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**Polish Suffragettes and the European Women's Movement
at the Turn of the 19th and 20th Centuries:
Paulina Kuczalska-Reinschmit's Social Activism and Journalism***

Introduction

Paulina Kuczalska-Reinschmit (1859–1921) is a key figure in the Polish suffrage movement – the so-called first wave of feminism – which ended after the First World War, when the re-born Polish nation granted women full rights as citizens. This act recognized the patriotic work of women during the partition of Polish territory by Prussia, Russia and Austria (1772–1918) (Żarnowska, Szwarz, 1992, 1994; Dufurat). Polish women had intensified their patriotic work after the failure of the January Uprising (1863–1864), which was followed by an increase in germanisation and russification. The Polish nation responded with an all-encompassing ideology of positivism, described in scholarship as “organic work” and “work at the foundations” (Modzelewski; Jaszczuk). Its purpose was to transform an agricultural, under-developed country under the dominance of the landed gentry and the Catholic Church into a modern industrial society: bourgeois, educated and secular. It was hoped that a boost in the economy might foster cultural development, which in turn might constitute a basis for

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national identity – the infrastructure of a modern nation state being, at the time of the project’s inception, in an exiguous condition.

Polish women fulfilled these ideals by founding “female committees” and “women’s work associations” as part of philanthropic, professional, industrial and cultural institutions, and by establishing underground educational and self-education organisations, which were legalized after the revolution of 1905–1907. This was to push against a widely-held traditional view that Polish women’s activity should be confined to the home and the family (Żarnowska, 2008: 13–28). Women justified their participation in various forms of civil activism not through an overt campaign for parity with men, but through focused concern for national education and the raising of future generations; this is why a large number of Polish female social activists at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries distanced themselves from such labels as “suffragette” or “feminist”. But the emancipatory aspect of this female activism was understood as a threat by conservative thinkers in Polish society, who criticized women’s openness to scientific positivism, to literary realism and naturalism, to socialist and peasant propaganda, and to the influence of the suffragette movement abroad. For the old guard of traditional values, this activism would result in unwarranted conflict between men and women and thus weaken a nation that could ill afford further depletion in strength, and there was the perceived perversity of women demanding certain educational, professional, legal and political rights that were not yet securely held by Polish men themselves (Hoszowska; Dormus, 2006; Bednarz-Grzybek).

Paulina Kuczalska-Reinschmit’s life and work

Current scholarship is now able to pinpoint the main facts in Kuczalska-Reinschmit’s biography (Walewska: 15–21; Pachucka: 54–128, 129–279; Hulewicz: 69–70) and her work as an activist (Sierakowska: 245–253; Szwarz: 141–145) and editor (Zaleska: 96–97, 111–112; Pawłowska: 571–588; Franke, 1999: 225–251; Franke, 2000: 101–118; Dormus, 2000: 87–110; Górnicka-Boratyńska: 82–145; Domarańczyk: 125–134; Zawiszewska) although the number of sources on her is limited for two reasons. Firstly, the archives of *Ster* [The Helm; *Ster. Dwutygodnik dla spraw wychowania i pracy kobiet*,

1895–1897; *Ster. Organ równouprawnienia kobiet*, 1907–1914) and Związek Równouprawnienia Kobiet Polskich [The Polish Women Emancipation Association] were destroyed during the Warsaw Uprising in 1944; secondly, Kuczalska-Reinschmit was a secretive and quiet person, whose work took place mostly behind the closed door of her office. Surviving accounts unanimously claim that she devoted her life to the ideal of emancipation while keeping herself in the shadows. Perhaps this is echoed by the epitaph on her gravestone: “Paulina Kuczalska-Reinschmit’s / the President of the Polish Women Emancipation Association, the Editor of “*Ster*” / You, who lived for the ideals / Glory be to you”.

