondary, have not been digitized or are not even accessible hindering the research process.

The second aspect of the digital turn is the abundance of photos available on the Internet. As for photos, ones I did not have access to when I performed my research are now popping up in dozens in a Google search. Fifteen years ago I considered myself lucky and trusted by the owner, when I was given the cherished paper prints from private photo collections. A majority of these new photos now available online are photos documenting the reburial of László

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8 *L'Espresso* 4 November (1956); *La Repubblica* 15 April (1992); *Der Spiegel* 24 October (1956).

Rajk on 6 October 1956. These are both private and press photos as this was the most photographed public event of the 1950s and beyond.

Following the *Zeitgeist*, László Rajk Jr. also launched his own personal website where he uploaded his family photos, which he did not share with me when I did my research. The website of Júlia Rajk's son represents his parents and their work equally. These family photos I have not seen before are of Júlia's mother, depicting Júlia with her family in the 1930s on an excursion, and the only photo when the family was together with Júlia holding her son in a baby blanket with his father standing behind them and looking at the baby-boy with a proud smile. The intimacy, ordinariness and iconography of the photo: a mother with a child while a father watches them proudly, is difficult to reconcile with the couple's shared communist values of equality.

The most exciting task of writing a book is selecting the cover image. I suggested an official photo with the couple together clapping during a harvest celebration standing on a podium. In the original picture there was a pretty woman standing on the left of László Rajk, as he has been always surrounded by pretty women. The publisher, when designing the cover, decided to photoshop the second woman from the photo. Reviews, articles, interviews about the book have often been published with this photoshopped photo as an authentic photo. The phenomenon of fake science and fake photos is not entirely new and, of course, the troubling question of who was that woman who was airbrushed from a feminist biography, especially as she will possibly disappear from historiography forever.

The digital turn introduced a new element in the politics of selectivity of historical sources as it made certain sources available online depending on the power position and resources of the given institution or individual. Digital citizenship is empowering some but making others invisible, depending on institutions having resources to digitize and to put sources available online. Júlia never served in an institutional power position, therefore sources on her life are not available. Her story is represented by others even after the digital turn.

Not only has the digital turn brought unexpected new sources to light but also new and exciting publications. I received an email from a dear friend, Padraic Kenney, in 2012, who suggested that I should help out his PhD student who is planning her first book project on women imprisoned during the communist period. An email from Anna Muller soon popped up in my mailbox asking for documents to be published in a volume curated by IPN (the newly established Polish Institute of National Remembrance). I responded to her that I think all of Júlia's documents have been published or are available on the website of her son, but I could inquire with László Rajk Jr. I contacted him and it turned out, again, how wrong I was as unexpected documents have

materialized from the private archive of László Rajk to be published in Warsaw in Polish. Maybe that was the moment when the trunk in the attic has been opened.

László Rajk made available to the Polish project three letters sent by Julia to her son from captivity in Romania, which he did not share with me when I was writing the book. There was another heartbreaking photo in the package of scanned documents which he sent with my help to Warsaw. That is a photo of him in an orphanage with Júlia's handwritten comment saying that the photo was taken in December 1949, seven months after the couple was imprisoned, and after the execution of her husband. Júlia also found it important to note in pencil on the back of the photo that she held on to it during her imprisonment. The photo was given to her by Ákos Pál, an old school colonel of the state security services, who participated in preparing the Rajk trial and who committed suicide when János Kádár was imprisoned in 1951. It is very understandable that the son did not want to share this photo with a wider audience, so it is not available on his webpage. What has changed that he gave the permission to published this photo in a Polish book? The publication did not go into print at the time of writing of this article due to the politics of the Polish historical institution – the Institute of National Remembrance – which originally commissioned the book. After years of silence, the IPN gave permission in 2018 to Anna Muller to publish the book somewhere else. On the one hand, exciting new sources have emerged as a result of the book project, curated at the time by a new and already controversial state-funded historical research institute, and on the other hand, these sources have remained unpublished because of the illiberal turn in places like Poland, while they were discovered precisely in the framework of this illiberal turn.

### New Frames

The second question is related to how the framing of women's life stories has changed in recent years. What has happened sixteen years after my book was published in 2001? Has the book succeeded in building a canon of its own while questioning the concept of canon itself? Did the results of my biography become an integral and indispensable part of history writing, which is confined to a national frame? Has the introduction of gender as a category of analysis produced the expected "epistemological change" in history writing?<sup>9</sup> The answer is a definite no, the book on Júlia Rajk has not become a part of the historical canon: she remained confined as the widow of László Rajk in

9 Andrea Pető, *Eastern Europe: Gender Research, Knowledge Production and Institutions. Handbuch Interdisziplinäre Geschlechterforschung*, 2018. Vol. 2. 1535–1547.

historical narratives.<sup>10</sup> But two unexpected changes did happen in the past fifteen years in the context of how women's history has been written.<sup>11</sup> The first is the conservative "herstory turn" that actually gave visibility to Júlia Rajk and the increasing interest of feminists in the communist women's movement, which had paradoxically contributed to the silencing of her story.

The first change, the "herstory turn," where absence of women in history was replaced by the presence of women. In this framework history of women has been written from the point of view of suffering, sacrifice, and victimhood and not in searching for agency or subjectivity.<sup>12</sup> This new school of history writing is a way for an illiberal state to appropriate memory politics of historical events for its own purpose. Women slowly became acceptable and worthy topics of historical research but without questioning the traditional framing. The research on particular subjects, such as female political prisoners during communism, has become an important research topic in institutes specialized in researching crimes of communism with the aim of making women visible. The life story of Júlia Rajk actually could be framed this way as a story of suffering and oppression during communism. As the increasing of women's visibility was the aim of feminist history writing, there was a clear confluence. But the nation-centered narrative maintains its self-standing community paradigm and women are considered as one group among others, as an appendix. Therefore, Júlia remained outside of this newly formed canon, too.

Secondly, a scholarly discussion started in gender studies on whether "communist feminism" has existed at all. The summarizing dossier of *Aspasia, The International Yearbook of Central, Eastern, and Southeastern European Women's and Gender History*, volumes 6 and 7, are focused on the history of women's and gender history in Central, Eastern, and Southern Europe by listing popular accomplishments. It is very understandable that, due to the disillusionment with neoliberal policies, critical intellectuals will revisit and turn to the evaluation and re-evaluation of statist feminism, as it existed under communism (but also in previous times). This scholarship is mostly focusing on different

10 See my acceptance speech of ALLEA 2018 Award published in Hungarian: "Germaine és Júlia. Párhuzamos történetek az európai históriában," 168 óra 7 June (2018): 42–44, and in Bulgarian: „Паралели в европейската история,” *Literaturen vestnik* 27 June (2018): 9.

11 Andrea Pető, "Changing Paradigms of Writing Women's History in Post-Communist Europe," in Парачовешкото: грация и гравитация— сборник в чест на проф. Миглена Николчин. *The Parahuman: Grace and Gravity. In Honour of Prof. Miglena Nikolchina*, ed. Kornelia Spassova, Darin Tenev, Maria Kalinova (Sofia: Sofia University, 2017), 280–289.

12 Andrea Pető, "Roots of Illiberal Memory Politics: Remembering Women in the 1956 Hungarian Revolution," *Baltic Worlds* 4 (2017): 42–58.

women's organizations, on both the national and the international level. The story of Júlia Rajk does not fit into the agenda of any of this research, no matter that she was a self-confessed communist. Present debates about the nostalgic presentation of history of women during communism only contribute to this self-ghettoization in a historical moment when critical analysis of progressive tradition and practice need it the most.

## Conclusions

The life story of Júlia Rajk illustrates the complexities of gender and communism, as far as the construction of female political subjectivity is concerned, and the vulnerability of women's histories to the populist challenge. Paul Frosh pointed out "the significance of witnessing for contemporary conjunctions between personal experience, shareable knowledge, and public representation."<sup>13</sup> The life story of Júlia Rajk was shareable knowledge back in 2001. By 2018 it is the women's herstory turn together with anti-communism that validate some parts of her story while silencing others. Her life story, independently from the high number of sources available online, is limited to the web page of her son and to my biography.

I was recently asked to give a talk about Júlia's life in László Rajk College because the elite fraternity of University of Economics in Budapest was under pressure from the new conservative government to change its name following the government agenda of eliminating names of streets and institutions with connections to leftist movements. During the meeting, discussing how to handle the government pressure on the fraternity to change its name, someone suggested to change the name to Júlia Rajk College to satisfy the expectation of the government on the one hand, and spare some money on ordering new seals and letterhead on the other. But the leadership of the college dismissed this proposal with the majority stating the obvious that Júlia Rajk was as much a communist as László Rajk, and that fact has been the main concern of the government. The second reason they dismissed this idea of renaming the college after Júlia is that others, they argued during the meeting, might think that it is a joke.

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13 Paul Frosh, "Telling Presences: Witnessing, Mass Media, and the Imagined Lives of Strangers Critical Studies," *Media Communication* 4 (2006): 267.

## Abstract

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**Andrea Pető**

CENTRAL EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY

*Revisiting the Life Story of Júlia Rajk*

The paper discusses the difficulties of writing the life story of the wife of a leading home-grown communist, László Rajk (1909–1949), Júlia Rajk. It argues that the digital turn makes sources visible and available, which have not been accessible before, such as newspaper articles and photos. However, the building up of the memory politic of the illiberal state uses herstory as a tool of “mnemonic security” and places Júlia Rajk’s life outside the canon.

## Keywords

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life story, digital turn, women’s history, herstory, Hungary, gender history, women in politics



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Anna Pawlik

## **"The State Helps You, So You Help the State."<sup>1</sup> Illness and Recovery in a Memoir Written by Zofia J. for a State Sanctioned Creative Writing Competition**

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DOI: 10.18318/td.2020.en.1.21 | ORCID: 0000-0002-4086-8627

**Z**ofia J.'s memoir is a short piece of writing, submitted to a competition organized in December 1961 by the Committee for Researching Rural Youth Communities of the Polish Academy of Sciences (Polska Akademia Nauk, henceforth PAN) and the Rural Sociology Department PAN in association with the Union of Rural Youths and the People's Publishing Cooperative.<sup>2</sup> It amounts to no more than five sheets of typed writing in A4 format. The document being discussed in this text was never published. Instead, it was stored as a manuscript in the PAN Archive – in the form of a typewriter copy of the handwritten original – among other published and un-

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**Anna Pawlik**  
– graduate of the faculty of culture studies at Warsaw University, member of the Women's Archive at the Institute of Literary Research PAN in Warsaw, responsible for the Archive dedicated to the memory of Maria Janion, who was one of the most remarkable Polish intellectuals of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

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1 This slogan was placed on a propaganda poster of a campaign raising awareness of venereal diseases. Piotr Barański, "Walka z chorobami wenerycznymi w Polsce w latach 1948–1949," in *Kłopoty z seksem w PRL. Rodzenie nie całkiem po ludzku, aborcja, choroby, odmienności*, ed. Marcin Kula (Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2012), 68.

2 Organizers promised all entries would be confidential, which is why I decided not to reveal the author's full name, but shorten it to an initial. The surname itself is to be found in the quoted sources.

published entries from this competition. Comparison work on the texts published by the People's Publishing Cooperative, shows they were edited before publication, not during the transcription process.<sup>3</sup> The process of removing certain passages was guided by censoring decisions,<sup>4</sup> as well as by methodological assumptions which aimed to remove those fragments that did not fit the research hypotheses the competition was based upon.

The organizers had outlined the participation criteria very broadly, with the main two being age (16–35 years) and place of residence, current or past. This is why the competition was open not only to those of peasant origin currently living in the countryside but also to those who moved, and were now inhabiting urban areas. The competition was aimed at young persons, rural teachers and doctors, by which we mean the so-called "peasant intelligentsia." "May all those who feel connected with the countryside write [...]" – the invitation to take part made it clear that there was no limit in terms of length and other formal requirements. And yet this clause was added to the invitation:

We do not intend to suggest participants write in any present memoir style. Everyone ought to write according to their own idea and order, in their own words – the way one tells the story of one's own life and the views which emerge from this experience, along with dreams and aspirations, as if speaking to someone close to the author's heart. We wish to remind you certain elements require consideration and developing in the memoirs.<sup>5</sup>

The pointers defining potential themes which might be of interest to readers were very detailed and clearly defined. Participants were, among other things, asked to give information including their date and place of birth, the name of their family town or village, their family's financial situation, their experience of preschool and schooling, relationships with peers and teachers, problems and conflicts, friendships, social relations, residential conditions, eating habits, way of dressing, relationship between domestic residents, school years leading to working age and their working lives, attitudes to those working their local lands, etc. Organizers also had expectations in terms of style and formalities, asking for concise, precise, and honest testimonies,

3 The memoirs were published up until 1980 in a nine volume series titled *Młode pokolenie wsi Polski Ludowej. Pamiętniki i studia* (Warszawa: Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza, 1964–1980).

4 Krzysztof Kosiński, "Pamiętnikarstwo konkursowe jako źródło historyczne," *Polska 1944/45–1989. Studia i materiały* 6 (2003): 139.

5 *Młode pokolenie wsi Polski Ludowej. Pamiętniki i studia*, vol. 1, *Awans pokolenia*, ed. Józef Chałasiński (Warszawa: Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza, 1964), 728.

chronological ordering of the authors' life stories, starting with their school years up until the present, preceded with narratives about their closest families. For those unused to writing such narratives these pointers would have seemed rather instructive.

In the published volumes of *Młode pokolenie wsi Polski Ludowej* (Young generation of the Polish Peoples' Republic countryside), which was a collection of competition entries, we see a range of diverse voices in both formal and narrative terms.<sup>6</sup> Apart from typical memoirs, these also contain diaries (this is probably due to the conventional understanding of the term "memoir," that is used alternately with the term "diary" in Poland) written from a certain distance in time or initiated after the call for entries had been read. Nevertheless, the majority of the published works are those which do not deviate from the organizers' expectations all that much.

Altogether more than five and a half thousand persons from lower social strata, many of whom had only just developed literacy skills, sat down to write and sent in longer or shorter memoirs, having been encouraged by the organizers to do so. The presence of their stories in history as anonymous pointers in terms of numbers<sup>7</sup> means that these texts deserve particular attention. They allow us to learn of individual lives as lived by those who belonged to an unnamed social group generally described only in academic research papers.

Social history is not, however, able to explain the biography of an individual person, just as individual persons cannot explain the way societies they might belong to function along with their institutions. There is always an inexhaustible disparity between that which is social and that which is personal. The individual cannot be reduced to a social scale, even though she or he is immersed in it, and the same holds true for the biographical dimension.<sup>8</sup> In seeking out this "in-between," and the tensions which arise in this field, I see a task for research work conducted in the spirit of *life writing*. This research perspective demands we concentrate not only on that which has taken place, but also on the way in which it is told – on the emotions, affectations, and identities involved. It demands that researchers adopt a sympathetic

6 *Młode pokolenie wsi Polski Ludowej. Pamiętniki i studia* (Warszawa: Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza, 1964–1980).

7 Piotr Laskowski, "»Zacząłem filozofować, rozmyślać, szukać odpowiedzi na dręczące mnie kwestie.« Wspomnienia Edwardy (Etl) Bomsztyk: biografia, emancypacja, polityka," *Praktyka Teoretyczna* 1 (2017): 85.

8 Sabina Loriga, "The Role of the Individual in History: Biographical and Historical Writing in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Century," in *Theoretical Discussions of Biography. Approaches from History, Microhistory, and Life Writing*, ed. Hans Renders and Binne de Haan (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 91.

attitude to the authors of the texts being reviewed, as well as sensitivity regarding the documents themselves, which are often conventional and fragmentary, and therefore demand repeated and insightful readings.<sup>9</sup>

This perspective is supplemented by questions asked by Sidonie Smith and Julie Watson – about the limits of research, about the barriers presented by the lack of sufficient sources, and the risks associated with interpretations: "When a subjectivity cannot be constructed from archival fragments, what storytelling possibilities are available ethically that, while respecting silences and incompleteness, can find some voicing?"<sup>10</sup> The authors refer to Marlene Kadar's assumptions, who in terms of her research practices allows activities which are based on the process of recovering lost stories, collecting fragments, and allowing for their incompleteness.

