Between Young Poland, Skamander and the Avant-garde

Women Writing Poetry in Interwar Poland

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Translated by Beata Zawadka and Barbara Braid

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Bolesław Leśmian *The Unpeopled Ballad*

Never seen through human eyes, no one roamed it far and wide,
A boundless meadow blossomed in its greenish-bluish hide,
A stream sparkled in the verdure as a never changing shred.
And carnations in the grass dotted themselves cherry-red.
A cricket swollen from this dew, dimmed its face with its spit.
And a droplet of a milkweed flashed then in its stalky slit,
And the meadow's breath did seethe and breathe alive to the sun,
There was no one who could see this nor could hear this, there was none.

Where are my June-hot breasts which no one has seen?
Why aren't my lips in this meadows' green?
I want to pick flowers to fill up my arms!
Why can no bloom be felt on my palms?

It became oddly-godly under hemlock on the side,
It was a girl-mist who did want to be two-lipped and two-eyed.
One could see her painful struggle to have both body and soul,
And to show her own white breasts, to flash with her plait of gold.
One could see her painful struggle – breathless torture, her womb's fear
Till she grew weaker forever, and did rest – unappeared!
But the place she could've been to – ceaselessly soughs and stays,
That place, useless for that soul, for that body – fragrant place.

Where are my June-hot breasts which no one has seen?
Why aren't my lips in this meadows' green?
I want to pick flowers to fill up my arms!
Why can no bloom be felt on my palms?

All the herbs and the insects enticed with a strange rustle
Did come sniffing unwalked tracks, making hubbub and bustle,
A nauught-ward spider did try to catch her shadow at least,
A humblebee blithely bugled the fulfilled non-being feast,
And crickets rattled the welcome songs, beetles hummed the songs of grief,
And flowers wiggly wreathed themselves to become a parting wreath!

In that sunny celebration they were all and shout with glee,
But that one who could've been – and that one who'll never be!
Where are my June-hot breasts which no one has seen?
Why aren't my lips in this meadows' green?
I want to pick flowers to fill up my arms!
Why can no bloom be felt on my palms?

B. Leśmian, *33 of the Most Beautiful Love Poems*,
transl. by Marian Polak-Chlabicz,
Create Space Independent Publishing Platform, 2011.

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Introduction

Inspirations. Three terms crucial to the history of Polish poetry in the first half of the 20th century are mentioned in the title of this monograph: Young Poland [Młoda Polska], Skamander, and Avant-garde.

Only the first and the last refer to literary movements that also occurred in other European countries, taking the form of local variations. Despite its inherent ideological and artistic complexity, Young Poland developed a coherent concept of literature as a means of expression and action (expressing and communicating the artist's situation and experiences and thus influencing the audience). The subject of a literary work, including poetry, encompass both personal content and political, economic and social issues. The artists aimed to articulate and diagnose the issues of modernity in a new language, creating literature that was engaged but not didactic or utilitarian.

Young Poland, also known as early modernism, emerged around 1890 and ended shortly after the First World War. It brought together various innovative philosophical ideas, artistic tendencies, and moral conventions characteristic of European culture at the turn of the 20th century.

Skamander refers to the most influential poetic group of the interwar period, which was established in Warsaw around 1918. It revolved around the monthly magazine *Skamander* [Scamander] (1920–1928, 1935–1939) and the weekly *Wiadomości Literackie* [Literary news] (1924–1939). The core of the group consisted of the so-called Big Five (Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz, Jan Lechoń, Antoni Słonimski, Julian Tuwim, Kazimierz Wierzyński), with Władysław Broniewski, Jerzy Liebert, Kazimiera Iłłakowiczówna, Gabriel Karski, Maria Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska and Irena Tuwim loosely associated with them. The Skamandrites also influenced younger poets who either imitated their work or resisted it, using it as a starting point to develop their own poetic idiom. The Skamandrites' model of lyricism, based on a model typical of early 20th century European poetry, was a reaction against Symbolism. Its distinguishing features included an active engagement with reality, a fascination with modern civilisation, the city and the crowd, a rejection of the distinction between 'poetic' and 'non-poetic' subjects, an appreciation for colloquial speech and everyday communication as poetic material, the creation of the lyrical hero as an ordinary citizen, and finally the

transcendence of boundaries between poetry and song, satire, cabaret and journalistic forms.

Avant-garde is the collective term for the new artistic trends of the first quarter of the 20th century, such as Dadaism, Cubism, Futurism, and Expressionism, which emerged in opposition to the previous concepts and achievements in art. The history of interwar Polish poetry uses the terms 'First' and 'Second Avant-garde.' The First Avant-garde, also known as the Krakow Avant-garde, formed in the early 1920s around Tadeusz Peiper, Julian Przyboś and Jalu Kurek, who published the magazine *Zwrotnica* [The Switch]. It remained active until the early 1930s. The Krakow Avant-garde's model of poetry was characterised by an affirmation of modernity in its various forms, adoration of the city, industrial civilisation and mechanised work, a break from the traditional understanding of the poet's role as a bard, priest or ideologue, a view of the poet as a craftsman working with language as their material, and of poetry as an economic and disciplined organisation of language, and an emphasis on metaphor as a key poetic device. The Second Avant-garde is the collective term for the poetic groups that formed in the 1930s and built upon the experience of the First Avant-garde, including the Lublin group centred around Józef Czechowicz, the Vilnius group centred around Czesław Miłosz, and the journal *Żagary* [The Brushwood].

Traditionally, interwar poetry is represented as an equilateral triangle consisting of Young Poland, Skamander, and Avant-garde, each forming one side. Regardless of how early twentieth-century lyric poetry is examined, it is viewed through the poetics typical of one of these movements, recognizable among the *literati* of both the interwar and post-Second World War period. While the poetics of Young Poland were seen as the source of innovative tendencies that culminated in the poetic models of Skamander and Avant-garde, Skamander itself was considered a dissenter from Poland's poetic heritage. On the other hand, the poets of the Avant-garde movement saw themselves as debunkers of the myths established both by Young Poland and Skamander, the latter seen as Young Poland's posthumous 'child.'[1] This configuration, established and

1 See Żółkiewski, 1979; Kwiatkowski, 1979; Przybylski, Rymkiewicz, Zawolska, 1991; Trznadel & Zaworska, 1993.

maintained by the participants in the Polish artistic culture of the 1920s[2] and the 1930s,[3] was accepted in its entirety by academics after the Second World War.[4] However, this configuration also has its shortcomings: like a 'tall tree' in Leopold Staff's poem, it casts a long shadow over the metaphorical 'meadow' below. The 'meadow' represents the interwar women's poetry which lives its secret life, unseen and unheard, amidst the figurative tall trees of Young Poland, Skamander, and Avant-garde.

Two types of sources have inspired me to research 'the secret life' of Polish women's poetry from 1918–1939. The first one is Virginia Woolf's extended essay *A Room of One's Own* (1929/2007), in which she explores why "no woman wrote a word of that extraordinary literature when every other man, it seemed, was capable of song or sonnet" (p. 44). To answer this question, Woolf brings to life Judith, Shakespeare's hypothetical sister, who is as talented, willing to learn, and curious as Shakespeare himself. By reconstructing Judith's biography, Woolf concludes that a "highly gifted girl who had tried to use her gift for poetry would have been so thwarted and hindered by other people, so tortured and pulled asunder by her own contrary instincts, that she must have lost her health and sanity to a certainty" (p. 53). In contrast, Woolf argues that the artist's mind must be "incandescent, unimpeded" (p. 61) so as to "fire […] out […] and consume […] [a]ll desire to protest, to preach, to proclaim an injury, to pay off a score, to make the world the witness of some hardship or grievance" (p. 61). The state of mind that allowed Shakespeare's "poetry flow […] from him free" (p. 61) was, therefore, unattainable for women long after the Renaissance, even though society later became more accepting of the literary work by "great ladies" (p. 68) who took advantage of their "comparative freedom and comfort to publish something with [their] name to it" (p. 62).

2 See e.g. Stur, 1921; Baczyński, 1924; Janowski, 1926; Drobner, 1920; Lorentowicz, 1925; Broniewski, 1928; Miller, 1928; Wygodzki, 1928; Herlaine, 1926; Przyboś, 1929.