“The Hetmaness” of the Polish suffragettes (Lubińska: 3) Paulina Kuczalska-Reinschmit, was born in 1859 in Ukraine. Her family were landed gentry; this status was ended by tsarist confiscation, whereupon – indigent, dispossessed – they moved to Warsaw. Her mother, Ewelina Porczyńska, was a proponent of the emancipatory ideals of the so-called Enthusiasts, and in her daughter instilled democratic values and a conviction about the intellectual equality of the sexes (Borkowska: 21–51) Kuczalska-Reinschmit received a thoroughgoing education, at home, not in a school; in fact this was typical for aristocracy from the eastern part of Poland. Among other things, she spoke several foreign languages, which would later prove extremely useful in her contacts with international women’s movements. In 1879 Kuczalska-Reinschmit married Stanisław Reinschmit, an aristocrat and an official of Poland’s Land Credit Company, whose family was linked to various literary circles in Warsaw. She established the first Women’s Reading Room in Warsaw with her friend Józefa Bojanowska. In 1881 she debuted in the newspaper for conservative Warsaw aristocracy, *Echo*, published by Zygmunt Sarnecki, where she expressed her views on the so-called woman question, the topic to which she devoted all her further social activism and journalism.

In the 1880s Kuczalska-Reinschmit wrote in the first Polish feminist periodical *Świt*, edited by progressive poetess Maria Konopnicka, and in the 1890s in *Przegląd Tygodniowy*, edited by Adam Wiślicki, a publication of that group labelled the Warsaw positivists. Her work also appeared in various women’s and family periodicals, such as *Tygodnik Mód i Powieści* and *Tygodnik Ilustrowany*. In the early 20th century Kuczalska-Reinschmit published in the

quasi-socialist *Ogniwo*, edited by Stanisław Stempowski, Stanisław Posner and Ludwik Krzywicki. She also worked for the publication of Galician suffragettes in the early 1900s periodical *Nowe Słowo*, edited by Maria Turzyma-Wiśniewska.

Kuczalska-Reinschmit established her own feminist periodical *Ster*, its first incarnation lasting from 1895 to 1897 in Lviv (in the territory of the Austrian Partition), and its aim primarily to support Galician women in their struggle for education equality. It was reborn in Warsaw in 1907–1914 to promote political rights “without gender difference”. She also published several volumes: *Edukacja kobiet w Polsce* (1902), *Historia ruchu kobiecego* (1903), *Młódzież żeńska i sprawa kobieca* (1906), *Wyborcze prawa kobiet* (1908), and the psychological drama *Siostry* (1908).

Her writing and publishing paralleled her activism, which consisted in establishing several pioneering institutions. In the nineteenth century, this included the creation of the Women’s Reading Rooms, of the Women’s Committee at the Warsaw Animal Care Society, of the Women’s Work Deputation at the Association for the Support of Industry and Commerce, of the 3rd Sewing Room at the Warsaw Charity Association, and of the Women’s Products Fair. The twentieth century also saw the founding of the Polish Women’s Emancipation Association. After her husband’s death in 1895, Kuczalska-Reinschmit co-habited with her friend and co-worker Józefa Bojanowska and her mother.

Foreign inspiration in Kuczalska-Reinschmit’s social, journalistic and editorial work

In that era straddling the turn of the 19th century into the 20th, Kuczalska-Reinschmit’s activism is notably different from the work of other activists of the women’s movement. Her emancipatory project (Górnicka-Boratyńska: 6; Kuczalska-Reinschmit: 556–557) in the 1880s and 1890s paradoxically both fulfilled and undermined the programme of “organic work,” which called for the solidarity of all social classes and groups, and assumed that the woman question, and the working class question or the Jewish question, should be subordinate to the Polish question, that is, the fight for independence and

national identity (Blobaum: 37–56). Kuczalska-Reinschmit claimed that the order of political priorities should be reversed: the needs of women, the working class, peasants or Jews should be met as soon as possible, so that the talent, energy and entrepreneurship of these groups may be utilised for the national cause, and the unity of the nation not undermined by their righteous anger. Her courage in expressing such progressive views, roundly criticised by conservatives, and the earnest engagement of women from all social groups, are so pioneering in a Polish context that they must have been inspired by similar movements in other cultures.