These questions are important for the reading of memoirs such as that written by Zofia J., which present us with certain methodological problems. What can one write about a memoir written by an anonymous woman from a small village in the Lower Carpathian region far from the central heart of Poland, who is not only distant in temporal terms – following the change of social order – but who has also been abandoned and forgotten? All that we know about this woman can be found in these few pages of autobiographical writing. What is the interpretation of this kind of personal document and how much interpretation do we allow ourselves in these sorts of documents? These are key questions, to which we must constantly return in our research work focusing on personal documents.

Zofia J.'s entry<sup>11</sup> is thematically divided into two sections, of which the first has a very personal quality. It narrates the rape which was perpetrated upon the author by a young man from a neighboring district, as the girl was walking at night along a rural lane, taking a shortcut when returning home from a village dance – this section also goes into some detail when describing the consequences of this crime. The first part has been organized by the author according to three dates: the rape itself (10 September 1948), the start of her sickness (15 November 1948), and the permit issued by a doctor for a marriage ceremony (6 July 1958). The fact that the author can still recall these events in the 1960s seems telling. Even if the dates were randomly chosen, they seem of

9 Bronisława Waligórska, *Listy z Cytadeli*, ed. Monika Rudaś-Grodzka (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Instytutu Badań Literackich PAN, 2018), 14–16.

10 Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, "The Archives of Those Who Write Themselves: What and Where Are They?" in this volume: page 344.

11 Organizers promised the competition entrants' identities would be confidential, and published anonymously, which is why I decided not to reveal the author's full name, but shorten it to an initial.

great importance in terms of the events being recalled. They add to the writing an element of defining detail, of symbolic proof which makes the author's story more believable to her readers.

The description of the rape – events fourteen years past, counting back from 1962 – is encapsulated by Zofia J. in this one paragraph:

A quiet, pleasant evening lit by a bright moon, I was returning from a dance with my friends. Each one of them lived closer to the village, while I kept flying along a country lane, when from behind a bush he leapt out, as if he were a predatory wolf after some fruit. This was a lad from a neighboring district I knew quite well, but had never taken any notice of, not being in any way friends with him, for his hooligan ways were not to my liking. This was a lad without honor. When he got in my way, he grabbed me so forcefully, I had no way of freeing myself from his grasp nor of screaming, for he stuffed a kerchief in my mouth. I being so most unfortunate was then abused by this awful man so badly, it took me a long time to make my way home.<sup>12</sup> (1)

Two months after that event, the author felt unwell, noticing also a rash upon her skin. She went to see a doctor, who diagnosed her with a “terrible ailment” (1) and wrote out a referral to a skin-venereal disease clinic, which the young woman then attended. Specialists there asked about the circumstances in which she had become infected. “And so I told them how it happened” (1) – Zofia J. writes in her memoir. The disease she had been infected with was not explicitly named in the text, but details provided clearly point to it being syphilis. The diagnosis was a great worry for J., the treatment taking a long time and involving many distressing processes. This was a condition which could be treated with penicillin by medical professionals of the time, though it was still associated with terrible things, especially by older generations of rural folk: “Father says that he heard about this illness when he was in America. He knew people who died in hospitals miserably, for their bodies fell apart while they were still alive” (2).

Zofia told her parents about the infection, but it is not clear from her memoir how much she told them about how she had been infected in the first place. From reading her text, we only learn that she confessed to her parents of having “a personal concern” (2), seeking compassion from them. Her rapist was also informed of the infection.

The next day, as I was returning from the shops, close to the road I saw that lad doing something in his garden, I approached him with tears in my eyes and called

<sup>12</sup> The original format has been retained in the quoted fragments.

him the worst sorts of names. Next, he told me that not only he would be suffering from this disease, but now others would have to suffer also. (1)

The subsequent sections of her memoir describe the course of her treatment. Every several days, for some months, J. had to visit a doctor until she was declared cured. The author stresses that she had more than ten kilometers to travel to the doctor's practice and had to walk this distance. This was a difficult task, especially in wintertime. Even so, she never interrupts her treatment, wanting to recover as soon as possible. In the latter section of her narrative she expresses gratitude to Communist Poland for "careful treatment and health insurance," which made the treatment free of charge for her (2). Ten years on from her recovery, J. got married, first making sure she was fully clear of infection.

So I ask my doctor if I can get married, and he gives his permission, but one must then remember to come get tested during the course of one's pregnancy. And so I remembered to do all that, just to be well and give birth to a healthy baby. (2)

At the time of writing her memoir, J. was married over four years and had two healthy children. She was living in a small village in today's Lower Carpathian voivodship. She then went on to say more about what happened to her perpetrator:

He who made special efforts to make others suffer with him, rather than to save himself, is no longer alive. His funeral took place towards the end of last year, though not in his village, but on the other side of Poland. He ended his hooligan life in a distant hospital. (4)

Part two of her memoir refers to various issues connected with the rural community in her place of residence.<sup>13</sup> She talks about how rural life was being modernized. This "modernity" was inaugurated with the installation of electricity supply networks in her rural district, which took place on 15 December 1960. The next stage was to be the creation of an appropriate road infrastructure. "We are building a road" (4) – J. writes – with joint strength and for the common good, as a community. And yet the project encountered difficulties and the rest of the text focuses on these. It was a complaint about the heart of the matter: a stubborn farmer who, in spite of promises of financial compensation, refused to have the road built on the edge of his land.

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13 The memoir does not explain if this is the same place in which the rape happened.

He did this, in spite of the benefits he himself would have reaped from such a development.

Descriptions of a whole life are not a genre determinant of memoir writing.<sup>14</sup> Even so, the call for entries defined the required elements as relating to the memoir writing genre, proposing a sequence which follows the course of a human life.

The choice of the way written tales are told affects the intrinsic qualities of said text. Zofia J.'s "autobiography" begins on 10 September 1948, which is the day on which she was raped. Everything which happened earlier – her childhood, growing up, family history, experiences of the time of the Second World War – were passed over. Autobiographical narratives are always incomplete,<sup>15</sup> but starting her narrative with the date of the rape seems telling, considering this breaks with genre conventions and strongly deviates from the suggestions given in the competition advert. And yet can we look in this for a telling form of expression, a specific textual moment, a breaching? For some reason, Zofia J. returns to this event many years later, deciding to tell complete strangers about what was done to her. And yet can we assume that this "mixed up" memoir structure is a sign of psychological damage, the result of a traumatizing crime? The author "swaps" her date of birth for the date of her rape – is this a sign that the date the crime was perpetrated has in some way become the date of birth for a new, traumatized "self"? What does matter is that she never explicitly calls by name what was done to her, even though she assigns a precise date to the event. "Sponiewieranie" (maltreatment) is the word she chooses to use, instead of "rape." It has less gravitas than "zhańbienie" (dishonor) used in a similar context by other women writers of published memoirs.<sup>16</sup> The difference between these two words is more than just in their emotional dimensions. According to a dictionary of Polish language from 1953, the word "zhańbienie" (dishonor) is synonymous with the meaning of "rape" as understood in commonplace contexts.<sup>17</sup> This same dictionary defines the word "sponiewieranie" (maltreatment)

14 Natalia Lemann, "Pamiętnik," in *Słownik rodzajów i gatunków literackich*, ed. Grzegorz Gazda and Słownia Tynecka-Makowska (Kraków: Universitas, 2006), 506–509.

15 Smith and Watson, *Archiwa zapisów życia*, 176.

16 "I prefer death to dishonor" – writes a woman author from the volume *Awans pokolenia* (Generation advancing), describing the dangerous situation she did manage to come out of in one piece: Weaver in a fabric factor, "Marzę o Paryżu," in *Młode pokolenie wsi Polski Ludowej. Pamiętniki i studia*, vol. 1, *Awans pokolenia*, ed. Józef Chałasiński (Warszawa: Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza, 1964), 713.

17 Jan Karłowicz, Adam Kryński and Władysław Niedźwiedzki, *Słownik języka polskiego*, vol. 6 (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1953).

as the destruction or the debasement of something. The word "maltreated" can also be used to describe someone who has been a victim of physical violence; it does not however relate to sexual violence.<sup>18</sup> A different dictionary, more contemporary, gives a different definition of the word "zhańbienie": "to sexually abuse a woman without her consent."<sup>19</sup> In turn, the term "sponiewieranie" mainly refers here to the psychological aspects related to use of force against persons – to debase, to belittle, to defame, to damage someone's personal sense of dignity.<sup>20</sup> Thus we see that a word literally relating to sexual violence, which was experienced by Zofia J., is not used in her memoir, while the assault itself is described in a single paragraph.

She goes into greatest detail when describing the course of medical treatment. It is actually through the description of the illness that we learn that the author was raped. The omission and textual marginalization of this experience is expressed in the amount of space devoted to it. The illness was raised to the rank of most important experience; in this context, the rape, though noted in the text, appears as something glossed or kept silent over. Pausing for a moment on the first paragraph of Zofia J.'s text, it is worth noting the way in which the narration is developed, leading to this dismissal. The sentence which introduces the violent event has the air of a fairytale to it – "A quiet, pleasant evening lit by a bright moon" – which is then enhanced by the appearance of a villainous character ("predatory wolf"). Perhaps this sort of narration creates the possibility of the story coming into being, one which in a different fashion would not have been utterable.

Zofia J. writes that on 10 September 1948 she was the victim of a brutal assault: she tried to defend herself, but the attacker was stronger – she screamed, but he gagged her with a kerchief. Once it was all over, she was unable to go straight home. The rape certainly impacted on her life, not just in the infection forced upon her body. We do not learn, however, anything about what happened once she returned home, whether anyone came to her aid, or whether she had to cope all by herself.

In 1948, rape was a crime defined by laws passed in 1932, the so called "Makarewicz statute," which, according to Monika Płatek, "is still valued as a remarkable achievement of Polish penal thinking."<sup>21</sup> This appraisal comes

18 Ibid., vol. 8.

19 *Praktyczny słownik współczesnej polszczyzny*, ed. Halina Zgółkowa, vol. 49 (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Kurpisz, 2004).

20 Ibid., vol. 40.

21 Monika Płatek, "Kryminologiczno-epistemologiczne i genderowe aspekty przestępstwa zgwałcenia," *Archiwum Kryminologii* 32 (2010): 357.



from the way in which the statute does not assume any limitations regarding “either subject or object of the act with regards to defined gender, including the possibility of the rape of a spouse, nor does it limit itself to an act perpetrated using violence or gender interactions, taking into account also deception and psychological force.”<sup>22</sup> And yet Platek also notes in this modern legal construction assumptions which treated the victim of rape with reserve and suspicion.<sup>23</sup> In this case, where we might expect a pursuit of justice, Zofia J’s memoir is silent. We can however draw conclusions that she did not report the crime to the authorities. She had to deal with everything all by herself. She found her sense of justice in the death of her rapist, who died a long way from his native village, in a hospital where, as we are invited to imagine, he was all alone.

From today’s perspective, the juxtaposition of thematically contrasting narratives – let us call them “private” and “public” – disturbs the order of a memoir as an intimate report of a violent experience. Part two of the text, the one related to life in the village, in this context seems immaterial, “tacked on.” And yet, paradoxically, introducing disharmony, it takes the weight off the opening section and restores balance to the narrative. One might also think it is a pretext, allowing the author to say that which is deeply personal. From this point of view, part one exists thanks to part two, which hides the former’s intention, the aim of which, one might presume, is to work through a traumatizing experience.

In spite of the differences between them, a certain similarity exists between the “private” and “public” spheres. In both these, the author tries to present herself as a decent citizen – committed, obedient, and grateful. In spite of the personal tone of part one, her style leans towards proving how well she

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Monika Platek also notes aspects of contemporary legislation related to social perceptions of the victims of the crime of rape: “Resistance must be both real and consistent and it is not the victim, but the court which is to judge if the victim wanted to be approached. Also the court, not the victim, must decide if the victim had to eventually submit to the attacker, or if they could have continued to defend themselves. Each time, seeing as a man was to be convicted, the type and intensity of the physical force used was “of course” in the imagination and experience of another man creating the doctrine and jurisdiction. Differences in the way women and men were trained socially were passed over. Women were expected to fight off sexual attackers, using physical force expected of the “ordinary person.” It was not taken into account that this “person” would have been male: for this was “obvious.” Women following social models of behavior generally expected of women of the time ran the risk of the resistance they put up being judged as fictitious.” (Platek, “Kryminologiczno-epistemologiczne i genderowe aspekty przestępstwa zgwałcenia,” 360).

has done her duty. We can cast more light upon this aspect of her memoir in relating the state strategies for dealing with venereal disease in the years Zofia J. underwent treatment for her condition.

An increase in sexually transmitted diseases following World War II, which was on the scale of an epidemic,<sup>24</sup> meant the authorities were forced to react and organize what was called Akcja W (Campaign W), planned for the year 1948.<sup>25</sup> This was preceded by a discussion among the medical community. Many articles were published in the year 1945 on the subject in the medical journal *Przegląd Lekarski*, which was not essentially medical, but related to battling social issues and preventing illness.

Substantial resources were invested in organizing advice clinics, in training doctors, supplying medicines, and so on. Efforts made to get as many people as was possible to undergo treatment were also connected with the necessity of educating the public about venereal disease and the risks it posed to the nation. The following actions were undertaken: posters put on display; leaflets and brochures distributed; talks given in workplaces, schools and during mass research programs, on the radio, through touring exhibitions ("naturalistic" films were screened); along with the publication of articles in the local press. Disorder, alcohol, extramarital relationships, and poor hygiene were highlighted as risk factors.<sup>26</sup> The rhetoric used by public health "administrators" implementing Campaign W was almost religious in the tone it took, in which medicalization understood as "a process of defining and reformulating social problems as medical problems,"<sup>27</sup> was tied into an image of the state which watches, protects, punishes, and forgives. Hence the "education" through macabre exhibitions, posters and brochures covered in warnings, offering free healthcare, in some cases doing so by force against individual wishes, and only then allowing a return to normal life (sexual, married, procreative life).

People were encouraged to lead lives of "sexual purity up until entering married life"<sup>28</sup> and restricting sexual activities to that conducted with their spouses. It was stressed that the state was heavily engaged in battling these illnesses (posters with the slogan "The State Helps You, So You Help the

24 Barański, "Walka z chorobami wenerycznymi w Polsce," 21.

25 "W" is an abbreviation of the Polish word "weneryczny," meaning venereal.

26 Barański, "Walka z chorobami wenerycznymi w Polsce," 67–68.

27 Sylwia Breczko, *Polityzacja ciała. Między dyskursem publicznym a teorią socjologiczną* (Kraków: Zakład Wydawniczy "Nomos," 2013), 25.

28 Barański, "Walka z chorobami wenerycznymi w Polsce," 40.

State,” screenings of film footage of President Bierut calling for improvements in the health of the general public).<sup>29</sup> Battling the spread of venereal disease became a matter of highest national importance. Disciplinary practices actioned self-restraint in terms of activities strongly connected with morality and spheres of communal life, which was of interest to the government.

As a result of this sort of campaign designed to battle sexually transmitted diseases, Zofia J. could not only not have encountered the medical diagnosis of venereal diseases, but most probably, due to the extent of Campaign W, she must have known what the diagnosis might be in her case, even before it was given. News of her condition caused her pain. Although syphilis was treatable by then, many still recalled the physical and psychological devastation caused by it in the past. Undergoing treatment was something the state demanded without question of those diagnosed with such infections. Attempts were made to encourage individuals to engage in treatments of their own free will, but if this did not work, according to pre-WWII legislation they could be forced to undergo treatment against their own will. Zofia J.’s memoir relates a duty well done, all the more so that this was paid for with “hardship and great effort.”

During the treatment I had to suffer a fair bit, for the road to the clinic was 11km long. During winter time, blizzards were so severe there was no sign of the road visible at all. Cars were not available at the time. In spite of the hardship and great effort I had to expend, I tried not to miss any of the sessions so as not to disrupt the treatment, all just to return to full health. (2)

“And so I am grateful to Communist Poland for careful treatment and free health insurance” (2) – she goes on to write.<sup>30</sup> The fate of this young woman infected with syphilis in a rural district was solely in the hands of the state. The ruling party is an assumed, and powerfully present, agent in the narrative, figuring as one of the organizers – the Union of Rural Youths. The author names this institution in her memoir, as having at their disposal her personal data:

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 65–70.