3 See e.g. Irzykowski, 1934; Hulka-Laskowski, 1931; Przyboś, 1931; Pomirowski, 1932; Czuchnowski, 1933; Sławińska, 1934; Terlecki, 1934; Zgorzelski, 1934; Czachowski, 1935; Kott, 1935; Putrament, 1936; Przyboś, 1938; Kamiński, 1938; Czernik, 1939; Fryde, 1939; Lichański, 1939, Sebyła, 1939.

4 See e.g. Maciąg, 1949; Wyka, 1959; Matuszewski & Pollak, 1961; Zaworska, 1963; Zawodziński, 1964; Szymański, 1967; Maciejewska, 1968; A. Lam, 1969; Wawrzykowska-Wierciochowa, 1970; Kwiatkowski, 1973; Szymański, 1973; Balcerzan, 1974.

Woolf lays out a feminist sociology of literary life by gathering the "mass of information" (1929/2007, p. 48) on Shakespeare's sister: "at what age did she marry; how many children had she as a rule; what was her house like, had she a room to herself; did she do the cooking; would she be likely to have a servant? All these facts lie somewhere, presumably, in parish registers and account books" (p. 48); one can "catch […] a glimpse of them in the lives of the great, whisking away into the back ground" (p. 49). Following Woolf's lead, I believe it is worthwhile to revisit source materials and piecemeal works on Polish women writers from the early twentieth century, to reassess their biographies or the biographies of their significant others, and to reconsider the circumstances of their literary debuts and their functioning in literary circles.

My second incentive for studying Polish women poets of the interwar period came from the works of Polish male and female researchers on the subject. One such work is *Poezja polska okresu międzywojennego* [The Polish poetry of the interwar period], an anthology of poems published as part of the *Biblioteka Narodowa* [National Library] series, with an introduction by Michał Głowiński and Janusz Sławiński (1987). Another important study is *Pisarki polskie od średniowiecza do współczesności* [The Polish women writers from the Middle Ages to modern times], a companion to Polish women's poetry, compiled by Grażyna Borkowska, Małgorzata Czermińska, and Ursula Phillips (2000). Last but not least, a significant source of inspiration for this book is a set of biographical entries, *Wielkopolski alfabet pisarek* [The alphabet of women writers from Great Poland], edited by Ewa Kraskowska and Lucyna Marzec (2012).

I agree with G. Borkowska, Czermińska, and Phillips when they dismiss the frequently asked questions regarding the gender of art, whether the division into 'women's literature' versus 'men's literature' is an ideological issue or a current intellectual trend, and whether the traditional division between the 'good' and 'bad' literature suffices. The scholars provide three arguments for using the criterion of gender in literature:

> For one, we believe that there is only general knowledge about a limited number of our 'writer heroines'. Secondly, we are convinced that even those often overlooked artists have 'a room of their own' in the 'house' of Polish literary history and are interesting as writers, individuals, and women. Thirdly, we share the view that, when seen from a female perspective, Polish literature takes on a new historical dimension – one that revolves not so much around autobiography or self-expression, but rather around the tension between the private and the public, the

> challenging intersection of the female 'I' with the world, the complex boundaries of personal freedom, the possibilities of comprehension and creativity, and the right to happiness (Borkowska, Czermińska, Philips, 2000, p. 6).[5]

I also agree with Kraskowska's concept of the "literary margins" as those which resist "arbitrary categorisations of literary works as better or worse, and less or more significant" (2012b, p. 8). This perspective allows to include various forms of women's writing, such as *belles-lettres*, journalism, life writing, or criticism: "[i]t often happens that the most interesting experiences from a specific individual's collective and temporal biography are revealed in these marginalised texts – ones which were ousted from history or never aspired to print, let alone canonicity" (Kraskowska, 2012b, p. 8).

Premises. This book takes a contemporary feminist perspective that recognises the lingering existence of white spots on the map of literary history. Nevertheless, this recovery of the long-forgotten women writers and their works need not result in a discovery of new literary worlds or unremembered female geniuses, or in the construction of a new literary canon that would compete with the current one, which are the aims of the 1970s feminist scholarship. Instead, this book aligns with German Ritz's postulate of "tracing the lost female presences and giving them a voice, at the same time filling in the gaps in our historical knowledge and composing anew a cultural canon that embraces not one gender but two" (Ritz, 2002, p. 10).

The contemporary Polish writer and scholar Inga Iwasiów highly values the theoretical, methodological, and ideological implications of including in literary history textbooks the "names of woman writers who, from the perspective of 'canon A', are seen as secondary" (2004, p. 43). She considers it noteworthy to remember that "due to her specific life story, Shakespeare's sister had no opportunity to become a female Shakespeare" (p. 43). Iwasiów believes that this perspective may counterbalance feminist critics' "attempts to reclaim the past" (p. 43):

5 All excerpts from primary and secondary sources that do not have a published English version are translated into English by the book's translator.

> The absence of evidence of forgotten female geniuses in literary history can be […] interpreted in two ways. Firstly, it serves as proof of the historical marginalization of women. Secondly, it is a reproduction of the criteria of canon construction and the literary conventions and tastes that marginalised women writers. If we are unable to find guidance from our sisters of the past (who were oftentimes victims of social and symbolic oppression and in need of our support), the fact that they are considered second-rate may in itself serve as our critical motivation (Iwasiów, 2004, p. 43).

Therefore, the recovery of non-canonical women writers aims to expand our understanding of the social origins of literature, the mechanisms of literary life, the dynamics of reception and the processes of canonisation.[6] It examines how women writing poetry functioned within the poetic community and emphasises the expectations of both professional and non-professional poetry readers during a specific literary period. Such a study also examines the significance, in their own time, of literary phenomena that contemporary scholarship considers to be secondary and marginal. These phenomena form a poetic backdrop against which gifted and recognised women poets, such as Kazimiera Iłłakowiczówna, Maria Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska, and Zuzanna Ginczanka, were able to shine. Thus, my research aligns with the socio-cultural approach to literature described by scholar Janusz Sławiński in the 1970s (1977, pp. 11–16),[7] as delineated by Tomasz Kunz today:

> The cultural sociology of literature should not primarily focus on phenomenologically defined literary texts. Instead, it should consider how these texts are read, and look at the various conditions (institutional, political, material etc.) in which they circulate, exchange, negotiate, and recontextualise their meanings. A literary text ought to be perceived as a subject that is construed through the act of reading, with the use of reading strategies that are conventionalised and accepted by an interpretational community. The effectiveness and validity of these strategies should be constantly

6 These issues have been explored in relation to twentieth-century poetry by Anna Legeżyńska (2009).

7 Drawing on Sławiński's work (1977), I situate my own research on women poets in the interwar period within the framework of the stages he identifies as "the circuit of literary communication: 1 – creator (writer), 2 – dispatcher, 3 – intermediary, 4 – receiver" (Sławiński, 1977, p. 11).

> tested by participants in such a community, who can choose to adopt or reject the proposed reading strategies and their ideological or axiological meanings.
>
> In other words, the cultural sociology of literature moves away from systemic thinking and the search for structural determinants, 'objective' tendencies, general laws and universal models. Instead, it concentrates on conducting detailed, transdisciplinary analyses of individual cases. It treats literary texts as 'centres' or 'hubs' that have the ability to 'mobilise resources', attracting, aggregating and linking various beings into one complex textual network or constellation (Kunz, 2012, pp. 434–435).

Accordingly, my research is focused not only on the reception but also on the perception of a literary text as an intermediary of processes and relationships between institutions, economic actors, material and symbolic capital, human communities and knowledge institutions, such as literary academies, festivals, printing houses and literary salons, and social relations between creators, critics, and consumers of culture.