So far, scholarship on this matter points to mainly British and French thinkers, such as Hipolit Taine, Herbert Spencer, Henry Thomas Buckle and John Stuart Mill. These figures were indeed lodestones for much Polish social thought and activism of the 19th century (*Polska w orbicie...*). Yet a careful re-reading of Polish suffragette texts reveals that, in contrast to male scholars, Polish feminists educated in foreign universities read not only the aforementioned authors, but also a vast international literature on women's rights. What is more, they also made direct contact with German, French, English, Czech and Scandinavian activists, and implemented foreign models of association activism (*Działaczki społeczne, feministki...*). Kuczalska-Reinschmit was a pioneer of such engagement, as she often travelled, first to study in Geneva and Brussels, then to participate in international women's congresses, returning with a wealth of suffragette periodicals and literature. She discussed them and made them available in the Women's Reading Room in Warsaw, which played several roles till the First World War: it was a private loaning library, a feminist reading room, a meeting hall for various organisations for women, the office of the Polish Women Emancipation Association, and the editorial office of *Ster*.

In the 1880s and 1890s the core of Kuczalska-Reinschmit's emancipation programme was formed. Her journalism in this period shows that she closely observed German, French and Czech women's movements, and that she borrowed elements of their work for her own activism. Most of her writing on German, French and Czech suffrage movements appeared in *Świt*, where she focused on the situation of women in the labour market, in the positivist periodical *Przegląd Tygodniowy*, where she focused on women in the already existing male association, and in her own Lviv periodical *Ster*, where she focused

on educational equality for women (Kuczalska-Reinschmit: 95–205, 209–321; Zawiszewska: 77–112, 113–180, 243–259). Her attitude to the German, French and Czech movements was not uniform, but instead varied according to the political and cultural relationship each host country had with Poland.

Kuczalska-Reinschmit and feminists from her circle had an ambivalent attitude to their German counterparts. On the one hand, they felt antipathy to the Partitioning Power, which was realising its programme of germanisation of the Polish; on the other hand, they experienced solidarity with German women and respected their industry, economy, skilled organisation and the ability to put the good of the nation above individual interests (Wajda: 45–87). Such ambivalence was characteristic of a great number of Poles at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, whatever their political inclinations and social class (Chamot: 156–235). Kuczalska-Reinschmit understood certain moments in the history of German women's movements as inspirations for the movement as a whole: the first suffragettes appearing around 1830; the establishment of *Frauenverein zur Bekämpfung und Ausgleichung Religiöser Vorurtheile* by Joanna Schwabe-Goldschmit in Hamburg during the Spring of Nations; the first Women's Congress, convened by Ludwika Otto in 1865 in Leipzig; the founding of *Allgemeine Deutsche Frauenverein*, which focused on access to the job market and higher education for women, creating women's unions, shelters, vocational schools, creative associations, and exhibitions of their works. According to Kuczalska-Reinschmit, it was the concentration on work and education that distinguished the German women's movement from the French or British. In her view, the Germans here were much more like the Poles. She nonetheless perceived the German programme as limited, as laggardly in an era of progress, and her attitude toward German women could sometimes be condescending. She held that the German women's movement, operating legally in its own country, could have achieved much more than its sister in Poland (which had been conquered by Prussia). There should have been parity of the sexes in secondary and higher education, in pay, in salaries – instead, the situation for a German woman was often little better than it was for a Polish woman.

For Kuczalska-Reinschmit, there were several things in the German movement which might be profitably imitated in Poland. German activists

published the sleek, professionally edited periodical *Neue Bahnen*. They organised annual congresses in various cities, which proved popular, and fostered local associations (Lokalverein). And though the General German Women's Association represented the whole women's movement and organised national congresses, it did not impose its views on local associations. To illustrate this cooperation between general and local associations, Kuczalska-Reinschmit wrote a detailed report from the Women's Congress, which took place in Weimar in 1884. The Polish territory was yet to have its own counterparts of many of those work unions, societies and associations of national, religious or charitable character (concerning vocational and general female education, orphans, juvenile female criminals, prostitutes, female servants, factory workers, teachers, people's kitchens, care for children and the elderly). This was, after all, one of the objectives of the information campaign organised by Kuczalska-Reinschmit in *Ster. Poles* might emulate their German neighbours' tactful and calm behaviour, perseverance, patience and effectiveness. The leader of Polish suffragettes appreciated the German activists' avoidance of "irritability" in speech, writing and behaviour, which opened rather than closed doors between themselves and conservative thinkers.