<sup>30</sup> “Until the end of 1971 the residents of rural districts, not employed in the public sector (with the exception of pregnant women and children up to the age of fourteen) were not provided with free national healthcare insurance.” See Ewelina Szpak, “*Chory człowiek jest wtedy jak coś go boli*.” *Społeczno-kulturowa historia zdrowia i choroby na wsi polskiej po 1945 r.* (Warszawa: Instytut Historii PAN, 2016), 8.

I ask that my entry to this Competition and my address remain solely the knowledge of the Union of Rural Youths, seeing as it is a secret I have revealed to You alone. (5)

This closing statement gives the text the air of a confession; a shameful statement, something the author was keeping secret from the world. The Union of Rural Youths, one of the memoir writing competition organizers, is thus endowed with great trust by Zofia J. Through the competition, J. decides to tell the story of a traumatizing event, because finally there is someone there willing to listen. J. is in search of an audience for her testimony.

Rape as an extreme sort of experience casts Zofia beyond the realm of normal living. Its consequence – infection – gives it liminal status; this "short break, during which the past is momentarily negated, suspended or removed, the future having not yet began."<sup>31</sup> The author is also excluded in a corporeal context: "For the first few weeks of my illness, I had to be very careful not to innocently infect those around me" (2). She focuses on that which had to be done and was done, denying herself any psychological reflection and social consequences of that which was done to her.

State propaganda describes venereal diseases with the lexicon of medicine and morality. Zofia J. seems to externalize this voice coming from above and tells us about her life, making use of such contextual frameworks. Her story is a confession, while also being a report of penance being done. The governing regime in her memoir is an unquestionable expert, teacher, and priest. State propaganda created techniques of managing disease that were a tool for political control.

J.'s dairy is, judging from this perspective, a product of this political strategy. The body had a political and cultural value, the regime of the time constructing a form of a politicized body. This was reflected in J.'s memoir, which by using the first-person narrative took up the government's own narrative voice. The body in this superficially personal narrative, having its political potential, undergoing treatment provided by the state, shows the way in which a narrative transfer has taken place – political discourse permeating an autobiographical, private narrative.

"Private" and "public" parts of the text thus represent an indivisible whole, giving expression to omnipresent and omnipotent bio-rule, which cuts across the definitions of what is personal and what is civic. Self-restraint and self-discipline Zofia J. has presented us with allowed her to return from "liminality" to society, for the author has done the duty expected

31 Quoted after Maciej Bobula, "Na progu śmierci. O liminalności w *Samotnym głosie człowieka* Andrzeja Sokurowa," *Studia Filmoznawcze* 35 (2011): 204.

of her by the state. Confessing and expressing her experiences in a language delivered to her by state sanctioned propaganda was to help, as it seems, her heal the wound caused by psychological and emotional violence. State control exercised over the biological dimension of life thus carried over to the quality of an individual life.

*Translation: Marek Kazmierski*

## Abstract

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**Anna Pawlik**

THE INSTITUTE OF LITERARY RESEARCH OF THE POLISH ACADEMY OF SCIENCES

*"The State Helps You, So You Help the State." Illness and Recovery in a Memoir Written by Zofia J. for a State Sanctioned Creative Writing Competition*

The following article deals with an unpublished memoir submitted by Zofia J. to a creative writing competition for young Polish people from rural communities organized in 1961 by the Committee for Researching Rural Youth Communities PAN and the Rural Sociology Department PAN in association with the Union of Rural Youths and the Polish People's Publishing Cooperative. The author of this memoir writes, among other things, about rape which was perpetrated against her by a young man from a neighboring district in 1948, as well as the crime's consequences, namely, the syphilis she was infected with by her rapist. This text deals with the relations between the health policies of the Polish state and the influence of this political practice on the lives and functioning of individual citizens. The article deals with the themes which are contained in the memoir, trying to ascertain how it was possible for Zofia J. to recover psychologically and physically in circumstances established by the Polish People's Republic and its state sanctioned institutions.

## Keywords

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memoirs, illness, recovery, creative writing, feminism

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Katarzyna Stańczak-Wiślicz

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## The Autobiographical Self in the Service of History: Martial Law Period Diaries Written by Women, 1981–1983

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DOI: 10.18318/td.2020.en.1.22 | ORCID: 0000-0003-1225-9653

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**D**eclared and imposed across Poland on 13 December 1981, martial law certainly occupies a very important place in the "catalogue of the central events of modern Polish cultural memory,"<sup>1</sup> even though it may not have complemented it, for a catalogue is an open-ended form. Martial law has become the object of historiographic discourse, a literary material, a link in the national *martyrologium*; lastly, an element of recollections and anecdotal stories. It was documented and evidenced on the spot, on a day-to-day basis. The awareness of its importance as a historical event produced an impulse for making collections of leaflets, photographs, illegal publications, and to write diaries and memoirs.<sup>2</sup> Incentives

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### Katarzyna Stańczak-Wiślicz

– historian, Assistant Professor in the Institute of Literary Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences, a member of the Women's Archive research team.

Author of *Opowieści o trudach życia: narracje zwierzeniowe w popularnej prasie kobiecej XX wieku* (2010), editor and co-author of collective monographs: *Zapisy cierpienia* (2011) and *Kultura Popularna w Polsce 1944–1989* (2 volumes). Her research focuses on: cultural history, gender history, society and culture of post-1945 Poland.

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1 Maria Kobielska, *Polska kultura pamięci w XXI wieku: dominanty: zbrodnia katyńska, powstanie warszawskie stan wojenny* (Warszawa: IBL PAN, 2016), 297.

2 Crucial and particularly difficult historical moments tend to abound in autobiographical output, as was first remarked by Jerzy Jedlicki, "Dzieje doświadczone i dzieje zaświadczone," in *Dzieło literackie jako źródło historyczne*, ed. Zofia Stefanowska and Janusz Sławiński (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1978), 345; and subsequently by Holocaust scholars, such as, A.H. Rosenfeld, B. Lang, and J. Leociak.

to write a diary or memoirs came from sociologists as well as from journal and magazine editorial boards, accompanying the crisis of the 1980s virtually from its very beginning.<sup>3</sup> The imposition of martial law brought about an inundation of journals kept spontaneously, apart from those encouraged by press competitions. In as early as February 1982, in the circle of KARTA, an illegal organization then, the idea roused a collection of such testimonies, propelled by the conviction that personal notes would allow to create a "broad collective picture of emotions and attitudes" and subsequently build a "truer history" of martial law.<sup>4</sup> A selection of fragments of such accounts published two years later was based on notes taken down by "ordinary people" as well as on utterances of noted intellectuals and dissidents. While the diaries of some main historical actors happened later on to appear in print, the notes made by "ordinary people" – apart from the aforementioned, thematically arranged, anthology of fragments – remained in the archive.

Situated between literature and history, "between fictional and documentary [...] writing," linking "the personal and the community-based,"<sup>5</sup> personal diaries are a long-recognized historical source. Using notes made by "ordinary" people as sources useful in research of everyday life and realities has quite a tradition.<sup>6</sup> In my focus on the diaries of "ordinary" people, primarily

3 For example, the competition "Polish August '80" announced by the Polish Sociological Society, Branch of Gdańsk, in November 1980; of the press competitions: "My Yesterday, My Today" – entries invited by *Przyjaciółka* Editorial Board in autumn 1981; "Daily Life," advertised by *Zwierciadło* magazine, 1982; *Polityka* Editorial Board's martial-law diary competition, 1984 (advertised after the lifting of martial law).

4 Zbigniew Gluza, "Dziesięć lat temu," in *Wstanie. Zbiorowy dziennik stanu wojennego* (Warszawa: Ośrodek Karta, 2014).

5 Jochen Hellbeck, "The Diary Between Literature and History: A Historian's Critical Response," *The Russian Review* 63 (2004): 621; Jacek Leociak, "Literatura dokumentu osobistego jako źródło do badań nad Zagładą Żydów: rekonesans metodologiczny," *Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały* 1 (2005): 17.

6 I understand this notion in terms of representatives of the "nameless millions" in line with the comprehensive and rather imprecise description proposed by Alf Ludtke. Alf Ludtke, "Introduction," in *The History of Everyday Life: Reconstructing Historical Experiences and Ways of Life*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 4, 10. Marlene Kadar places them in the sphere of ordinariness, outside a "higher culture" represented, for a change, by those who gained fame (for whatever reason). Marlene Kadar, "Coming to Terms: Life Writing – from Genre to Critical Practice," in *Theoretical Discussions on Biography. Approaches from History, Microhistory and Life Writing*, ed. Hans Renders and Binne de Haan (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2014), 198. As for using personal notes as a historical source, see Alicja Kusiak-Brownstein, "Płeć kulturowa, »doświadczenie« i wojna – kilka metodologicznych uwag o wykorzystaniu relacji wspomnieniowych," in *Kobieta i rewolucja obyc-*

women, dating to the martial law period, I obviously am attracted by their referential quality. The events or occurrences described therein are of importance to me as a narrative object rather than a record of a “truer” history of martial law. Analogically, I approach the (female) diarists primarily as authors of stories about a historical reality and as its participants in the second place. With all the awareness of the major differences, I assume an approach drawing upon micro-historical techniques as well as the tradition of research into autobiographical writing/literature.<sup>7</sup>

The analysis I propose herein is based upon diaries kept by the KARTA Centre (Ośrodek KARTA) and in the National Library’s manuscript collections. All of them were written on an ongoing basis, in the course of martial law; some contain clearly marked later postscripts and/or explanations. The authors lived in Warsaw, Poznań, and Częstochowa, represented various milieux and professions, sharing an educational standard higher than the period’s average (most of them had university degrees). All were either members or sympathizers of Solidarity.

My focus is on diaries written by women as I find attempts at critical reading of the “first Solidarity” period through the prism of gender, drawing attention to the then-initiated change in the discourse on the rights of women, personally close to me.<sup>8</sup> Primarily, however, I seek to determine these authors’ relationship with (the) history, how they situated themselves in the context of the events they describe, and whether (and to what an extent, if so) their gender might have influenced such relationships and perception. Such questions are encouraged by the historians’ considerations on the diversity between the “female” and “male” experience of martial law, and by the studies on female autobiographical output created during wars and crises.<sup>9</sup>

A tentative comparative analysis of martial law period diaries seems not to suggest that the texts written by female and male authors differ in the way the text is constructed, the topics covered or addressed, or the language

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zajowa: *Społeczno-kulturowe aspekty seksualności: Wiek XIX i XX* ed. Anna Żarnowska and Andrzej Szwarc (Warszawa: DiG, 2005), 411–412.

7 On the relationships between micro-history and (auto)biographical writing/literature, see Hans Renders, “The Limits of Representativeness: Biography, Life Writing and Micro-history,” in *Theoretical Discussions*, ed. Hans Renders and Binne de Haan, 129–138.

8 Such a critical perspective is proposed by Marcin Kościelniak in his article “Krucjata moralna »Solidarności,«” *Teksty Drugie* 5 (2018): 25–44.

9 Piotr Perkowski, “Stan i stany wojenne w relacjach kobiet i mężczyzn,” in *Pamięć historyczna kobiet*, ed. Katarzyna Sierakowska and Marek Przeniosło (Kielce: Uniwersytet Humanistyczno-Przyrodniczy Jana Kochanowskiego, 2009), 107–123. On autobiographies written by female authors, see Kusiak-Brownstein, “Płeć kulturowa,” 411–412.



used. Diarists of either gender were identically bound up in reporting on the political events and identically interspersed their stories with pieces of information regarding “the prose of life” – shortages and queues, shopping and purchases, problems with public transport. The age, education, and abode informed the scope of subjects and topics addressed or dealt with. The dramatic quality of the events described and the awareness of the importance of the historical moment prompted the authors to push into the background the gender-dependent differences of everyday martial law experience. Hence, it would be interesting to look closer at the writing, or literary strategies, they chose in order not only to dodge these differences but also to go beyond the limits of generally accepted patterns of female/feminine records of crisis situations.

The life-text/literature-history relationships assumed different shapes in diaries; however, as Jochen Hellbeck argues, a diarist's ongoing recording of things is a trace of the writer's self being inextricably linked to the historical time.<sup>10</sup> Periods of disturbed order, war, or crisis tend to imply a growing role of history as the narrative object. Of course, it then becomes a history as understood and constructed by the diarist. In the martial law diaries under analysis, history comes to the foreground. The women diarists focused on martial law as a special segment of history, cut out, as it were, of the normal course of time. This is suggested by the very titles of their records: *Dziennik stanu wojennego* (A martial law diary), *Zapiski ze stanu wojennego* (Notes from martial law), or the terse *Dziennik z 1981–1982* (Diary, 1981–1982), with a dramatic annotation *Wojna, stan wojenny* (War, martial law).<sup>11</sup> For most of these authors, the declaration of martial law became an impulse to write – or, plainly, the only reason for making the notes. Against this background, two diaries stand out. One is by Teresa Konarska: kept since February 1979, it originated from the author's observation of the emerging economic and political crisis, rather than a need for autobiographical reflection. Józefa Radzywińska, poet and prose writer, kept her diary since the 1940s and decided in 1981 to keep a separate martial law diary (*Dziennik stanu wojennego*) covering the period from 13 December 1981 to 22 July 1983; she otherwise kept her regular diary much longer. Save for these two, the other diaries open with an entry dated 13 December 1981 (or, in some cases, a few days later) and end, conceptually or casually, at different moments, some just a few months later.

The decision to start writing was encouraged by the intention to document and memorialize martial law. The authors thereby assumed the position

10 Hellbeck, “The Diary Between Literature and History,” 623.

11 The Polish for “martial law” being *stan wojenny* – literally, “state of war.”

of eyewitness<sup>12</sup> and chronicler, making the reader-to-be part of their diarist practice: s/he was expected to read the testimony once martial law was over and time was back on its proper track again. One of these authors very clearly defined her attitude by dedicating her notes to her grandchildren; another one, on editing her diary a few years later, declared that the purpose of her writing activity was to make the martial law occurrences “persist in human memory, so that they attest to those wonderful dozen-or-so months and the many long and disheartening years.”<sup>13</sup> Teresa Konarska had begun keeping her “chronicle of the current events” earlier on, to render a picture of “what was going on and what the average Pole felt in that period.”<sup>14</sup> Adoption of the strategy of witness made these authors not only write but also collect the traces of events as they went on: the official and illegal press, leaflets, postage stamps, and envelopes stamped by censorship officials. Anna Krzyżanowska made press clippings and a collection of uncensored correspondence, commodity vouchers, certificates and passes issued during martial law an immanent part of her diary. She formed her collection deliberately; in her own words, “I started collecting the newspapers so that my grandchildren and my great-grandchildren could read what it was like.”<sup>15</sup> This is how diaries such like this one became, as Paweł Rodak puts it, “part of a larger archive” gathering things and records of events.<sup>16</sup>

Very few of the women diarists were active participants of the “great events” they describe; in most of the cases, they were firsthand observers but very often referred to intermediated knowledge. Their documenting strategy was founded on gathering pieces of information of all and any sort – be it press clippings, recordings of radio and television broadcasts, down to gossip and hearsay. Their conscientiousness about the truthfulness of the accounts in question made them try and verify the information received. It was with considerable mistrust that they approached the official messages:

12 On the position of the eyewitness reporting on the events and a witness “testifying to his/her own experience,” see Ryszard Nycz, “My, świadkowie,” *Teksty Drugie* 3 (2018): 7–17.

13 Anna Krzyżanowska, *Dziennik z lat 1981–1982. Part 1: Stan wojenny, Warszawa, 13 grudnia 1981–5 października 1982*, MS, ref. no. AO II/632.1, Ośrodek KARTA archives, Warsaw, Poland [hereafter cited as KARTA]; M.T. Czaja, *Wspomnienia stanu wojennego w moich zapiskach*, ref. no. AOII/0118, 17, KARTA.