Sources. Resources for this project include data collected in the following sources: *Polski słownik biograficzny* [Polish Biographical Dictionary] (1935–2024), *Słownik współczesnych pisarzy polskich* [A Dictionary of contemporary Polish poets] (1963–1966), and *Współcześni polscy pisarze i badacze literatury* [Contemporary Polish writers and researchers of literature], as well as encyclopaedic guides such as *Literatura polska* [Polish literature] (1984–1985) and *Literatura polska XX wieku* [Polish literature of the twentieth century] (2000). Additionally, the social and literary anthologies and periodicals of the interwar period, such as *Rocznik Literacki* [Literary Yearly], dated for the years 1932–1938, as well as *Wiadomości Literackie*, *Skamander*, *Czartak* [The Hut], *Kwadryga* [The Quadriga], *Dźwignia* [The Lever], *Linia* [The Line], etc., also served as a source of biographical notes and texts. The collected material consists of 50 women poets and 150 volumes of poetry. Writing for *Rocznik Literacki* in the 1930s, literary critic Karol Wiktor Zawodziński informed readers that about 100 volumes of poetry were published annually in Poland, with approximately 10% of them being collections by women. This means that the material I have selected, consisting of women's creative work, is representative of the period. In his synthesis of poetic work for 1932, Zawodziński wrote, "a list, albeit incomplete, includes almost a hundred

volumes pf poetry" (Zawodziński, 1933, p. 26). In the following year, he explained the reasons for the incompleteness:

> In line with its current mass production, the release of poetry volumes in 1933 matched the quantity of the previous year. I am aware of a hundred similar publications, but when it comes to poetry, one can never be certain. Modest poets often publish their volumes in the obscure corners of the world, and hardly consider promoting them. Booksellers, in turn, accept money from enthusiasts of the Muses to publish their works, only to keep them stored in the basement – I encountered such a dishonest act last year. Owing to the specific circumstances in which I am writing this report, some of the poetry in question remains inaccessible to me, including the works I am deeply interested in (Zawodziński, 1934, p. 16).

I am therefore interested in those poets who published at least one volume of poetry. There are two main reasons for this choice. First, my review of interwar periodicals has revealed that there were more women who 'composed rhymes' (as there were men), even if they only published poems in daily newspapers, magazines, and socio-cultural weeklies, without ever releasing a poetry book. Including all of them in my research would prolong the work on this book and expand the topics I want to address, which, in my opinion, deserve a separate publication and the use of different research methods and tools. Secondly, publishing a poetry collection positions the author differently in the literary field and in literary studies compared to just publishing individual poems in the press. When an author is published, they become part of a community of professional writers, critics, and researchers who observe and comment on each other's work not only in newspapers or weeklies but also in academic and professional journals, dictionaries, bibliographies, and scholarly studies. This way, the authors become more 'visible' to both their contemporaries and to posterity, although this is not always the case. Publishing separate volumes of poetry does not necessarily lead to popularity among professional and non-professional readers (Ladorucki, 2002, pp. 173–188).

Although the aforementioned sources of information about female poets active in the years 1918–1939 are academically respected and trustworthy, they do not document the entirety of interwar poetic production. One notable exception is the *Bibliographical Card Index of the Polish 19th and 20th Century Journals*, located at the Institute of Literary Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw (IBL PAN). This is not surprising. While the creators of

bibliographies, dictionaries, and encyclopaedias strive to encompass everything that is published, they are aware of the vast amount of material that escapes them. We encounter such a situation in the case of auxiliary sciences of the history of literature of the interwar period, which have not yet fully documented the literary production, especially of the 1920s. Following the guidance of the authors of the aforementioned compendiums, I have compiled a list of female poets and their volumes, but during this work, I have repeatedly verified the facts provided by them. I have come to realise the excellent – and, at the same time, imperfect – nature of library catalogues as tools, especially the catalogues of the Polish National Library (PBN) where, theoretically, 'everything' should be available. In practice, 'everything' indeed is available there, yet access to this 'everything' is hindered, sometimes even impossible, because the card catalogues – both subject and alphabetical – are usually not interconnected. Card catalogues typically have their own history, whereas digital ones are still far from complete. Browsing through catalogues, especially their oldest parts, and understanding the process of their growth and transformations, is in itself a fascinating adventure filled with extraordinary discoveries and dramatic disappointments, worthy of being described in a separate work.

For the purposes of this study, there is a significant conclusion drawn from my browsing through library catalogues: the list of names of interwar female poets and their poetry volumes included in this book cannot be considered complete and final. However, this list should be regarded as a starting point for further research.

Book Structure. The book is divided into seven chapters, each of which – although referring to each other – can be read as a separate exploration of the following topics: the history of women's literature, the social and political context of women's literature in the early decades of the twentieth century, the role of female poets in anthologies of war poetry, and the interwar literary scene.

This story of women writing poetry in the first half of the twentieth century was written with two types of readers in mind. The book is ultimately of a scholarly nature, as evidenced by the welter of references and footnotes that provide bibliographic information and explanations for academic researchers. However, I also aim to satisfy non-professional readers who have an interest in interwar culture. To meet their expectations, I avoid using specialised

terminology whenever possible and craft the narrative to resemble more of a literary tale than a scholarly monograph.

The catalogues and bibliographies included in the book are not comprehensive, as I mentioned earlier. Therefore, I suggest treating them as a starting point for further independent research, rather than a definite source.

***

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Literature by Women – Women's Literature

Introduction. The concept of 'women's literature' has a long and complex history, encompassing two distinct narratives, that of women and that of literature, and it involves historically versatile notions of womanhood and literariness. The term 'women's literature' appeared in Polish literary studies in the early twentieth century, reached its peak in the interwar years, and then fell out of scholarly and critical focus after the Second World War. However, since 1989, there has been a resurgence of interest in women's literature among writers, researchers, critics, and readers of literature.

In simple terms, the phrase 'women's literature' has been used since ancient times until the eighteenth century to refer to all texts written by women, even if they were not artistic. The term highlighted the low social status of women, who historically gained access to education and became literate later than men. Even if some of them learned to read and write, women were often not able to write creatively due to their educational shortcomings, or attempted to do so by imitating men. 'Women's literature' has therefore for a long time been perceived as somewhat of an oxymoron, a juxtaposition of two orders that, as it was believed, should not be combined as they have nothing in common. Implicitly, then, the term evokes an astonished observation that there are women who create literature, although, theoretically, such women should not exist.

It was only during the Enlightenment, after three European revolutions in readership and when women's writing was no longer a rare occurrence, that the term 'women's literature' gained momentum. This term was based on the assumption that women write differently from men and that 'femininity' is an inherent part of their creativity. Literary critics of the Age of Reason, predominantly men – who prevailed in the literary criticism concerning women's writing until the late nineteenth century – thus commenced cataloguing the qualities of 'feminine' literary texts, topics, and genres, that is, texts where 'femininity' manifests itself the most clearly. It is also in the eighteenth century when prose started to be associated with 'women's writing.' In the centuries to follow, it is the novel, then, that became identified with women's literature. From

the late nineteenth century till the mid-twentieth century, and particularly in the interwar period, the notion of 'women's literature' referred to literary texts written by women that were categorised among three types of novels, namely, the novel of manners, the popular novel, and the novel of persuasion. In actuality, behind those genres there were phenomena and processes that were excluded from the high modernist canon: literary realism, 'non-artistic' circulation, and feminist ideology.

'Woman's nature.' The research conducted by the Polish women scholars such as Lidia Winniczuk (1973), Iza Bieżuńska-Małowist (1993), Maria Bogucka (1998, 2005) or Hanna Dziechcińska (2001) has demonstrated that from antiquity until the eighteenth century, both in Europe and in Poland, the definition of female 'nature' (de Beauvoir, 1049/2011; Janion, 1996; Frevert, 1997) and its 'taming' (Banaszkiewicz, 1997) were the main focus of theological, philosophical and scientific discourses, and in the nineteenth century – also of law and medicine. Philosophers, scientists, and priests agreed that female 'nature' was determined by its theological origins, namely, the sin of disobedience (Pandora and Eve), as well as its biological characteristic – a body suitable for impregnation, pregnancy, childbirth, and nurturing offspring. They were therefore insistent that female 'nature' consisted of physical, intellectual and moral weaknesses, and thus women had to answer to men physically, intellectually, and morally. Thus, a woman was defined either as a mother, wife, mistress of the house, and God's servant, or a jezebel; her duties included looking after her husband, family and household, possibly prayer or providing entertainment, while her spaces were limited to a home, a monastery, or a brothel. Even though in each century there were women whose talents, skills, and behaviours disproved the general assumptions of female 'weakness', equated with 'inferiority', yet until as late as the eighteenth century, most of these extraordinary women rulers, artists, philosophers, doctors, or writers were considered an exception to the rule. Of course, these considerations should be nuanced and developed in relation to each historical period.[1]

1 Broadening the perspective to include not just literary fiction, but all writing by women allows us to deepen our understanding the status of women in the past. When it comes

Women's artistic and literary work did not conform to this notion of 'female nature.' According to the European philosophical tradition, originating from Plato and Aristotle, only a man was 'naturally' predisposed to artistic creativity. In his study on women creators from antiquity to the late Middle Ages, Jerzy Strzelczyk (2007) states that: "women's intellectual and literary work existed in defiance of male expectations; once revealed, women writers nevertheless had to find justification for their deviation from societal norms" (pp. 9–10).