At the turn of 1880s and 1890s Kuczalska-Reinschmit contacted activists from the international women's movement, among them Maria Deraismes, Anita Augsborg, Lina Morgenstern, Eliška Krásnohorská and Karolina Světlá. This is when German inspirations in her emancipation programme were complemented by French ones. France and Poland were linked by several centuries of cultural relations (Dunin-Źasowicz; Nowakowski: 468–473; Źurowska: 307–313), culminating in the 19th century after the Napoleonic Wars, and then after the November Uprising in 1830, when Paris became the main centre of Polish political and artistic immigration. Polish emigrants sowed French interest in the so-called Polish question, but the texture of this interest changed after the war with Prussia in 1870–1871. With the strengthening of Prussia's position at the end of the 19th century, France decided that the Polish question was an internal issue for the three Partitioning Powers. Nevertheless, for many Poles, Paris was still regarded as a Mecca for artists and art lovers, and was still visited by many members of the Polish aristocracy, bourgeoisie and intelligentsia.

Whatever happened in France, whatever was written or read there, was a subject for lively discussion and imitation in Poland. In this respect, the activism of the Polish women's movement was no exception. Polish women observed French feminists with great interest and borrowed their organisational ideas; they were also inspired by French feminist writing. However, during international congresses Polish suffragettes demanded gestures of political loyalty from the French, wanted them, for instance, to recognise Polish delegates as separate from Russian, German or Austrian, and to support the Polish right to independence.

What she could not find in the German suffrage movement – an uncompromising demand for equality for women – Kuczalska-Reinschmit found in the International Women's Congress in Paris in 1889. Maria Cheliga-Loevy, a Polish member of the French movement, made a significant contribution to the organization of this congress, and after it founded the "Alliance universelle des femmes", which disseminated the ideals of women's international cooperation, and the *Bulletin de l'union universelle des femmes*, a periodical *Revue Féministe*. Kuczalska-Reinschmit wrote long and detailed reports from Women's Congresses for the Polish public (Kuczalska-Reinschmit: 209–229). After her first visit to France, she set up the first Polish branch of the Union, and as soon as 1891 organised the first underground congress of Polish women in Warsaw, as a celebration of the 25th anniversary of the literary work of Eliza Orzeszkowa – the author of the positivist novel *Marta* (1873). Kuczalska-Reinschmit was also the prime mover of underground women's congresses in the following years, and they were organised regularly on the territory of the Russian and Austrian Partition until the First World War (Sikorska-Kulesza: 81–95).

From the beginning of the 1890s she established institutions in Warsaw to protect women's professional work, and which gave priority to women's rights over national, class or religious ideology. This activity was modelled on the German, French and Czech associations, its aim to make Polish women aware that their common interests took precedence over class or religious difference. The result of this activism was the participation of the Warsaw–Cracow women's delegation in the first meeting of Polish educators in Lviv in 1894, and voting on reform of secondary education, which made the curriculum of

female secondary schools equal to that of male schools. In mid-1890s, this led to the establishment of the first private female secondary schools in the Austria-Partition cities of Cracow and Lviv – a move that would eventually result in women attending university (Czajeczka; Dutkova). The next stages in the realization of the congress of Polish educators, which depended on the will of the Austria-Hungarian government, were discussed in *Ster* in 1895–1897. She moved from the Polish Kingdom to Galicia for three years – from Warsaw to Lviv – as part of her campaign for the educational parity of boys and girls. She ceased publication of the Lviv periodical and returned to Warsaw when she had achieved her goal. In 1897, Jagiellonian University admitted its first female students.

In their fight for educational equality, the activists of the Kingdom of Poland and Galicia were inspired by the achievements of the Czech women's movement, too. In the 1880s and 1890s, Polish periodicals that supported the ideals of emancipation informed their readers about local associations in the areas of Czech, Moravia and Silesia, which were parts of Austria-Hungary (Mannová: 131–146; Vošahlíková: 277–286). In the Polish media it was stressed that the Habsburgs supported national minorities, but Polish women's periodicals also noted that some liberal reforms discriminated against women. For example, the Law of Associations prohibited women from founding and participating in political organisations, and because “politics” was understood at the time in very broad terms, women faced numerous obstacles in their public activism. They were thus limited to participation in charitable and welfare organisations, especially religious ones, although in the last decades of the nineteenth century women could also work for the benefit of single women, female factory workers, teachers, post-office staff, etc. Polish women were inspired by the work of the oldest Czech emancipatory association, which was secular and informal, and founded in the 1860s by Wojciech Náprstek: *Americký klub dam* [The American Women's Club]. It educated its members in humanistic subjects and science, and informed them about new technologies applied in the household. One club member was the writer Eliška Krásnohorská, a founder of the *Minerva Association*, who helped to establish the first private female secondary school in Prague in 1890. It offered a curriculum which

enabled its female students to be awarded the same diploma as male students, and thus opened their path to university.