14 Teresa Konarska, *Dzienniki*, vol. II, MS, ref. no. Akc. 11612, National Library of Poland, [hereinafter, “BN”], Warsaw.

15 Krzyżanowska, *Dziennik*, 55 [28 January 1982].

16 Paweł Rodak, “Prawda w dzienniku osobistym,” *Teksty Drugie* 4 (2009): 33.

"Since the news was spread by the military television, the number of victims is certainly different," thus Józefa Radzyńska commented on the reports on the bloody riots at the "Wujek" Coal Mine in Katowice.<sup>17</sup> Another author, a young academic worker from Poznań, ironically quoted the newspeak of the official mass media, finding that "the information broadcast on the radio and TV is so tendentious that you would hardly deem it credible." She admitted that she drew her own knowledge from some "[ideologically] hostile radios" – which for her, like for most other female diarists, meant Radio Free Europe.<sup>18</sup> But even those were not sources of reliable knowledge. Listening to foreign broadcasting stations was, in the first place, an act of daily resistance and evidence of communication with "the West" (as it was figured out then), while their reliability was dubious: "I don't know if it's true or not, but lack of plausible information causes you to believe any piece of gossip," the young scholar commented.<sup>19</sup> Uncertainty with respect to the truthfulness of the news being collected undermined the diarists' identity as chroniclers for whom the primary task was to determine the truth of the events – that is to say, the historical truth.<sup>20</sup>

Truth and, beside it, time have become the main categories organizing the narratives of the diaries under analysis. Subjecting the diarist practice to the documenting task shaped the pattern of a temporal narration leading to a static model of the latter. In such a model, which ignores the processual character of the narrator's biographical experiences, the story concentrates around a single occurrence or a fragment of one's life – a tough, or even traumatic one.<sup>21</sup> In diaries of the martial law period this relationship goes even further: a section of time, dramatic owing to its historical importance, rather than the narrator's individual experience(s), becomes central to the story being told. Similarly to one's personal chronology such individual experiences as private anniversaries or significant dates were situated somewhere in the background. The "selection exercise" performed by the diarists – which, according to Philippe Lejeune, caused them to split reality into pieces and select

17 Józefa Radzyńska, *Dziennik stanu wojennego (13 grudnia 1981–22 lipca 1983)*, ref. no. AO II/82, 8, KARTA [entry for 18 December 1981].

18 Katarzyna Kabacińska, untitled diary, MS, ref. No. AO II/72, Ośrodek KARTA archives, Warsaw, Poland [entries for: 16 December 1981; 21 December 1981].

19 Kabacińska, untitled diary, 5, 7 [17 December 1981; 21 December 1981].

20 According to Paweł Rodak, this is one of the three types of truth appearing in personal diaries (Rodak, "Prawda w dzienniku osobistym," 30), beside the truth of experience and the truth of (the) reality.

21 Jens Brockmeier, "Autobiographical Time," *Narrative Inquiry* 10 (2000): 67.

the important items only<sup>22</sup> – implied that the narratives became meaningful because of great historical events rather than events from one's personal life. The autobiographical time was thus getting suspended whilst the dynamism of the notes was set by the historical time.

The zero point from which the historical time started was, obviously, the 13 December 1981. Then on, in line with the calendar order, the diarists would meticulously note down the dates of subsequent entries, often naming the day of the week. The impression of thickened time, at moments when times of the day were marked, intensified the dramatic quality of the narrative. Counting down the consecutive days, weeks, and months had a similar function, being an element of internal chronology of a special time. "Month 4 since the war broke out has already passed," Anna Krzyżanowska remarked, using calligraphic lettering to mark the beginning of each consecutive month in her handwritten diary.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, the authors applied negative commemoration on an ongoing basis, presaging, for instance, the coming "2-month anniversary of martial law" or, more precisely, its second "mensiversary."<sup>24</sup> Starting the notes with such a climactic event set the narrative's pace and structure. In most of the diaries analyzed here, the frequency of notes taken decreased with time, their content getting increasingly filled with information repeated after Western radio stations as well as learned from Polish official channels such as television or press. Such a development ensued from the trajectory of martial law which was composed of sub-periods filled with events with a significant symbolic potential, such as anniversaries of the December 1970 riots and the Gdansk Agreements of August 1980, or the 13 December mensiversaries, interspersed with those of monotony of everyday life. The diarists' writing decisions were influenced by the lack of events or occurrences worthy of note and no prospect for change; all this made them remain silent – in case of one of the female authors, for good.<sup>25</sup> In the other cases, the narrative time of the notes, initially dense and intense, grew gradually rarefied. "I haven't been writing for so long, but what should I be writing about? There's no hope..." a teacher from Częstochowa noted down after several weeks of silence. She would sum up her subsequent,

22 Philippe Lejeune, "Koronka: dziennik jako seria datowanych śladów," trans. Magda and Paweł Rodakowie, *Pamiętnik Literacki* 4 (2006): 21.

23 Krzyżanowska, *Dziennik*, 121, 148, 149 [13 April 1982, 13 May 1982, 13 June 1982].

24 Teresa Irwicz [alias of Irena Wilczyńska-Wojtulewicz], *Zapiski ze stanu wojennego*, MS, ref. no. AO II/107, 4, KARTA. [entry for 12 February 1982].

25 Kabacińska, untitled diary, 17 [entry for 13 April 1982].

nearly twelve-month, discontinuance thus: "And afterwards, everything was all the more hopeless and depressing."<sup>26</sup>

It is easy to determine the catalogue of important events that reappear across the notes under analysis. Apart from the moment martial law was declared, the suppressed protest action at the "Wujek" mine is repeatedly recalled, along with the turmoil at the "Manifest Lipcowy" Coal Mine in Jastrzębie, Silesia; the detention of Polish Academy of Sciences' professors in Warsaw; the shooting of Jan Narożniak; the flight of Polish diplomats to the West; the repeat demonstrations and clashes with the militia; and Pope John Paul II's response to the situation in Poland. The diarists began their reporting on the history with the "obvious emblem of martial law" – that is, 13 December and General Wojciech Jaruzelski's speech declaring martial law. The amount of detail in the narrative is striking, albeit, as Maria Kaniowska points out, the image was filtered through the mass media.<sup>27</sup> The authors quoted fragments of the Jaruzelski speech and provisions from the Martial Law Decree, listing all the bans, stringencies, and restrictions, and giving information on the first arrests. The imposition of martial law appeared to them as an extraordinary event, one that made the everyday realities part of an eschatological project designed for the nation. Its momentousness was foreshadowed by certain supernatural phenomena, dreams and presentiments: "So, this is what I did have premonition about," thus the Częstochowa teacher explained her insomnia and rather abstruse predictions that "something will happen."<sup>28</sup> Extraordinary weather phenomena accompanied the terrestrial occurrence: "It's awkwardly dark, black above Poland in this sunny morning."<sup>29</sup>

Martial law was becoming yet another link in the tragic chain of history. "O Merciful Lord! Again, for ahundreth [*sic*] time now violence is taking the upper hand over our nation!" Radzymińska noted in her diary.<sup>30</sup> The dramatic course of the current events activated the reminiscences (own, or culturally transmitted) of traumatic moments in the history, primarily the Second World War and the German occupation; also, the

<sup>26</sup> Czaja, *Wspomnienia*, 8–9 [20 February 1982].

<sup>27</sup> Kobielska, *Polska kultura pamięci w XXI wieku*, 298.

<sup>28</sup> Czaja, *Wspomnienia*, 2 [13 December 1981].

<sup>29</sup> Maria Chmielewska-Jakubowicz, *Dziennik stanu wojennego 1981–1983*, ref. no. AO II/97, 1, KARTA; Czaja, *Wspomnienia*, 2 [15 December 1981].

<sup>30</sup> Radzymińska, *Dziennik stanu wojennego*, 2 [13 December 1981]. "Boże Miłosierny! Znow poraz [*sic*] setny zwycięża przemoc nad naszym narodem!"

events of 1956.<sup>31</sup> “The whole hell of the war and exile presented itself to my mind, as did the threat of October 1956,” one of these authors remarked, who in her early youth was a nurse during the Warsaw Rising of 1944.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, apart from the order of linear chronological narrative, the present approached the past. The past was not identical with any specific historical period; instead, it stood for a continuum of sufferings and heroism. The diarists recalled the symbolically embedded episodes in Polish history – from the Partitions and the Great Emigration through the Polish–Bolshevik War. However, the Second World War and the Occupation remained the major point of reference, which served as a benchmark of traumatic experience. The authors deliberately used the period’s terms such as curfew or the *Volksliste*.<sup>33</sup> They sought for similarities, starting with the condition of the weather, describing the frosty but beautiful winter – much the same as that of the year 1939 – and ending with a comparison between the propaganda language of both periods. “The history of the AK [Home Army] is being repeated – no other words but »troublemakers« and »terrorists« are in use,” such a summary of the TV news broadcast can be found in one of the diaries.<sup>34</sup> The observation of reality led the authors to the conclusion that martial law exceeded the limit on the scale of awe determined by the last war. The image of “our own” (Polish) army in the streets of towns and impossibility to extrapolate the enemy beyond the nation’s community broke the idea of the homeland’s sufferings prevalent before. “Even during the German occupation it was brighter,” one of the female authors wrote, admitting elsewhere that describing the tragedy of the situation is beyond her capability, for “no such thing has ever occurred in our history yet.”<sup>35</sup> Impossibility to find a relevant narrative pattern deprived people of hope and questioned attempts to rationalize the situation.

Martial law was a time of eschatological disaster when good ceased to exist, the only choice that remained was “between a greater and lesser

31 On memory and cultural transmission of reminiscences/recollection, see, Magdalena Saryusz-Wolska, “Wprowadzenie,” in *Pamięć zbiorowa i kulturowa. Współczesna perspektywa niemiecka*, ed. Magdalena Saryusz-Wolska (Kraków: Universitas, 2009).

32 Chmielewska-Jakubowicz, *Dziennik stanu wojennego*, 2.

33 Krzyżanowska, *Dziennik*, 15 [17 December 1981]; Kabacińska, untitled diary, 7 [27 December 1981].

34 Czaja, *Wspomnienia*, 3 [17 December 1981].

35 Radzymińska, *Dziennik stanu wojennego*, 8 [17 December 1981]; M. Czaja, *Wspomnienia*, 3, 6 [17 December 1981, 31 December 1981, 1 January 1982].

evil.”<sup>36</sup> The basic and commonsensical principles governing the world were suspended, such as the obligation to protect the special categories of people: the elderly, women, and children. “I fled from Śródmieście [the downtown district], for they would have no consideration for a Mother with a child,” thus Anna Krzyżanowska described her reaction at the sight of armed ZOMO (Motorized Reserves of the Civic Militia) troops.<sup>37</sup> Józefa Radzyńska bitterly noted that old-age pensioners or even disabled war veterans queuing for goods came across aggressive behavior, rather than due respect, from the people around.<sup>38</sup> The dramatic episodes of martial law, appearing one after the other, such as the pacification of the “Wujek” mine, epiphanically revealed the regime’s nature to the diarists. As the Częstochowa teacher commented:

I never thought this system is so felonious that the government can betray their own nation and declare a war on it, destroy its choicest children with the use of drilled human pretenders, faithless and worshipless.<sup>39</sup>

The discovery of this transcendental truth on the essence of the system violated the principle of commonsensical plausibility; as a result, the diarists could ponder over the credibility of the most fantastic hearsay, which were verified later on. In a reality to which immanent evil was fundamental, the news about plans to “starve the nation to death,” about Warsaw being encircled by a triple military cordon equipped with ammunition moistened with a substance causing lethal blood-thinning, or about physicians who, in their obedience to the regime authorities, shot ZOMO functionaries full of a specially prepared intoxicating mixture of medicines, all fell into a spectrum of imaginable phenomena.<sup>40</sup> Martial law was growing apocalyptic – an unequal clash between the evil forces impersonated by “communists,” excluded from the community, and the nation, represented by “the noblest sons and daughters of Poland, [...] our new heroes and martyrs.”<sup>41</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Irwicz, *Zapiski ze stanu wojennego*, 4 [14–17 February 1982].

<sup>37</sup> Krzyżanowska, *Dziennik*, 149 [13 May 1981].

<sup>38</sup> Radzyńska, *Dziennik stanu wojennego*, 314 [25 August 1982].

<sup>39</sup> Czaja, *Wspomnienia*, 6 [28 December 1981].

<sup>40</sup> Radzyńska, *Dziennik stanu wojennego*, 187 [29 December 1981]; Chmielewska-Jakubowicz, *Dziennik stanu wojennego*, 15 [26 December 1981].

<sup>41</sup> Czaja, *Wspomnienia*, 8 [7 January 1982].

The vision of history present in the notes under analysis is directly associated with the Romantic(ist) emotionality and, particularly, martyrological messianism, in its reactivated version, as described by Maria Janion.<sup>42</sup> In such a depiction, history was a field of clash between the forces of good and evil, martial law being a special segment of history, foreshadowing the apocalyptic. The historic mission of Poland as the chosen nation called for sacrifice, suffering, heroism, and moral chastity. The nation's unique relationship with God enabled some negotiation. Special intermediaries took part in the bargaining: on the one hand, the Blessed Virgin, who extended her protection over Poland, assisted by the Saints; on the other, John Paul II, representatives of the Church, and "new martyrs." Before martial law was declared, Teresa Konarska believed that their intercession could bring about a successful outcome of strike negotiations: "I think Our Lady of Częstochowa has really embedded the strikers and the whole of our country with her coat. [...] It must have been our Polish Pope who has prayed for this."<sup>43</sup> In the apocalyptic reality of martial law, only prayer and supernatural intervention entreated through prayer could bring about a solution, while any rational action ended up in a failure. God was the only one who could listen to and accept questions about the future. Even those of the diarists who did not manifest their religious attitude fell into the rhetoric of prayer – like one Warsaw doctor who asked: "O God, will this inferno ever come to an end, or will annihilation prevail?"<sup>44</sup>

In negotiating the shape of the history-in-making, John Paul II took a special place. The diarists referred to "our Pope's" appeals to be calm, quoted his words, and waited for his visit to Poland as an occurrence capable of changing the course of history. The pontificate of Pope John Paul II was one of the few sources of hope, apparently proving that God cared about Poland and protected it, and adding strength to those fighting against the apocalyptic evil. Józefa Radzyńska perceived Cardinal Wojtyła's election as pope as a sign from God, "so that we never lose hope and grow strengthened in our faith: we, the people elected in our suffering, experienced by history."<sup>45</sup> A sense of "chosenness," or at least, of a unique role of Poland, lies at the foundation of the understanding of history by the diarists under discussion. Such a vision was getting formed in the unique emotional climate that drew from the patriotic canon of

42 Maria Janion, *Czy będziesz wiedział co przeżyłeś* (Gdańsk: Tower Press, 2000), 7.

43 Konarska, *Dzienniki*, 156 [August 30, 1980].

44 e.g., Chmielewska-Jakubowicz, *Dziennik stanu wojennego*, 8 [18 December 1981].

45 Józefa Radzyńska, *Dzienniki z lat 1945–1991*, vol. II, ref. no. Akc. 9213, 723, BN [16 October 1978].



Romanticist literary works, the national messianism professed by John Paul II and the Church's teaching that referred to Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński's "theology of (the) nation."<sup>46</sup> The diarists recalled the Television Playhouse staging of Adam Mickiewicz's *Dziady* (Forefathers' Eve), Part III, sermons preached at the parish church with references to "the martyrdom of Catholics, Poles, Solidarity, and Wałęsa." In commenting the current events, they willingly quoted Romanticist verse exploring the threads of martyrdom and sacrifice.<sup>47</sup>

Positioning themselves as witnesses and chroniclers of the thus comprehended history, the diarists gave themselves validity and faded away into the background at the same time. They drew their sense of self-importance from their participation, observation, and recording of the Apocalypse occurring. Consequently, they described their documenting practices: "cutting out fragments" from newspapers, gathering papers and magazines, leaflets and correspondence, rewriting the contents of radio and television broadcasts.<sup>48</sup> This work, approached as an obligation to history and to the generations to come, made them devote their free time to these activities and neglect relaxation opportunities, and declare a readiness to neglect the household and family. Physical and psychical exhaustion, the complete lack of leisure time, no understanding from their friends and acquaintances were meant as a sacrifice enabling them to document the history. "My hand hurts me as I make my hasty notes [...] I am meeting almost no-one these days, I simply am short of time," one of the diarists wrote down in as early as the autumn of 1980.<sup>49</sup> Another one exposed herself to disdain from an accidentally met acquaintance as she bought official newspapers to use them for her diary's purposes.<sup>50</sup>

Since the diarists' paramount purpose was to document history, they consistently strove to keep an unemotional and possibly detailed annalistic narrative, believing that they could identify the actual version of the events taking place. In personal notes, the category of truth – as Paweł Rodak

46 On messianism in John Paul II's thought, see Paweł Rojek, "Mesjanizm Solidarności. Religia, naród i reformy w latach osiemdziesiątych," in *Spółeczeństwo teologiczne: polska teologia narodu 966–2016* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo M, 2016); Paweł Rojek, *Liturgia dziejów: Jan Paweł II i polski mesjanizm*, (Kraków: Wydawnictwo M, 2016).