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to antiquity, it is important to acknowledge four facts that are often oversimplified in popular discussions on women's literature. Lidia Winniczuk in her introduction to an anthology of ancient texts about women, emphasises that "one cannot generalise about women in Ancient Greece or the Graeco-Roman era, as women's lives differed in the eighth century B.C., in the fifth century B.C. and in later periods. It is also important to consider whether we are looking at a woman living in Athens or in Sparta, the Ionian Islands or cities. The role and situation of women varied, depending on their political, social, and economic circumstances, as well as foreign influences" (1973, p. 5). Historian Jerzy Strzelczyk discusses three other facts regarding the situation of women in the past. The first fact challenges the notion that women and lower social classes were universally illiterate. He argues that "elementary literacy in certain areas of the ancient and medieval world was a common skill, not only among the elites, such as royal or aristocratic courts and monasteries" (Strzelczyk, 2007, pp. 12–13). The second fact highlighted by Strzelczyk debunks the misconception that democracy was inherently favourable for the emancipation of women and marginalised social groups. In fact, "in the supposed golden age of Athenian democracy (from late fifth till sixth century B.C.), women's role and position were surprisingly marginal. […] Women (and slaves) were practically excluded from this democratic system" (Strzelczyk, 2007, p. 18). It was actually in *poleis*, or city-states, which did not emulate the Athenian system, that women's role in society was more prominent, leading to a stronger intellectual and artistic heritage. Finally, Strzelczyk argues that the absence of women in culture and literature does imply their lack of value in the private sphere. On the contrary, until the rise of capitalist economy in the eighteenth century, a 'household' encompassed "not only a family in the strict sense of the word, but also the generation of grandparents, other relatives ('residents'), and male and female slaves and servants. Therefore, women who managed households had to be involved in a wide range of activities. This was the case in times of natural economy, when many domestic tasks were not yet taken over by specialised institutions and a modern economy of goods" (Strzelczyk, 2007, p. 21).

Joanna Partyka in her book on the Old Polish model of a 'schooled wife' also makes a similar observation. The scholar writes about the social resistance that women writers and their work had to overcome:

> It seems that, throughout ages, the difference between 'male' and the 'female' writing was the fact that women's writing provoked surprise and resistance, even if it was not particularly exceptional. Still, it was seen as a form of rebellion against accepted norms. Regardless of her motivation, a woman writer was seen as going against her traditional roles of a mother, wife and a homemaker – or at least this is how the society looked upon non-religious female authors. Those women who wrote for the Glory of God, even outside the monastery, in the confines of the domestic space, were treated with silent acquiescence, if not with outright benevolence (Partyka, 2004, p. 93).

Those women who did decide to break societal norms, most frequently cite one of the three motivations that since antiquity have been associated with the gendered trope of affected modesty (Curtius, 1953/2013, pp. 83–85). These motivations included the desire to preserve and pass on the teachings of their masters (found in the writings created under the influence of philosophical schools and religious communities or orders); meeting the demands of close acquaintances or superiors, such as confessors, spiritual leaders, prioresses, or heavenly emissaries, in order to relate divine revelations (typical for the writings of female mystics); and, finally, the aspiration to better fulfil women's 'natural' parental, pedagogical, and custodial duties (to be seen in pedagogical, medical, and horticultural writings, and in cookbooks). These three justifications for writing proved to be exceptionally enduring: until the late nineteenth century, female writers often acknowledged not only the shortcomings of their education and the resulting unfamiliarity with literary conventions or their ineffective use, but also compliance with individuals considered more competent and educated, as well as pressure from family and friends.

However, the trope of affected modesty was not present in every text written by a woman. There are some interesting examples of a conscious rejection of this convention, either due to the limitations of women writers' rhetorical education, or because of their strong personalities. One such example is *Transakcyja albo opisanie całego życia jednej sieroty* [Transaction, or the Whole Life-Story of an Orphan] (1685), a versed autobiography of the first known Polish poetess, Anna Stanisławska (*primo voto* Warszycka, *secundo voto* Oleśnicka, *tertio voto*

Zbąska; 1651/1654-1700-/1701). Her brief introduction, entitled "To the Reader," concludes as follows:

Jeśli zaś książka nie do gustu twego,
Ta jest jej wada, że białogłowskiego
Konceptu, a zaś sama rzecz pisana.
To niech nie będzie od ciebie czytana

(Stanisławska, 1685/1935, p. 1).[2]

Favourable conditions for women's writing. For a woman to be creative at all, a combination of intellectually and artistically stimulating circumstances needed to arise. In antique and medieval societies, women were excluded from those forms of social and cultural life that would enable creating strong bonds for emotional, social and financial support in adulthood. As a result, female creativity had to develop on the margins of mainstream culture, in silence and solitude. For instance, Iza Bieżuńska-Małowist writes that although "women of antiquity were not as handicapped as some older and new research suggests" (1993, p. 240), they were still unable to participate in agons, that is, "all sorts of poetic, singing, and sports competitions, such as the Olympic, Nemean or Delphic games" (Bieżuńska-Małowist, 1993, p. 240), which were pivotal for that culture. Prohibited from taking part in such forms of cultural life as theatrical plays, gymnasium education, or visits to the bathhouse, women could – although to a limited degree – enjoy getting involved in symposia and religious cults (Lengauer, 1994, pp. 36–39). It is not surprising, then, that when it comes to cultural production, women most often focused on literature and philosophy (Bieżuńska-Małowist, 1993, pp. 243, 256). On his part, Jerzy Strzelczyk adds that in the situation when women were forced to take the backseat in education, the appearance of gifted females was most probable "in those fields which were less depended on formal schooling, and more on an individual study, preferably, of course, under some enlightened supervision. Philosophy was such a field – more

2 "If, then, this book does not suit your taste / it is because it has been begotten / in a woman's mind. And the thing is written / if it disappoints, do not start the reading."

common sense than erudite" (Strzelczyk, 2007, p. 24). Therefore, in antiquity the majority of women involved in creating culture were poetesses and philosophers.

Among Polish scholars, Lidia Winniczuk (1956) and Maria Dzielska (1993) have researched the question of women poets and philosophers of ancient times. They point out that, in addition to working on the fringes of the mainstream culture and engaging in those arts and genres that were less formalised or disregarded by normative poetics, women throughout history have been able to express their creativity in another context. They have often found opportunities for creative realization in groups or intellectual environments that fostered intellectual activity in general, usually under a guidance of a creative man. Manifold examples are at hand: women philosophers clustered around one male mentor with whom they shared an intellectual, social or familial bond, or they were found in women's communities resembling girls' finishing schools. Creative women throughout history also included female mystics who corresponded with each other, *les femmes savants* in the courts of Renaissance rulers, and bluestockings – animators of artistic and literary gatherings, known as 'salons,' during the Enlightenment, and so on.

The status of antique women poets summarised by Iza Bieżuńska-Małowist can also be applied to all creative women in the past. She adds another factor to the aforementioned conditions of women's creativity, that is, social background, or, to be more specific, "being well-bred" and enjoying the "protection" of the men in one's family who are engaged in the same profession:

> [Women poets] came from respectable and apparently affluent civil houses dispersed all over Greek city-states, [….] [and] from the regions occupied by Greek tribes where women had a higher social standing. It is worth noting that most women poets lived during the archaic, early classic, or Hellenic periods. The world of developed classical *poleis* – these communities of male citizens – must have been unwelcoming for women writers (Bieżuńska-Małowist, 1993, p. 255).
>
> It is interesting to observe that, in addition to poetesses, also other professional women – such as painters, philosophers, and doctors mentioned in inscriptions, etc. – were often daughters, wives, or sisters of men who excelled in the same fields (Bieżuńska-Małowist, 1993, p. 260).