In the Lviv edition of *Ster*, Kuczalska-Reinschmit published articles about the Minerva Association, the difficulties faced by the authorities of the first female secondary school in Prague, and the efforts of its graduates to win places at universities – and it is worth noting that the journalists writing for this periodical included men who supported the cause of emancipation. The graduates from the first female secondary school in Cracow entered Jagiellonian University at the same time that Minerva graduates entered Prague University. These Polish and Czech girls faced similar obstacles in their university life, as both nations were limited by the same central education authorities; initially, female students were accepted only into philosophy departments, and only as unenrolled students, and only on the condition of agreement expressed by all professors in the given department. For Polish suffragettes, educational success by women in Austria–Hungary was an important harbinger of equality of the sexes, and should be seen as an inspiration for full emancipation after the revolution of 1905–1907.

In contrast to inspiration gained from the experience of the German, French or Czech activists, the attitude to Russia presented by Kuczalska-Reinschmit and her circle may be described as proud isolation. In the Polish Kingdom, which was part of the Russian Partition, the situation of Poles in the 19th century was most difficult. After suppression of the January Uprising, russification was intensified. Poles were removed from official positions, the Catholic and Uniate Churches were persecuted, Russian ousted Polish as the primary language of instruction in the classroom, and private schools were strictly controlled. The creation of academic organisations was proscribed, as were many kinds of officially unsanctioned meetings. Censorship of the media, literature and theatre grew more strict. The governor of the Polish Kingdom had military prerogatives, which meant that he could imprison any citizen without a court sentence. In such a context, the Polish implemented three strategies, characteristic for any colonial community which is dependent on a hegemonic power: denial, cooperation and adjustment (Wawrzyczek: 11–19; Skórczewski: 393–409).

The feminist circle surrounding Kuczalska-Reinschmit chose the position of denial, which was made easier by the fact that its leader – although raised to be a polyglot – did not know Russian and, as an act of rebellion, refused to learn it. Until the revolution of 1905-1907 she also ignored the Russian emancipation movement, which since the 1860s had a more socialist than feminist character (Pruškarieva: 221–238). So both the conservative and the progressive elements of Polish society, including Polish feminists, distanced themselves from Russian women – and from those Polish women who studied in higher education courses for women in the cities of the Empire, because of their perceived sympathy for revolutionary ideals and disregard of moral standards (Tizskin: 125–138). Polish activists believed that such ideological “rowdiness,” evident in thought, speech, appearance and “inappropriate” behaviour, was harmful to the cause of emancipation. It was only after 1907 that positive texts about Russian suffragettes – who supported both Polish independence and the cause of political equality for Polish women within the Empire – would appear in *Ster*.

In its Lviv edition from the end of the 19th century and its Warsaw edition at the beginning of the 20th, *Ster* followed mainly German and French models, both in terms of the visual side of the publication, as well as the organisation and the content; it echoed periodicals published by Allgemeine Deutsche Frauenverein and Alliance universelle des femmes. *Ster* was an information platform for the whole women's associations movement from all three Partitions, and it published articles penned by members of various organisations for Polish women. It also ran news about the progress of the international emancipation movement, with a particular interest in the suffragettes. In 1907 – the two preceding years those of revolution in the Polish Kingdom – the tsarist authorities liberated the laws on associations, and Kuczalska-Reinschmit immediately established the Polish Women's Emancipation Association, which shared its agenda with the German and French associations mentioned above. The Polish Women's Emancipation Association soon became, together with the news section of *Ster*, the platform for the Polish suffrage activists.

Conclusion

To conclude: although Paulina Kuczalska-Reinschmit rooted her project of educational, professional and political emancipation in the ideology of the Polish Renaissance and aristocratic Sarmatism, she modelled her activism on foreign organisations. German in the 1880s; French and Czech in the 1890s. She was convinced that much could be learned through careful observation of the situation of women in other countries and in Polish territory partitioned by Russia, Prussia and Austria. She enumerated four reasons why Polish women should look abroad for inspiration.