47 Irwicz, *Zapiski ze stanu wojennego*, 1 [20 December 1981]; Krzyżanowska, *Dziennik*, 44 [26 December 1981].

48 Irwicz, *Zapiski ze stanu wojennego*, 2 [26 December 1981]; Krzyżanowska, *Dziennik*, 113 [17 March 1982].

49 Konarska, *Dzienniki*, 50, 55 [19 August 1980].

50 Chmielewska-Jakubowicz, *Dziennik stanu wojennego*, 9 [19 December 1981].

argues – concerns the author's experience rather than historical facts external to him/her.<sup>51</sup> The truth of experience manifested itself in two ways: first – somewhat contrary to what they intended – in the records of the authors' emotions, and second, in the sphere of daily life, which was ostentatiously neglected by them. Their own feelings and emotions were important for them and worth noting down only when they accompanied the events taking place in the political, rather than personal, realm; and only when they argued for how serious and threatening the situation was. Thus, the shock caused by the imposition of martial law was manifested in the dismay and extreme psychosomatic reactions – such as crying, paralyzing shock, unrestrainable shivering “of freezing and nerves.”<sup>52</sup> It perturbed the natural rhythm of everyday life, causing the diarists to “forget” about their meals and neglect the customary preparations for Christmas.<sup>53</sup> Thus, by noting down their own reactions, they determined a hierarchy of importance wherein the momentousness of the history-in-making depreciated one's private domestic hustle. As Katarzyna Sierakowska pointed out in her analysis of First World War diaries, the diarists perceived the importance of their domestic activity in line with the cultural model promoting activity for the national cause.<sup>54</sup> And yet it was in the daily life sphere that the truth became evident of individual experience of a crisis that made the world incomprehensible and the thitherto-existing logic invalid, while new practices of action were not yet elaborated.<sup>55</sup> The truth about the management of the crisis-stricken daily realities, about coping in face of market shortages and the rigors of martial law, assumed the form of records of subjective deprivation. The diarists complained about shortages of bread, light bulbs, matches, medicines, clothes and – a particularly humiliating thing – basic personal hygiene items, including sanitary pads.<sup>56</sup> Scared with rising prices, they meticulously compared the old and the new prices

51 Paweł Rodak, “Dziennik osobisty i historia,” in *Zapisywanie historii. Literaturoznawstwo i historiografia*, ed. Włodzimierz Bolecki and Jerzy Madejski (Warszawa: Instytut Badań Literackich PAN, 2010), 305.

52 Kabacińska, untitled diary 1 [13 December 1981]; M. Chmielewska-Jakubowicz, *Dziennik stanu wojennego*, 1 [13 December 1981].

53 Czaja, *Wspomnienia*, 3 [21 December 1981].

54 Katarzyna Sierakowska, *Śmierć, wygnanie, głód w dokumentach osobistych. Ziemie polskie w latach Wielkiej Wojny 1914–1918* (Warszawa: Instytut Historii PAN, 2015), 22.

55 Łukasz Rogowski, Radosław Skrobacz, and Dorota Mroczkowska, “Codzienność w kryzysie,” *Kultura i Społeczeństwo* 1 (2010): 38.

56 Krzyżanowska, *Dziennik*, 94 [10 March 1982].

of foodstuffs: “Horrible rise in [the prices of] foods”<sup>57</sup> or “new grub prices since today. I experienced a shock once I entered the shop,” they commented.<sup>58</sup> Firstly, however, they documented the experience of chaos and loss of control over reality. The martial law declaration prompted them to refer to patterns of wartime behavior, to which they would not, and indeed could not, adapt on time. The Warsaw physician remarked, scared, that she had no food supplies or cigarettes accumulated; another diarist was afraid that electricity might be turned off and was concerned that no kerosene or carbide lamp was available.<sup>59</sup> Józefa Radzymińska considered herself famine-sick: with her apparent dizziness and “liver swelling,” against no real threat of mass malnourishment, this self-diagnosis ought to be seen as a trace of experience of deprivation of an elementary sense of security.<sup>60</sup>

Writing of daily burdens and nuisances, the diarists frequently saw them as items in the abundant catalogue of the nation’s sufferings, extending their own feelings to the whole community. Supply shortages, queues in front of shops and, subsequently, increasing prices were interpreted by them as facets of the communist authorities’ struggle against the society. Hence, Anna Krzyżanowska noted down – “for the sake of memory and for the grandchildren” – what was offered at the characteristic Warsaw retail outlets (for instance, baby foods at the “Moda Polska” fashion showroom), documented her own quests for children’s shoes, or medicine.<sup>61</sup> Probably owing to her own biographical experience – she was a mother of two small kids then, her descriptions of everyday crisis-time “fuss-and-hustle”<sup>62</sup> are relatively the most

57 Ibid., 71 [30 January 1982].

58 Kabacińska, untitled diary 15 [1 February 1982].

59 Chmielewska-Jakubowicz, *Dziennik stanu wojennego*, 2 [13 December 1981]; Irwicz, *Zapiski ze stanu wojennego*, 2 [26 December 1981].

60 Radzymińska, *Dziennik stanu wojennego*, 11 [18 December 1981]; *Raport o tendencjach zmian oraz stanie wyżywienia społeczeństwa w latach 1980–1991*, eds. Bożena Gulbicka, Waldemar Michna and Barbara Chmielewska (Warszawa: IERiGŻX, 1992), 30. On the function of hunger in personal narratives of the 1980s crisis in Poland, see, Katarzyna Stańczak-Wiślicz, “»Jak związać koniec z końcem.« Jedzenie i konsumpcja w Polsce w latach osiemdziesiątych XX w. w dyskursie eksperckim i kobiecych narracjach osobistych,” *Rocznik Antropologii Historii* 7 (2014): 135–163.

61 Krzyżanowska, *Dziennik*, 124–125 [27 April 1982] note about baby foods sold at the “Moda Polska” fashion showrooms.

62 I am referring to this category, in Polish idiomatic neologism *krzqtactwo*, described by Jolanta Brach-Czaina in her *Szczeliny istnienia* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo eFKA 1998) as a way in which women functioned in their daily lives.

extensive. All the same, as was the case with the other diarists, she would have declaratively pushed them to the background.

Although organizing the crisis-time everyday life rested on the shoulders of the authors of these diaries, including the time- and effort-consuming adaptive practices such as domestic manufacturing of food, altering and mending of garments, seeking for substitutes of hard-to-find products, they tended to deprecate their own efforts and labor.<sup>63</sup> They referred to their heroic efforts to provide the family with appropriate meals as "concocting" or "cooking up," serving "whatever was available."<sup>64</sup> They described their daily problems in clearly disregarding terms. "These are funny trifles, of course": thus one of the diarists commented on shortages of light-bulbs and electricity, adding with embarrassment that "the possibility to biologically survive" depended upon such supplies.<sup>65</sup> Another one ostentatiously disdained the information on decreased coupon rations of meat, declaring her interest in the political events, in the first place.<sup>66</sup> Similarly to the diarist accounts penned by men,<sup>67</sup> writing of the most painfully experienced restrictions and limitations of the time, female diarists would refer to those politically determined: censorship and information chaos, control of the correspondence exchanged by regular citizens, suspended publication of newspapers and magazines, or the ban on assemblies. Meanwhile, as per a contemporary (1982) public opinion survey, most of the respondents pointed to "personal" restrictions – that is, those affecting daily practices and routines – as the most grievous ones.<sup>68</sup>

It seems that in the name of their chosen writing strategy, the one of a chronicler's and witness to a great history, these authors depreciated the sphere of everyday life as well as their own activity: to an extent, they quit

63 Although sociologists have noted an increased household activity for males, related to the prevalent crisis, the burden of household keeping continuously rested on women. See, Jolanta Brach-Czaina, *Szczeliny istnienia* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo eFKa, 1998); Barbara Kalkhoff, "Organizacja i podział pracy w gospodarstwach domowych," *Prace Naukowe/Akademia Ekonomiczna w Katowicach: Konsumpcja w gospodarstwach domowych lat osiemdziesiątych*, ed. Teresa Pałaszewska-Reindl (Katowice: Akademia Ekonomiczna im. Karola Adamieckiego, 1992), 91.

64 Konarska, *Dzienniki*, 67.

65 Irwicz, *Zapiski ze stanu wojennego*, 2 [26 December 1981].

66 Kabacińska, untitled diary, 10 [27 December 1981].

67 e.g., Jerzy Jurek, *Lata 1963–89*, ref. no. AO II/337, KARTA; Henryk Bąkowski, *Zapiski z dni pogardy*, ref. no. AO II/111, KARTA.

68 Waldemar Urbanik and Amadeusz Urbanik, *Pamięć stanu wojennego: Strażnicy i więźniowie niepamięci* (Szczecin: Pedagogium, 2010), 39.

their own status as selves while writing. They avoided writing about themselves; they did not perceive their own experiences as a sufficient reason for writing a diary. They “came into being” as authors of accounts of martial law; and thus, contrary to the concepts of female or feminine diary writing, they prioritized “the extraordinary” above the ordinary and the daily.<sup>69</sup> They accepted a hierarchy of importance that privileged the spheres of politics and community, the latter being described as the nation or society. Tentatively analyzed, the notes taken by women tend to focus on politics and great history even more, compared to those authored by men; also, the women authors show a definitely more intense disregard for efforts regarding the organization of daily life. It looks as if the diarists were deliberately avoiding to describe the sphere of life traditionally regarded female, banal, and unimportant.

Collective identity dominating over individual identity, the chronology adapted to political occurrences, the area of private life being pushed aside: all this makes one take a closer look at the autobiographical dimension of the diaries under analysis. They certainly are identifiable with a type of autobiographical writing described by Małgorzata Czermińska as testimony literature, since they assume the participation of a future reader, and thereby, the significant element of “autobiographical triangle” is at work. Written as a testimony, these diaries comprise “the represented” at the text’s center,<sup>70</sup> pushing the autobiographical self to the background. Much in a chronicle manner, they form a specific compilation or register of events from various orders or spheres,<sup>71</sup> clearly focusing on the political field. The dominance of the documentary layer over the authors’ self-reflection and own commentaries, along with press clippings, reproduced scripts of TV/radio broadcasts incorporated in the diary, allow to approach them as “silvic” forms.<sup>72</sup>

The circumstances in which these diaries were written, and the fact that it was a historic event that provided the impulse for keeping them, meant that

69 Rebecca Hogan, “Engendered Autobiographies: The Diary as a Feminine Form,” *Prose Studies: History, Theory, Criticism* 14 (1991): 103.

70 Małgorzata Czermińska, *Autobiograficzny trójkąt: Świadectwo, wyznanie i wyzwanie* (Kraków: Universitas, 2000), 19–21.

71 Alexandra Walsham, “Chronicles, Memory and Autobiography in Reformation England,” *Memory Studies* 11 (2018): 36.

72 Ryszard Nycz, *Sylwy współczesne* (Kraków: Universitas, 1996), 40–43; Stanisław Roszak, *Archiwa sarmackiej pamięci. Funkcje i znaczenie rękopiśmiennych ksiąg typu silva rerum w kulturze Rzeczypospolitej XVIII wieku* (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, 2004), 139.

the autobiographical self was pushed into the shadow of history while also, paradoxically, imparting importance to them. By choosing the position of (eye)witness and the annalistic model of recording things, the diarists determined a certain hierarchy of importance. They considered their own experiences worth rendering as long as those experiences testified to what the writers considered the historical truth. As a result, these diaries are not merely a record of martial law but also of their authors' own annalistic or chronicle-like practice, testifying to the existence of an autobiographical self that is enshadowed or is at the service of (the) history.

*Translation: Tristan Korecki*

## Abstract

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**Katarzyna Stańczak-Wiślicz**

THE INSTITUTE OF LITERARY RESEARCH OF THE POLISH ACADEMY OF SCIENCES

*The Autobiographical Self in the Service of History: Martial Law Period Diaries Written by Women, 1981–1983*

This article analyses personal diaries written by women during the martial law period in Poland (1981–1983). It seeks to consider the authors' relationship with (the) history, how they situated themselves in the context of the events they describe, and how their gender might have influenced such relationships. The vision of history present in the diaries under analysis is directly associated with the martyrological national messianism and Romantic emotionality. Thus, the diarists were deliberately avoiding description of everyday life, prioritizing collective over individual identity. They choose the position of (eye)witness and the annalistic model of recording things, and considered their own experience important only inasmuch as it conformed to what they acknowledged to be the historical truth. As a result, the diaries under analysis are not only a record of martial law but also of their authors' own annalistic practice, which positioned an autobiographical self in the shadow or at the service of (the) history.

## Keywords

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autobiography, gender, history, martial law, national messianism

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Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson

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## The Archives of Those Who Write Themselves: What and Where Are They?

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DOI: 10.18318/td.2020.en.1.23 | ORCID: Sidonie Smith 0000-0003-1351-576X

Julia Watson 0000-0002-2544-3823

**O**ur work has focused primarily on theorizing women's autobiographical narratives in the later twentieth- and early twenty-first centuries. As scholars in life writing studies, we have regarded individual or collective self-presentation as acts through which life writers articulate subjectivities, negotiate identifications, and entangle their self-understandings in the genres and media of expression available to them. Researchers interested in writing women's biographies have a different project and, therefore, a different relationship to autobiographical writing. Biographical critics seek to identify sources and kinds of evidence to ground the story of another person's life, including the evidence in autobiographical work. What links our two disparate fields – autobiographical and biographical studies – is interest in and attention to archives of many kinds. Indeed, feminist scholars of life writing and feminist biographers have spent decades searching for autobiographical writing by women that is obscured or hidden away in family and institutional archives. Scholars of the life writing of women of color and other minoritized peoples continue to search for fragments of experiential histories in unpublished manuscripts and documentary records of heterogeneous kinds.

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**Sidonie Smith** is the Lorna G. Goodison Distinguished University Professor Emerita of English and Women's Studies, University of Michigan, and Past President of the Modern Language Association of America (2010). She authored six monographs, including *Manifesto for the Humanities: Transforming Doctoral Education in Good Enough Times* (2015) and over seventy essays. With Kay Schaffer, she co-authored *Human Rights and Narrated Lives* (2004). With Julia Watson, she co-authored *Reading Autobiography* (2001) and *Life Writing in the Long Run: A Smith & Watson Autobiography Studies Reader* (2017).

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**Julia Watson** is Professor Emerita of Comparative Studies and former Associate Dean of Arts and Sciences at The Ohio State University. She and Sidonie Smith have co-authored *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (expanded edition, 2010), *Life Writing in the Long Run: A Smith & Watson Autobiography Studies Reader* (2017, free online), several journal essays, and co-edited five collections. Watson has published over fifty essays, most recently on postcolonial autoethnographic film, online publishing, and graphic memoirs by various women artists.