Literary criticism of women's writing. Even when a woman was able to create literature, philosophy or art in favourable conditions, with the support of her family or community, she and her work did not escape criticism. One notable

example is the Greek poetess Sappho, born in the late seventh century B.C. in Mytilene on the island of Lesbos, whose name and location has been associated with four key ways in which European culture has devalued women writers. The first method entails the innuendo of 'sapphic' or 'lesbian' relationships; the second – mockery of female ugliness. Both are evident, for instance, in a biographical note from the turn of the second and third century A.D., several hundred years after Sappho's death. In her book, Alicja Szastyńska-Siemion quotes this note, which ends with the following statement: "some accuse Sappho of her unnatural behaviour and loving women. Her looks were nothing special: she was unattractive, dark-skinned, and short" (qtd. in Szastyńska-Siemion, 1993, p. 40).[3] While the truth of Sappho's intimate life remains elusive[4], the idea itself of treating a woman as an object of desire in a culture where only a man could be desired, and an appearance that deviated from the norm of female beauty, were both considered fundamental flaws, both physically and spiritually.[5]

The third and fourth ways of depreciating the woman writer included incorporating into her biography accusations of promiscuity and portraying her as a victim of unrequited love for a man. Consequently, Sappho was rumoured to have been the lover of Alcaeus, Anacreon, Archilochus, and Hipponax, and it is believed that she committed suicide by jumping off the Leucadian cliffs after Phaon had rejected her. All four methods of discrediting the poetess are culturally rooted in an unspoken conviction that a woman's creativity springs

3 "We need to bear in mind that the Greek ideal of beauty consisted of tallness, golden hair, and dark eyes. We do not really know whether Sappho truly deviated from this ideal; it might be that the posterity deprived her of a pleasant appearance so that it would not overshadow her poetry" (Szastyńska-Siemion, 1993, p. 41).

4 According to Henri-Irénée Marrou, girls' finishing schools in Mitylene – including those run by Sappho – could be one solution to the exclusion of women from social life. The in/famous 'sapphic' aspect of these schools, however, was nothing scandalous, as ancient (Greek) *paideia* believed that upbringing "is lit up by a blaze of passion" (Marrou, 1948/1956, p. 33) – yet, such desire was perceived as 'natural' in the socialization of boys, but 'unnatural' in the socialization of girls (Marrou, 1948/1956, pp. 33–35). See also Dover, 1978/2016.

5 See *Plato's Symposium*, 2001; Sinko, 1923; Jaeger, 1939/1946; Foucault, 1986; Dover, 1978/2016.

from her body. Accordingly, had Sappho been heterosexual and attractive, she would have married, had children, regulated her libido, and thus, would not have had the inclination, audacity, or temptation to engage in writing. In that view, a woman's intellectual and creative pursuits are either the effect of her bodily abnormalities, or an error of nature. The fourth and final objection regarding female creativity in antiquity concerned women's (lack of) command of the rules of writing. However, this objection did not apply to Sappho, as her poetic mastery was impeccable.[6]

Numerous sources are available on the diverse methods by which women creators have been deprecated in European culture. Books by Małgorzata Borkowska (1996, 2002), Joanna Partyka (2004), Karolina Tragosz (1997, 2002), Jerzy Strzelczyk (2009), and a series of studies edited by Krystyna Stasiewicz (1998) serve as examples of this extensive discussion (Frankowska-Terlecka & Giermak-Zielińska, 1997, pp. 36–39; Bogucka, 1998, pp. 114–152; Czarnecka, 2004, pp. 17–29).

This *status quo ante* was maintained as *status quo bias* long after the grand discourse on women had been initiated. Originating in the fourteenth century with the Renaissance ideals, this discourse continued in the sixteenth century and persisted in both the misogynistic and pro-women's literature of the subsequent eras. Until the Enlightenment, the European mainstream reflection on women was dominated by deliberations about their nature and why they could not and should not engage in intellectual and artistic creation, including literature.

Written works and literature, a writing woman and a woman writer. In the previous sections of this chapter, I refer to creative women, writing women, intellectually and artistically active women, and refrain from using the term a 'woman writer.' This section, therefore, will discuss the terminology pertaining to the

6 Szastyńska-Siemion states that "[i]n the later part of the classical Athens era, Sappho, the great Aeolian, became a comedic figure. Comedy writers, while showing respect for her literary work, focused on her biography to entertain the ancient theatre audience. This led to the creation of a series of damaging 'legends' about Sappho that verged on slander. Her profound engagement in love and other emotional matters became a source of amusement for many" (1993, pp. 112–113). See also Niżyńska, 1993.

concepts of the artist, creative work, literature, and authorship. It is important to note that these terms have evolved through different epochs, and the meaning we currently assign to them only emerged in the nineteenth century.[7] Until this time, the reflection on the relationship between art and craft, visual arts and literature, poetry, prose, and drama, writing and sound, and literature and *belles-lettres,* etc., had a significant influence on the perception of creative work, literariness, and the art of writing. Simply put, it was not until the eighteenth century in Europe, and even later in Poland, that modern concepts of written works and *belles-lettres* began to take shape. Prior to this, all written works related to any aspect of social life – literary fiction, treatises, didactic treaties, and journalism – were understood as literature. On the other hand, what we now call *belles-lettres*, that is, fine writing, was previously used in reference to poetry. Furthermore, lyric poetry, which is now considered a fully-fledged literary form, was once regarded as mere verse.

The term *belles-lettres* emerged in analogy to the term *beaux arts*. Aesthetically, this term was linked to the recognition that the art of the word differs from other arts and sciences, although it does share some common elements with them. Yet, while in the Enlightenment, *belles-lettres* included the types and genres that were standardised by classic and classicist poetics, in the nineteenth century the term also encompassed previously uncodified genres such as the novel and the short story.

The question of women's literature, writing women, and their heritage is complicated by certain 'non-literary' issues. One of these issues is the incompleteness of preserved ancient, medieval, and modern sources, such as papyrus scrolls, clay and wooden tablets, birch bark, headstones, parchment codices, and paper documentation – all prone to destruction over time, whether by nature or by human activity, conscious or unconscious. Another factor is the ratio of preserved copies to original works, unpreserved and often reinvented by subsequent copyists and compilers. We must also take into account the ancient and medieval principle of anonymity that was obligatory for a large part of

7 See e.g. Tatarkiewicz, 1975, 2009; Golka, 1995; Markiewicz, 1980; Sinko, 1951; Sarnowska-Temeriusz, Kostkiewiczowa, 1990; Kowalczykowa, 1975; Kulczycka-Saloni, 1985; Podraza-Kwiatkowska, 2000.

religious works, as well as the literary conventions of impersonating historical and fictional characters. It is also important to consider the development of literacy, including both loud and silent reading, and the evolution of more intimate reading practices. The decline of court, princely or church patronage, and the gradual inclusion of the bourgeoisie in the consumption of culture, as well as the relationship between the high and mass culture and the emergence of modern print media and the novel, have all had an impact as well. These issues and processes, overlapping, effected in the professionalization of writing. Therefore, in the nineteenth century, as writing literature became an intellectual profession for men, the woman 'dabbling in writing' – that is, an amateur – has also been replaced by a professional woman writer.

Woman writer in the Middle Ages. The aforementioned complications and the inadequacy of contemporary theoretical concepts or common sense approaches to pre-modern literature are emphasised by Polish scholars Jerzy Łanowski and Marek Starowieyski (1996) in their coursebook on the history of Greek literature, as well as by Magdalena Sakowska (2009) in her commentary on the dictionary of medieval women writers. In their introduction, Łanowski and Starowieyski mention the extensive damage suffered by ancient literature due to Christian censorship and numerous military conflicts, which reduced its overall output to a "mere one per mile of literary production":

> The way manuscripts were transmitted and the outlook on literary property, mistakes, and forgeries were very different from our contemporary approach. As a result, fake literary works were oftentimes attributed to writers who did not actually author them, and texts were intentionally or accidentally redacted, either shortened or extended. The chronology of literature and its creators is complex, uncertain, and at times, hypothetical. The Greeks developed the science of philology as late as the third century B.C., more than five hundred years after the onset of literary production. Philology, the oldest of all sciences, has been developing for over two thousand years, constantly improving its methods and achieving impressive scholarly results. However, these findings are often only probable, and rarely completely certain regarding issues such as dating, the credibility of the text, or the mutual relationship between chronologically associated literary works (Łanowski & Starowieyski, 1996, p. 15).