The knowledge of the international women's movement gives a broader perspective on the situation of Polish women, and allows them to make a decision about when to rebel against a curtailment of freedom.

Polish women should model their work on the better-organised German, French and Czech movements, and also seek, like these foreign bodies, to transcend the divisions of class. Kuczalska-Reinschmit criticised certain non-democratic practices of the Polish emancipatory movement, in which class antagonisms between landed gentry, post-aristocratic intelligentsia, working-class women and peasant women were prominent until the beginning of the 20th century.

The Polish movement could learn how to organize mass rallies from German or French examples. Such rallies would widen public consciousness about the reality of women's position in society, and breed a solidarity in the movement itself.

And European women, not only Polish women, must be alert to the decisions of politicians and industrialists, and to the interconnectedness of actions across national borders. For Kuczalska-Reinschmit, attempts to limit or to broaden women's labour rights in Prussia, or educational rights in the Habsburg Monarchy, would eventually lead to similar changes to Polish women's rights in the lands of the Prussian, Austrian or Russian Partitions.

For the above reasons, Kuczalska-Reinschmit – regarding state institutions as inimical to equality of the sexes – supported the creation of the so-called emancipatory women's international, on the model of the Socialist International. Polish conservatives accused her of treason, of putting women's interests above

those of Polish independence. But she had the chance to observe international women's congresses and to share her experience of activism with other participants up until the First World War, and was convinced that, despite differences in the political contexts of various countries, progress with the woman question was always inhibited by the same factors. From the point of view of women's interests, she saw no difference between a German woman from Berlin, a French woman from Paris, a Czech woman from the Austria-Hungarian Monarchy, a Polish woman from the Grand Duchy of Pozen taken over by the Reich, a Polish woman from the Polish Kingdom taken over by Russia, or a Polish woman from Galicia. They all suffered similar discrimination.

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**Polish Suffragettes and the European Women's Movement
at the Turn of the 19th and 20th Centuries:
Paulina Kuczalska-Reinschmit's Social Activism and Journalism**

Summary

Paulina Kuczalska-Reinschmit (1859–1921) – the leader of the Polish emancipation movement at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries and active on the territory under Russian Partition – established her programme for educational, professional and political emancipation of Polish women, drawing inspiration from national sources: the ideology of the Polish Renaissance and Polish Sarmatism of the pre-partition era, but the forms of implementation of this programme were based on foreign, mainly German, French and Czech, influences. The German, French and Czech influence are noticeable particularly in the crystallization of her emancipation programme, that is in the 1880s and the 1890s when she wrote about German, French and Czech women in the first Polish feminist daily *Świt* [The Dawn], then in the daily of the so-called Warsaw positivists titled *Przegląd Tygodniowy* [The Weekly Review] and finally in her own feminist periodical *Ster* [The Helm]. *Ster* had two editions: *Ster*, issued in Lviv in the years 1895–1897, was an organ of the supporters of educational emancipation for women in the territories under Austrian Partition and was closed when the Jagiellonian University admitted its first female students; *Ster*, issued in Warsaw in the years 1907–1914, was an organ of Związek Równouprawnienia Kobiet Polskich [Polish Women Emancipation Association], which led to the granting of full citizenship rights to Polish women in 1918. While working on the programmes and forms of activity of *Ster* and of the Polish Women Emancipation Association, she took advantage of the models created mainly by the German organization Allgemeine Deutsche Frauenverein as well as Ludwika Otto and Augusta Schmidt's magazine *Neue Bahnen*, and French organization Alliance Universelle des Femmes as well as Maria Cheliga's magazine *Bulletin de l'union universelle des femmes* or *Revue Féministe*.

Keywords: comparative literature, European feminism, Polish Women's Movement, Paulina Kuczalska-Reinschmit's social activism and journalism, periodical *Ster* [The Helm] (Lviv, 1895–1897; Warsaw 1907–1914)

Słowa kluczowe: literatura porównawcza, feminizm europejski, polski ruch kobiecy, działalność społeczna i publicystyczna Pauliny Kuczalskiej-Reinschmit, czasopismo „Ster” (Lwów, 1895–1897; Warszawa 1907–1914)