Both the scholar of autobiographical writing and the biographer of women's lives depend on archival materials for their projects. But even the personal documents and artifacts of archives are not unmediated evidence of the lived life. That is, archival materials are not transparent repositories of the truth of the life to be simply reconstructed; rather, they are at points opaque and must be interpreted. They reveal parts of a subject's story, in line with the collecting norms and purposes of the archive, but they are constrained in certain ways. While institutions such as public repositories, memorials, museums, and libraries provide sites for recovering, piecing together, and commemorating personal stories, these are partially curated, collective rememberings of lives in particular historical moments and contexts,<sup>1</sup> and may not offer access to the lived histories of some subjects. Moreover, momentous historical processes, such as regime change, may contribute to large-scale projects of forgetting or erasing people's stories.

Further, archivists collect and curate materials through ideological frames that reproduce gendered identities and norms prevailing at the moment of their establishment, and later. Gendered norms dictate which subjects are considered worthy of memorialization, and which subjects are excluded or overlooked on account of their gender identity, but also on account of their racial, ethnic, or class status, or on account of their social roles or invisibility. Often, only fragments remain as ambiguous gestures toward the unknown and unheralded life.

Thus, scholars have to theorize the often-partial materials of self-inscription and devise methods for interrogating the truth claims that an archival collection seems to assert, particularly with autobiographical works. In this sense, researchers become not only readers and compilers, but also detectives; they have to question how things "fit together" and propose multiple, dissonant readings of the archived materials comprising a "life." For us as theorists of the autobiographical, then, texts of self-life-writing, whether published or unpublished, full-length or fragmentary, are objects of inquiry in themselves. Neither the subject's life writing nor the archival evidence are transparent, coherent phenomena that generate "truth." Because autobiographical narratives are a mode of subjective truth, the experiential histories they disclose may be conflicting, partial, situated at different life moments, and always incomplete. As Joan W. Scott observes, "experience is at once always already

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<sup>1</sup> See Jacques Derrida's influential *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), for an elegant analysis of the entanglements of psychic processes of remembering and technologies of memorial inscription, with its timely analysis of post-2000 social media and their impact on the projects, meanings, and tensions of archives and the practice of archiving and curating.



an interpretation and is in need of interpretation.”<sup>2</sup> That is, what we call “experience” is always mediated, as a shifting and provisional set of postulates, perceptions, affects, and embodied memories that change over time with the changing location of the subject.

The numerous books and essays of our esteemed colleague Philippe Lejeune have been deeply concerned with how theoretical issues of autobiographical writing intersect with issues of archival research. He has frequently focused on unpublished or out-of-print diaries that ground his central project, tracing a transhistorical record of personal writing in France through the documentation of many unpublished or forgotten sources. Philippe Lejeune wrote in 1993 that “everyday writing remains very much unknown in France,”<sup>3</sup> not least because diaries have been “indicted” by most critics as not “literature.” He proceeded to read ninety-six diaries kept by young girls, most unpublished, which he found archived in libraries or other public or family collections, some solicited through calls to radio stations and ads in newspapers. Indeed Lejeune assembled his own archive to raise probing questions about how such diaries may be read and discussed, when nineteenth-century female “diarists were censored both ideologically and aesthetically.”<sup>4</sup> He thereby positioned the critic’s interest in theorizing personal writing and the historian’s process of labor in formal and informal archives not as opposed activities, but as mutually sustaining acts – a model for other scholars.

As our contribution to this extended conversation about theorizing autobiographical acts and labor in historical archives, we focus on how life writers incorporate archival materials from their personal archives as well as from formal archives in their acts of self-inscription. Some writers may draw on the archive of personal memory, with its complexities of psychic phenomena, cultural influences, and embodied affects. They may also draw on family archives that include such artifacts as photograph albums, genealogies, letters, objects, official documents, ledgers, accounts of visions, lists of books read, or names and dates written in bibles. Other autobiographical writers may incorporate material from public archives and, now, from digitized archives, such as the records of a former colonial or imperial power or state bureaucracies, and

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2 Joan W. Scott, “Experience,” in *Feminists Theorize the Political*, ed. Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott (New York: Routledge, 1992), 37.

3 Philippe Lejeune, “The »Journal de Jeune Fille« in Nineteenth-Century France,” in *On Diary*, ed. Jeremy D. Popkin and Julie Rak, trans. Katharine Durnin (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i, 2009), 141.

4 Lejeune, “Jeune Fille,” 131.

from institutional archives spanning school records, religious registries, and medical cases.

In other words, those who write themselves become readers, interpreters, and curators of many kinds of archival material, ranging from the intimate to the impersonal. They also turn to their personal archives of earlier self-writing in journals and diaries and self-imaging in photographs and drawings. In a sense, those who write themselves interpret the archive of their earlier versions of self-inscription in acts of resituating and composing the past. When such written lives enter the world, they encounter other kinds of archives and may be changed in subsequent editions or by translation into other languages and media. That is, as new reading publics access different versions of a published “life” over time, the text acquires an “afterlife” that shifts its relationship to archival material.

In what follows we develop this argument by foregrounding issues of theory and method. We take up eight micro-studies that discuss very different autobiographical texts, primarily by women, over the last four centuries. We suggest what material a life writer’s archive encompasses within and beyond stored documents and objects, including the subjective records of embodied life, which may be full of conflicting evidence and positions. Along the way, we emphasize the following critical concepts in life writing studies: identity, authenticity, paratextual surrounds, and mediation. And we listen for what people who write themselves tell us about archives of self. In conclusion we pose some critical questions about the challenges in archival research confronting scholars of women’s lives.

### Background Assumptions

We begin by briefly summarizing our approach to life writing.

1. An autobiographical text is not a transparent window on a subject but an act of interpretation.

In *Reading Autobiography*, we observe that “life narratives, through the memories they construct, are records of acts of interpretation by subjects inescapably in historical time and in relation to their own ever-moving pasts.”<sup>5</sup> Further, we note that “autobiographical texts are not a transparent »window« on the flesh-and-blood author’s life. Rather they are sustained acts of self-reflection in time by subjects who define their place in the family, genealogy, society, and historical moment

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5 Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*, Second Edition (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 30.

through acts of auto-graphing the text's layers of narrative, which may include writing, photographs, drawings, etc."<sup>6</sup> Embedded in the cultures and materials of writing, autobiographical acts and practices involve phenomena beyond the frame of a single subject and single text as fixed points of reference.

2. Every autobiographical "I" is complex.

The subject of life writing is an autobiographical "I." And yet, that "I" is really a multitude of "I's," with different relationships to one another and to the reader. We proposed a schema for understanding these multiple "I's" of autobiographical acts in chapter 3 of *Reading Autobiography*.<sup>7</sup> There is, of course, the flesh-and-blood author, the historical person whose life is the subject of storytelling. But readers have no access to this first-person subject, only to that subject's interpretation of her experiential history.

The narrating "I" of the text, however, is accessible to readers or viewers. In autobiographical inscription it is the proxy agent shaping, figuring, and telling a story, or confessing, or meditating on the past, or singing a lyric. And the narrating "I" is not necessarily single – it may include multiple, different "I's" composed over time, as happens with a set of letters or the volumes of a serial autobiographical work.

There is also the narrated "I," that is, the version or versions of a past self that the narrating "I" remembers, imagines, reconstructs, draws, or performs. Finally, there is the ideological "I" or "I's" that hover in and may haunt the text. The ideological "I" refers to historically-contingent concepts of what a person is, who can be a subject of life writing, and whose story is intelligible or important. All these different "I's" enact distinct acts of remembering, imagining, constituting, and performing self-representation.

3. The "I" is not stable but may shift its referent or speaking position.

We also need to keep in mind that the pronoun used in composing a life narrative, the "I," is a linguistic proxy. This "I" can and sometimes does shift in a text. Sometimes the proxy is a proper name, or is put in the second or third person, for example, as "you" or "she." In narratives involving multiple persons in the production, and perhaps composition, of collaborative life writing, the narration is that of a collective "we," an assemblage of narrators blended from multiple speaking positions.

With these prefatory remarks in mind, we turn to our eight micro-studies.

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6 Ibid.

7 Ibid., 71–79.

### Micro-study 1: The Childhood Diary As Authentic Source

We begin with a child's diary. The diary form is often approached as the most transparent of autobiographical genres, an intimate, unpolished, quotidian register of life as it is lived. For someone rummaging in archives to find traces of women's lives, the diary would seem a particularly valuable find, promising an unfiltered glimpse into a subject's past. But, as this micro-study suggests, the archival evidence of even a childhood diary invites scrutiny precisely because that transparency can be deceptive.

Amid the carnage of the war in Bosnia in the early 1990s, a young Bosnian-Croat girl living in Sarajevo, the cosmopolitan capital of Bosnia-Herzegovina, kept a diary of everyday life under siege by Bosnian Serb paramilitaries, recording bombings and deaths, but also attempts at sustaining social life through family gatherings and school. After two years of chronicling conditions of violence and duress, Zlata Filipović showed the diary to her teacher, who subsequently sought out and found a publisher for the diary in Sarajevo; in 1993, the journal, in Croatian, appeared as *Zlata's Diary* through the auspices of UNICEF (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund).<sup>8</sup> Eager to put a human face on the siege to spur outrage in Western audiences, international journalists featured the intimate and affecting child's diary in their reporting; and soon young Zlata became a well-known face of suffering, labeled "the young Anne Frank." After a French photographer carried the diary to Paris, it found a publisher, Le Robert Laffont-Fixot, which issued the translation as *Journal de Zlata*. Subsequently the diary, expanded with further entries over the intervening months, was published by Viking Penguin in the United States in 1994. *Zlata's Diary* eventually found its way into high school classrooms. Zlata continued as a celebrity witness and a spokesperson for the United Nations, touring and witnessing to survival and death and to besieged childhood in the midst of war.

*Zlata's Diary* appeared as the transcription of a teenager's earnest personal diary documenting everyday life during the Bosnian War, a world-historical event of ethnic and nationalist violence. In this sense, it serves as a childhood archive of witnessing to suffering ethnicity and its unrelenting vulnerability. Yet, *Zlata's Diary* raises complex issues about the immediacy of the archive's authenticity and its project of representativeness. In another essay, Sidonie offers an extensive analysis of the published diary;<sup>9</sup> here we point to two features that complicate the reading of its authenticity and representativeness.

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8 Zlata Filipović, *Zlata's Diary: A Child's Life in Sarajevo* (New York and London: Penguin, 1994).

9 See Sidonie Smith, "Narratives and Rights: Zlata's *Diary* and the Circulation of Stories of Suffering Ethnicity," *Women's Studies Quarterly* 34, no. 1/2 (Spring/Summer 2006): 133–152. Special Issue on The Intimate and the Global.

The first feature concerns Zlata's self-positioning in her diary as a latter-day "Anne Frank" and the marketing of Zlata's celebrity as the "Bosnian Anne Frank." She invokes the figure of Anne Frank within her diary; and she names her diary and addresses the diary to a friend as did Anne Frank. Moreover, once the first part was published and she gained public status, she assumed the position of the child witness to lost childhood within the later entries of the diary. She thus imagines her childhood self through the figure of "Anne Frank" and attaches the aura of the earlier victim of ethnic genocide to herself, thereby intensifying the diary's affective appeal by joining it to an earlier diary that has for more than half a century been seared in world memory.<sup>10</sup> The journalistic ascription of celebrity to Zlata and the marketing of the diary within the contemporary regime of human rights has the effect of at once elevating the authenticity of the voice of the (sentimentalized) child and universalizing that voice through its commodification in the global transit in witness narratives. Paradoxically, however, the self-conscious performativity of the diary undermines the transparency of the truth effect of the innocent child witness and the "child's eye view."

The second feature concerns the authenticity of the child's archive of suffering, which is exposed as an artificial effect of commodification. Versions of the diary published outside Bosnia added to the text the evocative immediacy of photographs. One photo presents Zlata in bed, accompanied by the caption: "Zlata, who loves books, reads by candlelight." But to capture the image of the child reading by candlelight, the photographer, as a reviewer from *Newsweek* observed,<sup>11</sup> has to use a flashbulb; in so doing, the light of the flash undoes the photo's authenticity effect of a child by candlelight. We are not suggesting that this child's diaristic archive of everyday suffering during a genocidal war is "inauthentic" as witness testimony; but we note that in this case the autobiographical archive is not only an intimate personal artifact; it is also an effect of global rights discourses, the figure of the child in world memory, and complex processes of the production, circulation, and reception of acts of personal witnessing commodified through global markets.

This example shows the thorny issues exposed as a published diary enters the routes of international circulation and reception that remake it, and its writer, as an artifact for consumption. We might think of this process as an archival feedback loop, because the diary of one child's everyday experience

10 See Anne Frank, *The Diary of Anne Frank* (Amsterdam: originally printed by Otto Frank, 1947).

11 "Child of War: The Diary of Zlata Filipovic," *Newsweek* 24–27 (1994): 27.

of violence depends on an archive of diaristic records and materials related to another girl's life in hiding. Once that "likeness" begins to circulate, the diarist herself increasingly understands herself through it.

### Micro-study 2: Public Archives and Postmemory

We turn next to how some writers, aware of their precarity as victims in world-historical events, have aimed to manage issues about the authenticity of archival evidence and publication by documenting their stories of vulnerability with multiple public and personal archives that produce the authority of evidence. But in these instances, too, issues may arise.

An example is Art Spiegelman's graphic memoir, *Maus: A Survivor's Tale*,<sup>12</sup> which references numerous public and family archives that situate his family story within a collective story located on what he has called the "fault line where World-History and Personal History collide."<sup>13</sup> The authorial persona Art, whom Spiegelman creates, is at once an insistent researcher and an unreliable narrator; but the archival documentation he references is authoritative. *Maus* incorporates many kinds of formal and informal archival materials about its own creation. Foremost is the tape transcript of the father Vladek's individual story as a myth of himself; it is juxtaposed to the son "Art-the-narrator's" less flattering biography of his father, and "Art-the-artist's" story of how he composed the comic.<sup>14</sup>

Additionally, Spiegelman incorporates documents from family archives. There are brief life vignettes for several family members he never knew, who were killed or killed themselves during the Holocaust. Stories of the mother's and father's families over generations in Poland are alluded to in genealogical charts, photographs, drawings, and stories. From public archives Spiegelman references lists of events that happened to European Jews, including maps, the plan of a gas chamber, and the formula for Zyklon B used in them; citations from books and newspapers display how widespread the Fascist ideology of Aryan superiority and the racial inferiority of Jews was. Spiegelman details Art's visit to Auschwitz and the records he accessed there. This mass of documentation is incorporated into the narrative by cartoon drawings that

12 Art Spiegelman, *Maus: A Survivor's Tale. I. My Father Bleeds History. II. And Here My Troubles Began* (New York: Pantheon, 1993).

13 Art Spiegelman, "Preface," in *In the Shadow of No Towers* (New York: Pantheon Graphic Novels, 2004), n.p.

14 Art Spiegelman, *MetaMaus: A Look Inside a Modern Classic, Maus* (New York: Pantheon, 2011).

readers can verify elsewhere and that he later assembled as evidence, first in a Hyperstax CD, then in the volume *MetaMaus*.<sup>15</sup> In *Maus* Spiegelman also interweaves an earlier personal diary in comics form, *Prisoner on the Hell Planet*, that presents young Art as a self-obsessed and miserable teenager. And he alludes to stories that cannot be told either because evidence is missing or the pain of telling the story is too great, as in the case of Art's mother's suicide when he was a teenager. That is, gaps – what is not available in his archives and what is too painful to narrate – also comprise part of the story.

Notably, the use of historical evidence in *Maus* is “history from below”: its account of the Holocaust tells the story from the point of view of its victims, with a focus on the invasion of Poland, efforts to hide from the invading Nazis and the collaboration of some Poles, arrests and deportations to the death camps, accounts of life there that display the use of extermination technologies, the aftermath of the war as a struggle to survive in hiding and in refugee camps, and the challenges of exile (in their case in Sweden) and immigration to New York. Yet this grim documentation is depicted in appealing comic images, with stories told through characters represented as various animals. Spiegelman risks using comic representation to engage readers who may be resistant to stories of Holocaust victims.