What is highlighted by the above excerpt are the difficulties in reconstructing pre-modern (here: antique) literature. It also demonstrates the challenges in assessing the degree to which our perspective on pre-modern literature aligns with historical reality. By extension, recreating the state of women's creative work in pre-modern culture is even more problematic. It is worthwhile to look at this situation from the point of view of medieval women writers. In her commentary, Magdalena Sakowska writes:

> At present, we can confidently and interchangeably use the terms 'female author' and 'woman writer' to refer to a person who writes her own ideas. Contrary to that, in the Middle Ages both women and men writers worked in tandems, with one person dictating the text (and sometimes putting it down on a special slate), while the other wrote it down. The authorship of the latter person is rarely considered for male authors; however, women's contributions were often downplayed, and the authorship of the male member of the tandem was often assumed, regardless of the actual division of work.
>
> Woman mystics are a good example of this phenomenon, such as Frances of Rome, a fifteenth-century woman author, who shared her visions with many people in her circle. However, since her confessor edited her revelations, she has not been recognised as their author. […] The same situation occurred for female poets. In many regions, such as Provençe, Ireland, Wales, and Scandinavia, poets did not write their poems down. Instead, others memorised their works, and paid attention to the name of the author when reciting the poem. As a result, poetry circulated orally for a long time. Therefore, women poets who created their work in this way cannot be considered 'writers'; they were 'authors.' The term 'woman writer' would refer to someone who compiled a songbook from memory. For example, if this dictionary were a dictionary of women writers, the entry 'Saint Cecilia' would be replaced by 'Angelica of Bologna' because she translated Cecilia's memories into Latin and set them down. However, my intention in writing this dictionary was to immortalise the women who created literary works rather than those who preserved them by writing them down (Sakowska, 2009, pp. 7–8).

In order to incorporate women authors who lived in Europe and Byzantium from the early sixth to the early sixteenth century into her dictionary, Sakowska had to clarify her selection criteria. This demonstrates the diversity of medieval women's writing. Consequently, the dictionary in question includes women authors "whose works have survived until our times in at least a large fragment, […] whose work can be considered to a degree original as it is neither a literary

translation, nor a barely revised adaptation of another work, […] whose names, nicknames or initials we know," and those "whose authorship has not yet been convincingly undermined […] even if scholars are still discussing it" (Sakowska, 2009, p. 8). On the other hand, the dictionary does not contain the names of women authors of "letters and sets of correspondence as their overall number would undoubtedly exceed the number of women authors included in this work (except for Heloise, whose letters became 'literary' right away, and Laura Cereta, who approached her own correspondence as a work of literature)" (Sakowska, 2009, p. 9). Neither does the dictionary refer to the authors of "medical documentation,[…] [nor] all sorts of utilitarian texts, such as grants, privileges, petitions, last wills, court depositions, ledgers, and others (such as, for example, monastic rules) that were considered non-literary also in the Middle Ages" (Sakowska, 2009, p. 9). Sakowska also excluded "female scriveners, even if they edited an anthology of texts, […] women writers whose fictional status has been proven, […] fictional female characters to whom poetic texts have been ascribed, […] persons whose names are associated with the texts in question but who nevertheless did not contribute to their origination, or those whose texts were extensively edited, most often after the death of their 'authors' " (Sakowska, 2009, p. 9).

The medieval women writers referred to in Sakowska's dictionary consist primarily of woman mystics, hagiographers, and poetesses. Their surviving works demonstrate that, although they used the same literary genres as their male counterparts, women writers approached these genres differently. For instance, male mystics "tended to analyse their visions and use them to construct their mystical treatises," while female mystics "concentrated on meditations that accompanied their visions, and recorded them in the (liturgical) order of their experiences" (Sakowska, 2009, p. 12). Moreover, the female mysticism mainly revolved around "nuptial mysticism, where the union of a woman's soul with the heavenly Bridegroom was described in fiery metaphors (for which women were oftentimes reproached)" (Sakowska, 2009, p. 12). It could also involve Passion mysticism, in which female mystics centred on "co-suffering with Christ and the Virgin Mary" (Sakowska, 2009, p. 12).

Female and male hagiographical works also differed. Male hagiographers focused on the "great holy men at the onset of Christianity" (Sakowska, 2009, p. 12), while female hagiographers wrote "biographies of women they knew personally, such as their teachers or superiors, based on direct observation,

which added a sense of realism to their works" (Sakowska, 2009, p. 12). Concerning women's poetry, secular texts are found to be far less original than religious ones. Seculars poetesses primarily wrote about love, which placed them in the realm of "broadly understood courtly poetry" (Sakowska, 2009, p. 15). Nevertheless, they also wrote funeral genres, panegyrics, satires, and other genres of an ancient origin. Religious women authors, on the other hand, created liturgical, mystical, and allegorical poetry, poems on biblical topics, as well as hymns, meditations, and *lauda*. Overall, works written by medieval female authors focus on shared emotions and often draw from their personal experiences and observations. Additionally, these works attempt to structure events in the convention of romance, while also forsaking Latin as the literary *lingua franca*, thus contributing to the development of vernacular literature.

As a result, Sakowska's dictionary confirms certain patterns well known to scholars studying women's works written in the antiquity. For one, the dictionary endorses that:

> women were more motivated to write when they were surrounded by other […] women writers. They frequently belonged to literary groups that included both men and women, and they sought validation and inspiration from more renowned women authors. Moreover, poetesses would exchange their poetic works with each other and with men, whereas women mystics took interest in the visions of others and mentored their own students (Sakowska, 2009, p. 19).

Another regularity Sakowska's dictionary attests to is the fact that, although there were many women authors in the medieval periods, their written works did not conform to the mainstream genres used by male authors of that time. In addition, both pre-modern copyists and compilers, as well as modern scholars, often attributed anonymous texts created by women to men, or – perhaps because they were authored by women – did not consider them important enough to preserve them for posterity (Sakowska, 2009, p. 20).

Priory as a women's enclave. In the final section dedicated to the topics explored in Sakowska's dictionary, I would like to briefly discuss the priory as a medieval institution that provided a favourable environment for women's intellectual activity. Although the Church theoretically had male supervision over this institution, it can be perceived as a specifically female community. In reality, the priory enjoyed significant administrative and financial independence. The

research conducted by scholars Małgorzata Borkowska (1980, 1996) and Karolina Targosz (2002) allows us to catch a glimpse of secluded this world, which was cloistered off to laymen, and where women were able to engaged in intellectual work. Due to the enclosed character of the priory, the creative work written there did not have an impact on the cultural and literary mainstream, and its mystery appealed to – the primarily erotic – imagination of secular authors. Writing about daily life in Polish priories, M. Borkowska mentions that the Reformation affected their organization, resulting in most cloisters becoming "houses of collective solitude" or "houses in the service of silence" (M. Borkowska, 1996, pp. 93–94). However, above all, the Reformation transformed the priory into a site of literary and intellectual work, which was practiced until the sixteenth century only in few European female congregations.

The late sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries witnessed a significant spiritual and religious transformation following the Council of Trent. This period saw a revival of spirituality and religion both in Europe and in Poland, during which women's monastic literature flourished (M. Borkowska, 1980b, p. 10). Ironically, in this time of geographical and scientific discoveries and of religious and philosophical upheaval, when "Polish asceticism […] and mysticism were declining and misunderstood" (M. Borkowska, 1996, p. 300), monastic literature thrived. The texts produced at the time included pious songs, often anonymous, as well as "contemplations," "accounts of the inner state of the soul," "conferences […] on monastic duties, upcoming holidays, and the order's current problems […] delivered by the prioress or her alternate," as well as congregations' chronicles and libraries (M. Borkowska, 1996, p. 301).

For the purpose of this study, suffice to say that the chronicles of the priories contain records on the era of wars – an era considered to be the golden age of priories – which is distinct from the annals written by men associated with the Church or a specific royal or aristocratic court. When discussing Polish nun-historiographers, Karolina Targosz mentions that due to their lack of formal education, their writing style was deprived of macaronic language and baroque rhetoric. Instead, they employed colloquial language, which, while perhaps cumbersome, was also vibrant. They documented their daily lives in the shadows of grand history, thereby portraying the other side of the coin in comparison to the male narratives of wars, kings, leaders, and bishops (K. Targosz, 2002, p. 12). Diverse representatives of the baronage or nobility, oftentimes sisters or relatives of enlightened women (bluestockings), have frequently served as the

funders, prioresses or residents of numerous priories (K. Targosz, 2015, pp. 448–517). Whether seeking refuge in priories for retreats, mourning, or to escape from the plague, or simply to spend their widowhood or later years there, queens, duchesses, women aristocrats, and noblewomen provided support to these institutions. The aforementioned reasons for joining a priory could be attributed to both spiritual practices and a desire for a respite from 'worldly duties' and 'women's obligations.'