Throughout *Maus*, then, Spiegelman situates his persona Art in at least three ways – as resentful son, *Raw* comics artist, and resourceful researcher who draws on multiple archives in part because, as a child born after World War II, he lacks direct memories of his family's experiences. Scholar Marianne Hirsch has described Spiegelman's use of what she calls “postmemory” in such relationships to the past.<sup>16</sup> Hirsch asserts, “»Postmemory« describes the relationship that the »generation after« bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before – to experiences they »remember« only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up. But these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to seem to constitute memories in their own right.”<sup>17</sup> As Hirsch suggests, postmemory describes a mediated connection to the past – “mediated [...] by imaginative investment, projection, and creation.”<sup>18</sup>

15 Ibid.

16 See Marianne Hirsch, “Family Pictures: *Maus*, Mourning and Post-Memory,” *Discourse* 15, no. 2 (1992–1993): 3–29; and, further, Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

17 Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer, *postmemory.net*, accessed November 10, 2017, <http://postmemory.net>.

18 Ibid.

Because Spiegelman's comics are created from the position of postmemory rather than direct memory, they cannot be a transparent recounting – even the archival documents he references are redrawn, therefore interpreted and narrativized. As Spiegelman's practice in *Maus* suggests, there is no transparent recounting of archival data about earlier events when a researcher is positioned outside them. For he or she must consider how to shape the story, what weight to give to varied and conflicting kinds of evidence, and whether to make the story consistent or to highlight tensions and even contradictions that fracture it – but may make it more compelling.

### Micro-study 3: Archives of Feelings and Impressions

Is the writer's task different when she is an eyewitness to the events about which she writes? As *Zlata's Diary* suggested, eyewitness accounts confront issues in winning the reader's belief and having the "truth" of the narrative validated. Spiegelman incorporated many kinds of evidence into his comics to authenticate his truth of claims about the experience of both victims and survivors that drew on personal and public archives – the "objective" evidence of photos and documents about historical events or places. But another kind of personal archive is also available to writers, that of archives of feeling, which have been of great significance in women's life writing. Ann Cvetkovich, in *An Archive of Feelings*, acknowledges Derrida's argument about the impossibility of archival truth because all archives are sites "of contests over knowledge and power."<sup>19</sup> But she draws on many kinds of evidence, particularly in gay and lesbian archives, of such material as documentary films and everyday "oral history, personal photographs and letters, and ephemera" to argue for the existence of an archive of feelings, which she defines as "a practice of fantasy made material" that focuses on emotion and feeling.<sup>20</sup>

In Cvetkovich's terms, even published narratives might productively be thought of as "impressions"<sup>21</sup> rather than objective records because they suggest how memory is crafted, even by eyewitnesses. Consider this example. In the early twentieth century, Chicago-born Mary Borden, despite being an heiress and the mother of three small children, volunteered as

19 Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 268.

20 Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings*, 269.

21 Cvetkovich notes that Derrida "explores the mechanisms by which memory leaves its material traces or »impressions,« and the arbitrary relation between the material object and the psychic life it marks" (*An Archive of Feelings*, 268).



a nurse during World War I and worked for four years behind the Belgian and French sectors of the Western front. *The Forbidden Zone: A Nurse's Impressions of the First World War* is her collection of seventeen brief vignettes dramatizing her experience as a hospital nurse.<sup>22</sup> Unlike better-known autobiographical narratives such as Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* and Vera Brittain's *Testament of Youth*,<sup>23</sup> Borden shaped her story as a series of impressions of remembered moments during her service, many of which she wrote in hospitals in snatches. Although she tried to publish it in 1917, it was considered too controversial and was not published until 1929, when uncensored accounts of World War I began to appear.<sup>24</sup> Borden herself described her manuscript as a non-linear "collection of fragments" that critics found "ugly" and repetitive.<sup>25</sup> Yet, because her archive presents memories as felt impressions, the repetitions in its sketches powerfully render the confusion and absurdity of moments on the front by foregrounding stark and surreal perspectives.<sup>26</sup>

For example, in *Bombardment*, within three pages the narration moves from the appearance of a speck "travelling high through the mysterious twilight" as "a whirling engine"<sup>27</sup> to the town's slow awakening to "terror and bewilderment"<sup>28</sup> as, from an aerial view, "scars appeared on it like the marks of smallpox" and "gashes appeared in its streets."<sup>29</sup> After the airplane "laughed" at the town, then disappeared in the sunshine, "the town was left in convulsions."<sup>30</sup> In this bird's-eye view of bombing devastation, Borden is not a visible presence. The factual record of bombing casualties, however, is converted into a sensory narrative of how war devastated both the areas attacked and participating soldiers. Through such brief "impressions" the

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22 Mary Borden, *The Forbidden Zone: A Nurse's Impressions of the First World War* (London: Hesperus Press, 2008).

23 Erich Maria Remarque, *All Quiet on the Western Front* (New York: Little, Brown & Co., 1929); and Vera Brittain, *Testament of Youth: An Autobiographical Study of the Years 1900–1925* (London: Macmillan, 1934).

24 Hazel Hutchinson, "Introduction," in Borden, *The Forbidden Zone*, xiv.

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid., xv.

27 Borden, *The Forbidden Zone*, 11.

28 Ibid., 12.

29 Ibid., 13.

30 Ibid.

destructiveness and perversity of that war are powerfully conveyed. Indeed, Malcolm Brown, a historian at the Imperial War Museum in London, declares Borden's work a masterpiece and a "remarkable contribution to the literature of that conflict" for its searing yet compassionate narration of events from the point of view of a nurse in the field.<sup>31</sup> Thus, Borden's reworking of her hastily written sketches links her personal archive to a world-historical event and creates an archive of feelings that both enriches and questions the accounts in official archives.

An archive of feelings can also disrupt the progressive narrative logic of certain life narratives, such as the story of successful migration and assimilation. Mary Antin, who emigrated from a Russian shtetl to the United States in the late nineteenth century, published *The Promised Land: The Autobiography of a Russian Immigrant* in 1912 as a narrative of Americanization through which the young woman attests to her successful Americanization.<sup>32</sup> She asserts that hers is a representative story, written at a time of virulent anti-immigrant discourses permeating debates about "alien" outsiders and their threat to the nation in early twentieth-century America. Antin's story, in the mode of conversion narrative, tracks the process and project of becoming a clean and proper American subject and, along the way, foregrounds the radical discontinuity between the old world of Eastern Europe and the new of America. While the first part of her divided text narrates her childhood in a Russian shtetl, represented as backward and constraining in its medieval sociality of femininity, the second half is a *Bildungsroman*, a tale of education through the formal classroom and the settlement house. In this tale, the model pupil is made an "American" by a willed act of becoming. She cultivates and exhibits a desirable character of entrepreneurial ambition, Emersonian individuality, and progressive femininity.

And yet, passages in *The Promised Land* disrupt Antin's story of assimilation. When the narrator reconstructs her childhood in Polotzk from the other side of conversion to an American subjectivity, she discovers that her childhood self is almost totally lost to her. What she can recover are memories of the smells of food and the olfactory affects of eating, particularly her mother's cheesecake: "Why, I can dream away a half-hour on the immortal flavor of those thick cheese cakes we used to have on Saturday night."<sup>33</sup> The memory

31 Malcolm Brown, "Forward," in Borden, *The Forbidden Zone*, xi.

32 Mary Antin, *The Promised Land: The Autobiography of a Russian Immigrant* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1912). *The Promised Land* first appeared in serial form in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1911 and 1912.

33 *Ibid.*, 90–91.

of the cheesecake evokes an extended description of a sensorium of embodied attachment, a sensual register that slows the pace of the narrative of Americanization and interrupts the representation of the Jewish Pale as oppressive. In drawing on her personal archive of feelings, Antin shows how archives of personal remembering expose the contradictions, ambivalences, and paradoxes of life writing, for those who migrate from one nation, culture, and history to another. Even as the narrator identifies as an assimilated American woman, she still writes of her felt loss of the past, however much she frames it as degrading. Paradoxically, she remembers what has had to be forgotten for assimilation to “stick.”

The reshaping of memories as archives of feeling in such life narratives resists accessing the authority of official histories; but they are valid subjective “evidence” for the larger, public events in which the narrators participated. Here, the interpenetration of felt subjectivity and world-historical formations, such as war and mass migration, presents individualized, less homogenized renditions of the experience of historical change.

#### **Micro-study 4: Archives of the Inscribed Past**

The eruptive memories of the past occasionally introduced in Antin’s immigration narrative can become a theme of a life writer’s text. For example, diarists often reread their earlier entries and may reinterpret them in the margins, especially in unpublished works. Letter writers similarly reflect on and may disagree with their earlier views. Memoirists may include photographs of themselves, family, and friends that undercut claims in their texts or cause them to reread their personal pasts differently. That is, the work of some life writers includes records of past versions of themselves that present them as dynamic and changing.

An example of autobiographical writing that displays explicit shifts in the writer’s self-conception is Mary McCarthy’s *Memories of a Catholic Girlhood*.<sup>34</sup> Although this memoir appears to be a chronological narrative of her girlhood and early adult years drawn from essays she wrote over a decade, each chapter is framed by a reflection composed when she was assembling the book, that calls earlier memories and stories about herself into question. That is, McCarthy makes explicit that her self-conception depends on the moment or point of view from which she is viewing and focalizing her past. For example, a chapter narrates her grandmother’s strict control of her and her brother as the orphaned children were growing up in a home she ruled as a “center of

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34 Mary McCarthy, *Memories of a Catholic Girlhood* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1957).

power.”<sup>35</sup> Yet in her later reflection that follows the chapter, McCarthy muses, “In one sense I have been unfair here to my grandmother. I show her, as it were, in retrospect, looking back at her and judging her as an adult. But as a child, I liked my grandmother, I thought her a tremendous figure. Many of her faults – her blood-curdling Catholicism, for example – were not apparent to me as faults.”<sup>36</sup> More generally, she observes, in another reflection on her earlier story, “There are some semi-fictional touches here [...]. I arranged actual events so as to make »a good story« out of them. It is hard to overcome this temptation if you are in the habit of writing fiction.”<sup>37</sup> Thus, McCarthy’s memories are contextualized as subjective “impressions” even as their authority for that moment is asserted.

A more recent instance occurs in the work of contemporary American queer artist Alison Bechdel, whose graphic memoir is entitled *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic*.<sup>38</sup> Her narrating “I” is an older artist rereading and reflecting on her past in relation to both the history of her family and that of homosexuality in twentieth-century America. The graphic memoir depicts growing up in rural Pennsylvania in a family that runs a funeral (“fun”) home and is comprised of an artistic and autistic group of individuals who inhabit their home like an “artists’ colony.”<sup>39</sup> Part of *Fun Home*’s story is daughter Alison’s discovery of her identity as a graphic artist and a lesbian. She must also confront the death of her father at age forty-four when she was seventeen, likely by suicide, and the suppressed history of his homosexuality that links his desire to her own. Beautifully drawn and wittily narrated, *Fun Home* contains numerous sketches of documents from both the family’s records and young Alison’s writings and artifacts that attest to its material quality as not just documentation but an embodiment of Bechdel’s history.

Notable among *Fun Home*’s archive of self are the adolescent diaries that her parents suggested young Alison keep to remedy her obsessive-compulsive disorder. Although her diary’s daily chronicles, reproduced in child-scrrawl, fill many pages with names and dates, young Alison’s emerging self-consciousness soon compels her to write “I think” after each sentence. Then she begins to compress the marking of each perception into a drawn symbol, the circumflex, which she scrawls repeatedly so that the entries become

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35 Ibid., 34.

36 Ibid., 50.

37 Ibid., 164–165.

38 Alison Bechdel, *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2006).

39 Ibid., 134.

almost unreadable. The diary's inauthenticity increases when Alison, because of her poor penmanship, is required to dictate "official" episodes of her daily life to her mother. But these official entries exclude major personal events. For example, the narrated "I's" diary has an entry on swimming, but none on getting her first menstrual period; such personal stories are censored in her formal family. Finally, teenaged Alison abandons keeping a diary, which Bechdel sums up as her young self's recognition of "the implicit lie of the blank page."<sup>40</sup> It bespeaks the then-unspeakable homosexual desire she shared with her father, which was formative for her sexuality. Ironically, then, while young Alison cannot keep a conventional diary, that failure becomes the starting point of her innovative autographic self-presentation. That is, Bechdel critiques the value of the archive of her early diary-writing as authentic evidence of her experiential life and exposes, metacritically, how to read for gaps and overwritten moments. As readers, we move contrapuntally between the narrated "I's" diary in the comic's dialogue boxes and the adult narrating "I's" meta-commentary in the boxes above them that reference her view now of what she had actually experienced, thought, and felt. Her practice suggests that omissions may be more revealing than the apparent written record.

In both examples, an older narrator emphasizes how she now reads her younger self differently as a subject in formation who may have been reluctant or unable to disclose her emerging inner history. Both call into question the authority and authenticity of single examples from personal archives. And they suggest that archival records not only be read against the grain, but also offer advice on how to do so.

### **Micro-study 5: Collections as Homogenizing Archives**

So far, our case studies have focused on autobiographical texts, registering the complexities of the relationship of self-representation to the text's archives, the archival imaginary, archival politics, and archival registers. In the cases that follow, we consider various issues related to the afterlives of autobiographical acts and practices, particularly what happens when life writing becomes part of an archive, and thus gains an archival afterlife.

Consider the afterlife of women's life stories in anthologies. In the West there is a long history of anthologizing lives, from the medieval collections of women saints' lives to the nineteenth-century collections of biographies by women sharing a profession or some kind of notoriety; these constitute

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 186.

what scholar Alison Booth terms prosopography.<sup>41</sup> In *Reading Autobiography*, we define prosopography as “a practice of making a collective study of the characteristics shared by a group whose members’ biographies often cannot be referenced, in order to discover relationships and patterns among their lives at a particular historical moment.”<sup>42</sup> With the advent of second-wave feminism in the late twentieth century, collections of women’s personal stories became a mode of collective life storytelling joining the personal and the political to assert the importance of the authority of experience. Several such anthologies appeared: collections about child abuse, lesbian coming-out stories, stories by women of color attesting to oppression and activism, in developing nations the stories of decolonization, and more. At the end of the century, as discourses of human rights emerged and institutional venues for hearing claims of women’s human rights were established, numerous anthologies of women witnessing to radical injury and harm were available as personal documentation.

These edited volumes designed to advance claims for recognition, reparation, and repair not only became archival, but also exposed issues about the afterlife of women’s witnessing. As Kay Schaffer and Sidonie Smith observe, when women’s stories are published in a collection, either during or after their lifetimes, the editing process may impose new contexts that affect how their texts are read and what larger story the collection of women’s stories is made to tell.<sup>43</sup> Issues of context and occasions for archive-building thus become salient. For gathering stories into an anthology creates an archive of collective experience. Often, the stories are linked as testimonies to experiencing a kind of injury and harm, or set in a national or transnational context of violence and suffering. Certainly, human rights campaigns benefit by publishing anthologies that assemble an archive of testimony to shared experiences of victimization, particularly when those are contextualized by scholar-activists who provide explanatory historical and contextual information. The aim of such collections, in print and on websites, is to rewrite history, name perpetrators, claim recognition, and inspire further action. Yet, in the arena of rights violations, when an individual’s story is resituated in someone

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41 Alison Booth, *How to Make It as a Woman: Collective Biographical History from Victoria to the Present* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004). Booth explores prosopography, how in England from the mid-nineteenth century to the twentieth century publishers assembled women’s stories into biographical volumes of groups of women sharing some kind of history, profession, or status.

42 Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 278.

43 Kay Schaffer and Sidonie Smith, *Human Rights and Narrated Lives: The Ethics of Recognition* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

else's framework, it may be constrained by the discourse that make it intelligible to the intended audience, reinterpreted by the other stories to which it is juxtaposed, and truncated to fit story requirements for a direct, affectively compelling appeal.

Consider an example. In 1994, Inger Agger, a Danish psychologist, published *The Blue Room. Trauma and Testimony among Refugee Women: A Psychosocial Exploration*.<sup>44</sup> Agger frames women's stories of witness to torture, sexual predation, and imprisonment through the disciplinary lens of psychology. The room is at once a literal place and a figurative trope. Literally, Agger interviewed the women whose stories she gathered in the blue room of her home; figuratively, the "blue room" references a place of healing. Like the classical memory theater that images the project of remembering as moving through the rooms of a building, the different chapters gather the witness testimony in "rooms" designated as different kinds of traumatic experience. Walking through memory and working through trauma are entangled. Thus, while the book includes the first-person witness of women from Latin America and the Middle East who lived in Denmark as refugees, the Western paradigm of a therapeutic model of remembering and recovery individualizes the process of recovery at the same time that it simplifies and universalizes the way to recovery.