Thus, for centuries, the priory was the only community of women in European culture where spiritual and intellectual concerns could be intertwined. The priory had its own rules, history, and literature, which unfortunately remained unknown to the public then and now. The monastic legacy is still preserved in the form of unpublished manuscripts. This is because in the past, nuns used a literary style that deviated from the dominant style of the time, and contemporary nuns rarely have the expertise to approach these texts from a literary historian's perspective. Additionally, scholars studying the literature of previous eras often face challenges in accessing monastic archives. In the end, the situation of women's literature in pre-modern times is comparable to the situation of literature created historically in priories: both are little known because they are not canonical, and both are not canonical because they are practically unknown.[8]

Equally important for understanding this lack of insight into the impressive literary heritage of priories is the long tradition – culminating in the Enlightenment – of resentment felt both by society and the Church towards female congregations.[9] Laypeople viewed the Church's limitations on a human being as contrary to both Nature and Reason. This is why the criticism of monastic life was often associated with the criticism of the Church as an institution. On the other hand, the Church saw the hierarchy of priories, with their own rules and, oftentimes, independence from male supervision, as evidence of the sin of disobedience that tainted woman's nature and called for male control. One of the most incriminating circumstances pointed out by both secular and Church critics was the alleged sexual depravity that flourished in enclosed

8 See e.g. Lanoux, 2003; Iwasiów & Czerska, 2005; Krukowska, 2010.

9 See e.g. Hinz, 1960; Spink, 1974; Smoleński, 1979; Snopek, 1986.

communities of women. The Sappho legend inherited from antiquity, that is, the image of women copulating with each other, became a permanent fixation for those who participated in such discourse (Bonet, 1997). The conviction that only the male body is desirable and that women, when together, indulge in love rather than creative work, connects the homonormative Greek culture to the heteronormative Christian culture, where the prohibition of same-sex female activity and erotic pleasure goes hand in hand with the ban on female intellectual exploration and fulfilment. Denis Diderot's *The Nun* (1790), an important text of the French Enlightenment, synthesises the abovementioned notion of monastery life as a breeding ground for the acts against Nature and Reason.

The reluctance towards female communities and women's own governance did not diminish in the nineteenth century. During this period, priories situated on Polish soil struggled for survival, grappling against problems with food provision and preservation of their Catholic and Polish identity, while also actively engaging in philanthropic activities. The nineteenth-century literary fiction identifies a retreat in the priory with moral issues rather than contemplation and intellectual pursuits, thus leading to the perception of the priory as an "honorary rubbish bin" (M. Borkowska, 2002, p. 340) for women with few marital prospects. Both laymen and clergy in the nineteenth century became unfamiliar with the concept of priories, and this mindset became more apparent after the Russian revolution of 1905–1907. At that time, in the Russian partition, religion experienced a revival and priests rejoiced at the thought of the aid provided by non-cloistered female congregations. Yet, they failed to comprehend the purpose and significance of enclosed female orders (M. Borkowska, 2002, p. 340).

Women's readership. Returning to the main point, it is important to consider the issue of female readership. In Europe, especially in France, the situation of women writers underwent a significant change during the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries, as their number increased considerably. This was a direct result of the three major 'reading revolutions' that took place between the Renaissance and the Enlightenment: the spread of reading and writing skills, the popularization of silent reading, and the advent of printing. According to Roger Chartier, literacy and the ability to read silently are fundamental for the origination of the modern subject, that is, a human being understood as an

individual rather than a part of a greater whole, one who can independently justify their own thoughts, emotions, and actions, free from the influence of traditional authorities:

> All of these differences in access to the written word affected the process of privatisation in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The ability to read was an essential prerequisite for certain new practices around which people built their private lives. Personal communion with a read or written text liberated the individual from the old mediators, freed him or her from the control of the group, and made it possible to cultivate an inner life. Solitary reading permitted the development of the new forms of piety, which radically altered man's relation to the divine. The ability to read and write enabled people to relate to others and to the authorities in new ways. The greater a person's familiarity with writing, the more emancipated he was from traditional ways of life, which bound the individual tightly to his community and made him dependent on others to read and interpret the divine word and the commandments of his sovereign (Chartier, 1989, pp. 116–117).

Also:

> Silent reading opened new horizons for those who mastered it. It radically transformed intellectual work, which in essence became an intimate activity, a personal confrontation with an ever-growing number of texts, a question of memorization and cross-referencing. It made possible a more personal form of piety, a more private devotion, a relation with the sacred not subject to the discipline ad mediation of the Church. […] Finally, silent, secret, private reading paved the way for previously unthinkable audacities (Chartier, 1989, p. 125).

Reading and writing, silent reading, and the invention of printing led to various new practices, including owning private libraries and repeated studying of the same texts individually or collectively, for instance during family and social gatherings or within religious groups. People also created libraries and studies as spaces of complete freedom, allowing them to escape the crowds or household duties, while feeling connected to the world and in control of its changes. Unfortunately, women were discouraged from participating in these practices due to hindrances in their education, the establishment of a separate literary canon for women readers (dominated by pious texts), or by engaging women in 'useful' household tasks.

Still, the process of dynamic social changes in the Enlightenment could not be withheld. Discussing the readership in the eighteenth-century England, Ian Watt points out that, as "many of the nobility and gentry continued their cultural regress […][,] there was a parallel tendency for literature to become a primarily feminine pursuit" (Watt, 1957/1964, p. 43):

> Women of the upper and middle classes could partake in few of the activities of their menfolk, whether of business or pleasure. It was not usual for them to engage in politics, business or the administration of their estates, while the main masculine leisure pursuits such as hunting and drinking were also barred. Such women, therefore, had a great deal of leisure, and this leisure was often occupies by omnivorous reading (Watt, 1957/1964, p. 44).

Intuitions of male members of society were accurate. According to Roger Chartier, who refers to the example of Michel de Montaigne, reading intimately – for oneself and alone – as well as having one's own favourite books that accompany a person through good and bad times are sources of individual power capable of defying authority (Chartier, 1989, pp. 135–137). This awareness must have been shared by Virginia Woolf when she wrote about the importance of having a "room of one's own" (1929/2007) as a space and condition for female emancipation. Woolf wrote her famous essay in the late 1920s, a time when culture still made a clear distinction between a study and a library as male spaces, and the female space of a drawing room (Digby, 1990, pp. 195–196). During this era men owned antiquarian bookshops and curated bibliophile collections that showcased books as physical objects and intellectual realms, while women managed reading rooms and facilitated books borrowing, acting as intermediaries between authors and readers.

Genres and themes of women's literature. Despite the challenges mentioned above, women writers were no longer uncommon in eighteenth-century Europe. The previous attitude of 'protecting' the fair sex from education, intellectual activity, and literary work as being 'inappropriate' and 'immoral' gradually gave way to a new tendency of educating women. This shift was driven by a new theological argument: if Eve succumbed to Satan's persuasion and sinned due to her lack of prudence, her female descendants should be educated so that they do not repeat her mistake. While Eve's sin was used in the past to argue against women's education, it now became an argument in favour of education

tailored specifically for women.[10] Therefore, women's education aimed to help them understand the reasons for their subordination to men and internalise the conviction of womanly 'weakness.' In other words, it aimed to reinforce the domestic hierarchy and enable women to become better wives, mothers, and homemakers.[11] Even though in the seventeenth–eighteenth century the existence of women writers was no longer a surprise, many of them wrote under a male pseudonym or signed their texts with their husbands' or brothers' names.

10 This does not mean that young males had enjoyed unrestricted access to literature. Since antiquity, politicians and tutors controlled access to literature for both male and female students. However, girls were expected to read works included in a literary canon designed especially for them, which consisted of useful and pleasant readings from which female students were supposed to learn about the world and the predetermined role of their sex. Girls were not allowed to read non-canonical texts, and thus were not encouraged to think critically and to discern between right and wrong, or good and bad literature. In contrast, literature for boys was selected with the view of their future philosophical studies, enabling them to pass judgement and make decisions. One significant piece of evidence for this is Plutarch's treatise *How the Young Man Should Study Poetry*, which holds importance in European literary and pedagogical thought. The education of the young male reader focused on shaping their "critical thinking skills, enabling them to recognise the good and useful aspects of poetry while discerning the bad and harmful ones" (Stabryła, 1983, pp. XXIV–XXV). This education extended beyond the book list provided by the boys' teachers. Thus, young males, having access to non-canonical, and potentially "bad and harmful" literature, were able to experience intellectual satisfaction, religious temptation, and imagined existential or physical adventures that were not available to female students.