The collected volumes of witnessing by women who survived radical injury and harm have proliferated as a massive archive of women's witnessing that circulates through the global traffic in human rights narratives. Certainly this work assembles remarkable projects of storytelling from below, stories of women who have been degraded, oppressed, marginalized, abused, dehumanized, forgotten, and discarded. But while it is an archival record of significance, it also reveals the effects of the global politics of human rights discourse, institutions, protocols, and methods of circulation. Women's stories are caught up in the constraints of human rights claims-making and disciplinary ideologies, such as that of repair and recovery. They are subject to several kinds of traffic: the commodification imperatives of publishers seeking salable stories of victimization and survival; the investment of perpetrators in denial and defamation; and the pressure to make stories conform to the generic template that best adjusts to the legal parameters of the rights regime.

### Micro-study 6: Paratexts, Epitexts, and Republication

The paratextual material of a published life story includes all that surrounds it – its framing documents and the publication material that contributes to its

44 Inger Agger, *The Blue Room. Trauma and Testimony among Refugee Women: A Psychosocial Exploration* (London: Zed Books, 1994).

afterlife in multiple editions and versions.<sup>45</sup> Collectively these comprise an archive of curation and reception that is not a static repository but a multi-sited and changing set of iterations. That is, a life story's archive is not just situated in the past of the subject; it moves with the changing present and is open to future changes. Our next example explores how significantly a historical text may shift over the decades of its publication and reception.

The captivity narrative of Mary Rowlandson, originally published in 1682, has a long history of editions spanning three hundred years. Comparing several editions of a text such as Rowlandson's reveals micro- and macro-level changes in the epitext of the first edition. We can observe when illustrations are included or deleted, note shifts in who authors the preface and afterword, consider when and why appendices are included. Alterations between the first and successive editions also involve changes in the book size, typeface, design, quality of paper, cover page, exact title, and so on. As successive editions are issued by different publishers, they may be associated with different communities or groups, even though the first edition of Rowlandson was issued by her Puritan community. Republication by a publisher serving another kind of community will situate Rowlandson's narrative differently. So, too, will versions by academic publishers preparing the text for scholarly use. That is, different versions of a life narrative appeal to different audiences and are put to different social and cultural uses during a text's print life.

The history of editions of *A True History of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson* in the United States suggest how complex its historical archive is.<sup>46</sup> We could observe similar trajectories in life writing by former American slave Harriet Jacobs in the narrative of her life before her liberation was purchased, and medieval English Margery Kempe's account of her spiritual wandering in Europe after conversion to Catholicism. In such cases,

45 Gérard Genette calls this the paratextual material that surrounds a story. Peritextual materials inside the book are added in the publishing process and may include its cover, inside covers, introduction, chapter titles and breaks, epigraphs (for example, in *Maus* one from Hitler), dedication, photographs, and so forth. These may change significantly with different editions of the book. Epitexts concern the kinds of material "surrounds" that are attached to the book after publication. They may include advertising, interviews, reviews, and the like. Genette argues that paratextual materials may appear to be "neutral" but in fact create a threshold that affects how the book is received and interpreted by various reading communities. Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); see also Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 99–100.

46 Mary Rowlandson, "A True History of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson," ed. Amy Schrage Lang, in *Journeys in New Worlds*, ed. William L. Andrews et al. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), 27–65.



researchers must carefully contextualize which version of a print text they are referencing. Often no “authoritative version” may exist.

Scholars seeking to assemble a collection of readings on a woman’s life story need to examine the archive for information about the following: For published work, who made up the reading public or consumers of the life narrative at the time it was written, and subsequently? What roles did groups such as friendship circles, book clubs, libraries, or – now – talk shows or blogs play in the circulation of the narrative? How was the woman’s story taken up in the journals, letters, and other memorabilia of her readers? Teasing out archival evidence that addresses these issues can yield fascinating detail about cultural reinterpretations of a life story. Indeed, the successive versions of the life story produced in republication over time are in themselves a story.

### Micro-study 7: Archives and Remediation

As we see, the archives of life writing are not a fixed repository but a site of renewal and revitalization through new information and interpretations that generate successive versions of a subject. But evidence can never speak for itself. Consider the work of the German-Jewish autobiographical artist Charlotte Salomon. Her vast painted-and-lettered project, *Life? or Theatre? (Leben? oder Theater?)*, increasingly known among art historians and scholars of the Holocaust, situates the story of her family circle in Berlin, during the early days of the Nazi regime.<sup>47</sup> Salomon escaped persecution for a while by moving to the south of France, where she furiously painted and wrote a complex story of her family’s life informed by the Nietzschean views of life and death taught to her by her stepmother-opera singer’s voice coach, who was also her secret lover. Unfortunately, when Salomon and her new husband filed their marriage license in the courthouse of Nice during the Vichy regime, the Gestapo located and arrested them in September 1943. The pregnant Charlotte and her new husband were sent to Auschwitz-Birkenau where, at age 26, she was immediately murdered. Remarkably, she had given her painted pages to a village doctor who preserved them and, in 1947, gave them to her parents, who had survived the war in the Netherlands.

*Life? or Theatre?*, conceived as a play or “Singspiel,” an operetta-like work, in 789 pages painted and lettered in gouache (plus transparencies and suggested music), narrates the family’s troubled past, with eight suicides, most of women including those of her mother, aunt, and grandmother. Beginning in 1961 Salomon’s work was exhibited, and given to the Jewish Historical Museum in

47 Charlotte Salomon, *Life? or Theater? (Leben? oder Theater?)* (New York and London: Overlook Duckworth, Peter Mayer Publishers, 2017).

Amsterdam, which has now assembled an archive that also includes her other paintings, family photographs, letters, and related manuscripts. This primary archive of material by or on Salomon has expanded to include translations and versions of *Life? or Theatre?* in other media: seven films, an opera, several plays, biographies and a biographical novel, as well as numerous scholarly studies and exhibition catalogs, an official website, and various online sites.<sup>48</sup> Each of these remediations emphasizes different moments in interpreting its visual-verbal narrative.

Recently, Frans Weisz's 2012 film, *Leven? of Theater? (Life or Theater?)*, revealed nineteen additional painted pages of a letter forming the epilogue of the play in which Salomon apparently makes a shocking confession about murdering her grandfather. This new material will require a new generation of critical interpretations and dramatic enactments to engage with what seems to be a scandalous revelation. In this case, what we call the *remediation* of Salomon's work is ongoing and controversial.<sup>49</sup> The vigorous arguments that have ensued, and will continue, concern not only the arc of Salomon's life and the interpretation of *Life? or Theatre?*, but how her work should be invoked in Holocaust studies. Art historian Griselda Pollock, Salomon's foremost critic, argues to the contrary that the new material in the letter supports her reading of the performativity of *Life? or Theatre?*.<sup>50</sup> She points toward Salomon's grandfather as the originator of the harm that haunted her maternal family.<sup>51</sup> Thus, even seven decades after her death, Salomon's work is open to questions about both the status of evidence and the ethics of her project. Thus, archival

48 In addition to the Weisz documentary *Leven of Theater? (Life or Theater?)* linked to the 1981 biographical dramatization *Charlotte*, which he co-wrote and filmed (one of seven films on Salomon's and her family's lives), these include: French composer Marc-André Dalva-bie's opera "Charlotte Salomon," which premiered at the Salzburg Festival in 2014; prolific French biographer David Foenkinos's 2015 *Charlotte* (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 2014, trans. Sam Taylor, NY: Overlook Press, 2016), a novel in poetic verse published to much celebration and translated into several European languages; exhibitions in 2016 at Musée Masséna, Nice, and in 2017–2018 at the Joods Historisch Museum, Amsterdam, of Salomon's work; and Griselda Pollock's new study, discussed below, as well as many reviews.

49 See Weisz's 2012 film and Toni Bentley, "The Obsessive Art and Great Confession of Charlotte Salomon," *The New Yorker* online, July 15, 2017, for presentations that suggest Salomon was possibly a murderer.

50 Pollock points to Salomon's persona's allegation as referencing "the »virtual murder by the old man« of several young women" (227). See Griselda Pollock, *Charlotte Salomon and the Theater of Memory* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018).

51 Julia's project in progress is a rhetorical reading of Salomon's long letter as life writing that argues that its apparent claim needs to be contextualized and understood differently.

debates on life writing may remain open-ended, even when all the “evidence” seems to have been found.

### Micro-study 8: Digital Archives and Networked Lives

Finally, we consider briefly what impact digital media are having on our sense of what constitutes an archive and indeed the living of a life. With the twenty-first century explosion in digital archiving and the rise of Big Data projects, materials that were previously sequestered in less accessible official archives, institutions, and storage facilities now enter into a digital ecology of what Andrew Hoskins calls the “continuously networked present.”<sup>52</sup> When offline documentary materials are archived online, however, their status is changed by the architecture and degree of interactivity of the platforms and coding systems used as well as the capabilities of software and hardware. This transfer process constitutes a kind of algorithmic curation, which may be more or less discriminating in its protocols of collection. Further, since costs associated with digitizing archives are often significant, those who provide funding may influence what is digitized.

To the digitized archives are added born-digital archives enabled and sustained by algorithmic logics that feed into repositories of Big Data. This data includes the massive amounts of information swept from social media sites, all of them generative sites of self-imaging, self-inscription, and self-curation. It includes, as well, data accumulated by governments and other security businesses, as well as hackers. In these online archives researchers can track “digital footprints” and encounter what Kylie Cardell calls “digital clutter,” the overabundance of available documents.<sup>53</sup> Yet, researchers depend on other researchers, as well as coders and web architects, to develop meta-data and display architecture through which to find and visualize material. As Xin Huang observes, “the metadata releases” material such as images “from its stillness and gives it a new political ontology and form of agency.”<sup>54</sup> And yet, the archival material returned from online archives and Big Data in response to particular queries regarding pieces of evidence is only as effective as the thoughtfulness of the coders, the quality of the metadata, and the openness

52 Kylie Cardell adopts this phrase from Andrew Hoskins in “Modern Memory-Making: Marie Kondo, Online Journaling, and the Excavation, Curation, and Control of Personal Digital Data,” *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies* 3 (2017): 499–517, 506.

53 Xin Huang, “Excavating the Gendered Self: Digital Affordance and Photo-Auto/Biography,” *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies* 3 (2017): 519–539, 527.

54 *Ibid.*, 527.

of the site. Thus, digital archives, whether digitized or born-digital, raise both methodological and ethical issues for researchers of women's lives.

Although we cannot discuss the many complex issues raised by accumulating massive online archives of the self, we note some intriguing effects that will challenge researchers of women's online lives. In this new environment, self-curators cannot control where all the bits and pieces of their online lives may be taken up, circulated, and stored in other peoples' archives, or orphaned somewhere in the cloud. Lest they feel inadequate to the task of curating an out-of-control archive of self, however, new businesses now market self-aggregation services. For instance, for those trying to assemble a more coherent self, "Uberflip" offers to "centralize your existing content." This challenge will also confront researchers of a subject's self-curation. And there are possible future challenges. Because both historical and contemporary lives have become subjects for online games, people may become able to virtually inhabit the lives of others. Thus, in the future, researching subjects' self-archives may disclose their fantasies as well, as, through gaming, those subjects become alternative selves, celebrity fantasies, avatars of heroic action. Scholars interested in telling women's stories will encounter challenges in online environments undreamed of by earlier generations of researchers.

## Conclusion

We have explored how the archive is not a single or static repository of evidentiary documents, but a set of dynamic and shifting sites. We have considered ways in which those who write themselves establish and draw on both public archives and their personal archives of storage memory and postmemory, including not just stories, tropes, and ready-made genres, but feelings and impressions. We have seen that life writers may confront thorny questions in negotiating their relationship to diverse archives. And we have observed how the afterlife of some life writing, through republication or remediation, raises issues about the entanglement of autobiographical stories in the forces and flows of production, circulation, and reception. From our perspective as scholars of life writing, women's autobiographical work around the globe provides stirring models for reading self-archives and discovering their illuminating stories, even as we struggle with the difficulties of pinpointing some truth of the subject in them.

From our considerations several ethical and methodological questions arise about work on women's life writing and the archival evidence of their lives.

- Researchers serve as "post-archive" collectors, aggregators, and curators who must confront how projects in official and unofficial archives tend

to collectivize and homogenize people's histories in ways that subordinate them to particular interests, institutional imperatives, and narrative frames. How do archives impose classifiable identities upon women's experiential histories that reduce the felt and lived life to a set of features or activities?

- How might researchers listen for other stories, the traces of felt life, in the archive of feelings?<sup>55</sup>
- How may researchers address the material difficulties of archival work, particularly the frequent backlog of uncatalogued materials? How may they gain access to materials stored in family and personal archives? (The kind of innovative outreach Philippe Lejeune describes in *The »Journal de Jeune Fille« in Nineteenth-Century France* may be a start.<sup>56</sup>)
- Where might the inaccessible material body of a subject – the compilation of her histories, sensations, and affects – be found in archival fragments?
- When confronting the erasure of some lives and subjectivities from official records, how might researchers engage the fragments left in marginalia or ledgers?
- When a subjectivity cannot be constructed from archival fragments, what storytelling possibilities are available ethically that, while respecting silences and incompleteness, can find some voicing? As Marlene Kadar eloquently argues, scholars become witnesses to the work of recovering lost stories as they piece together fragments and allow them to stutter (*The Devouring*).<sup>57</sup>
- When a subject's life cannot be reconstructed or a subjectivity theorized, can alternative possibilities for storytelling be imagined?
- And last, what kinds of questions – not statements – might allow researchers to breathe life into the testimony of archives of the self?

To invoke Derrida's challenge about archives: "The question of the archive is not [...] a question of the past. [...] It is a question of the future, the question of the future itself, the question of a response, of a promise and of a responsibility for tomorrow."<sup>58</sup>

55 Clare Brant, Tobias Heinrich, and Monica Soeting, "The Placing of Displaced Lives: Refugee Narratives," *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies* 3 (2017): 625–628.

56 See his discussion in Lejeune, *On Diary*, 129–143.

57 Marlene Kadar, "The Devouring: Traces of Roma in the Holocaust: No Tattoo, Sterilized Body, Gypsy Girl," in *Tracing the Autobiographical*, eds. Marlene Kadar, Susanna Egan, Linda Worley, and Jeanne Perrault (Vancouver: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2005), 223–246.

58 Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 36.

## Abstract

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**Sidonie Smith**

UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

**Julia Watson**

THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

*The Archives of Those Who Write Themselves: What and Where Are They?*

Autobiographical archives are never “transparent,” unmediated documentary evidence. For, life writers act as readers, interpreters, and curators of material ranging from the intimate to the impersonal. Their personal archives, which include earlier self-writing in journals and diaries and self-imaging in photographs and drawings, are reinterpreted in situating and composing the past. As a written life enters the world, it encounters other kinds of archives and may be changed by subsequent editions or translation into other languages and media. That is, the “afterlife” of a text shifts its relationship to archival materials as new reading publics access different versions of the “life” over time. This paper foregrounds issues of theory and method, emphasizing critical concepts in life writing studies such as identity, authenticity, paratextual surrounds, and mediation. We use eight micro-studies of autobiographical texts, written primarily by women over the last four centuries, and explore what material is encompassed in a life writer’s archive, including the conflicting evidence of subjective records of embodied life. Finally, we pose critical questions about the challenges confronting scholars in archival research.

## Keywords

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archives of the Self, archives of feelings and impressions, collections and archival afterlives, archival remediation, digital archiving







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*other special issues*

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*Holocaust in Literary and Cultural Studies*

*Anthropology in Literary Studies*

*Postcolonial or Postdependence Studies?*

*Nonfiction, Reportage, Testimony*

*The Humanities and Posthumanism*

*Visual Literacy*

*Memory and Place*

*Literature and Society*

*Migrant Literature*