11 The drive to discipline women, however, demonstrates the unwavering social conviction that they had the potential to rebel or transgress norms. The necessity to explain why women were to be subordinate to men testifies to the fact that there were always women who behaved as men's equals. Indeed, almost every cultural mechanism of debarring and disciplining women had a wiggle room. As I have already mentioned, in the Middle Ages, women's intellectual activity tended to be criticised in secular life, yet allowed in priories. The Reformation eliminated priories, so women could not avoid their domestic duties, but they could still read on their own at home – initially the Bible, but later other texts as well. Similarly, while standardised education was unavailable to women, they were allowed certain medical practices as activities consistent with women's naturally 'caring' nature, etc.

This practice lingered until the nineteenth century, as evidenced, for example, in France by George Sand[12] and Sidonie-Gabrielle Colette (Willy).[13] It is also apparent in the ambiguous pennames used by the Brontë sisters (Bentley, 1947, p. 37).

These first professional women writers emulated men because it is from men that they learned the principles of creating individual literary forms and genres. However, this by no means disqualified women's literature; after all, compliance to literary rules and principles was commendable in classicist poetics. On the other hand, the absence of literary rules was considered an asset of the female art of writing, for it allegedly expressed women's 'natural' emotionality, best evidenced in the uncodified genres such as the letter.[14] It was in Romanticism that following the rules, seen as imitation, became a serious accusation, particularly against women writers. Romantic European culture came to appreciate 'originality,' individuality, and generic syncretism. These changes in literary taste occurred first in France where the male theoretical reflection on women's writing began already in the seventeenth century. According to Joanna Partyka, "the question was no longer whether it was appropriate for a woman to write at all; what was being debated was the most appropriate literary genres and the original feminine style" (Partyka, 2004, p. 108).

12 See Sand, 1968/1991; Bochenek-Franczakowa, 1981; Barry, 1977; Jack, 2010.

13 See Lottman, 1991; Ledwina, 2006.

14 The conviction that the letter is most suitable form of expression for the feminine mind and emotion was articulated for the first time in the Enlightenment. Yet, this belief persisted in Polish literary theory until the twentieth century. In the late 1930s, Polish scholar Stefania Swarczyńska wrote about the letter as a 'women's' genre. In her view, woman's "natural inclination towards details, her ability to navigate events without delving deeply into them, her intelligence that is broad, but not necessarily deep, her pragmatism, emotionality, and ease with which she falls into moods, as well as her gregariousness and the need to unbosom herself – all these traits, so deeply ingrained in the feminine psyche, are compatible with women's artistic penchant for epistolography. Another advantage of women as letter writers was their lack of formal education, which allowed for unstifled creativity" (Skwarczyńska, 1937, p. 71).

Writing women and the first Polish female writers. Poland saw its first female writers emerge only in the early eighteenth century, more than a hundred years after their French, Italian or English counterparts made their literary debut. However, this does not mean that Polish women who engaged in writing had not been active prior to the Age of Reason:

> a "writing woman" differs from a "woman writer" in the contemporary sense of the phrase. She is an authoress of a text which usually falls outside the interest of a literary historian.
>
> Before women writers of literary fiction emerged in the First Republic of Poland, there were women who wrote letters and diaries, women who recorded family genealogies, women who kept ledgers, and women who edited their households' miscellanea. In convents, nuns documented the annals of their congregations, recorded their spiritual experiences in mystic autobiographies, or memorialised their remarkable sisters in biographies. These women were not yet female writers, but their 'dabbling in writing' would later develop into *belles-lettres* (Partyka, 2004, p. 5).

The inception of the Polish female writing cannot be compared to the long and illustrious tradition of French literature – to mention, for instance, Marie de France (twelfth century), Christine de Pisan (the turn of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries), Marguerite de Navarre (fifteenth – sixteenth centuries), Madeleine de Scudéry, Madame de Sévigné, and Marie de Lafayette (seventeenth century). During the same period, Poland can only boast of the seventeenth century Latin poetry of Anna Memorata and the versed autobiography of Anna Stanisławska, whose literary craftmanship does not reach the level of the abovementioned French women writers. This cultural lag among Polish women writers, which became a subject of theoretical dispute among nineteenth century authors, was already evident during the Renaissance. It is not that the Polish humanists of the time failed to address this issue; on the contrary, in the so-called great feud over the woman, Andrzej Glaber of Kobylin supported female education, while Piotr Skarga held an opposing opinion. There were also humanists who contradicted themselves when it came to women's rights. For example, Andrzej Frycz Modrzewski claimed that nothing is as harmful to a woman's morals as a lack of knowledge, and observed and condemned husbands' violence towards their wives. However, in his project aimed at reforming the sixteenth-century school system, the thinker never even considered girls' education.

The intellectual ferment of the Renaissance in Old Poland rarely entailed social and literary practice. This is because a persistent element of the entire Old Polish thought and parenetic literature was "the belief that women brought with them a mix of good and bad predispositions when they entered the world" (Dziechcińska, 2001, p. 13). An application of this tenet is illustrated by the challenge faced by humanist Łukasz Górnicki when translating *The Book of the Courtier* (1528) by Baldassare Castiglioni, as discussed by Hanna Dziechcińska. Dziechcińska compares three versions of this sixteenth-century *speculum* literature – Italian, Polish and Spanish – focusing on their structure, themes, and language. Her particular interest lies in Book III of Castiglioni's work, which in the Italian version emphasises the ideal of the 'refined lady' (her beauty, education, and demeanour), the 'superiority' of one sex over the other, and love (including strategies for winning the friendship of a married woman and appropriate forms of familiarity for ladies in relation to male strangers). Dziechcińska pays attention to the questions of "the translator's preferences, […] the possibilities for reception" and "the lexical challenges that the translation language presents in relations to certain parts of the original" (Dziechcińska, 2001, p. 77).

In the aforementioned Book III, all of these factors become complicated. In the Italian and Spanish versions of *The Book of the Courtier*, women actively participate in the debate on courtly comportment and love. The Dutchess of Urbino plays a central role in the court, and one of her ladies-in-waiting serves as the moderator of the debate. However, in the Polish translation of Castiglioni's work, the discussion takes place without any female characters. Łukasz Górnicki faced difficulties translating Book III due to the absence of women's education; a lady-in-waiting who freely discusses gender issues with men and quotes texts from the 'feud over woman' discourse was also a foreign concept in the Renaissance Poland.

Górnicki was also compelled to omit large portions of Castiglioni's text that discusses love, because the Polish language of the period had no 'suitable' linguistic equivalents for the emotional states and physiological processes related to this aspect of life. This utterly transformed the tone of the entire work. In the Italian and Spanish versions of *The Book of the Courtier*, all the characters dazzle with wit and a sense of humour, and entertain each other with delightful anecdotes, word puns, double entendres, and quick-witted, sharp dialogue. On the contrary, the Polish version is deprived of all joy and humour that come

from the dynamics of a mixed company. Women in the First Republic of Poland lived in a greater isolation both from education and the world of men compared to their counterparts in Western Europe. As a result, they lacked the linguistic skills or intellectual and social sophistication required for engaging in an unrestrained, enjoyable, and intelligent conversation.

Last but not least, in order to distance himself from the Italian 'depravation,' Górnicki resolved to also omit those fragments of *The Book of the Courtier* in which characters deliberate over ways of winning the approval of a married woman and the acceptable forms of love for a man other than her husband. Consequently, contrary to the Italian and Spanish versions of Castiglioni's text, Górnicki warns Polish women against the dangers of love and men's vile designs, instead of praising affections and flirtations of a married woman as a source of joy in life. Thus, as Dziechcinska concludes, "Górnicki's *The Book of the Courtier* reflects the fusion of language, vocabulary, and discourse with the dominant intellectual tendencies and interests" as well as "specific cultural situations, particularly different in terms of established traditions and courtly manners" (Dziechcińska, 2001, p. 86).

As evidenced in the Renaissance literature mentioned above, in the Old Polish period there was a conscious effort to maintain a difference in the status of women in more developed Western European countries and in Poland. For example, male writers consistently ridiculed even those intellectual fields which was practiced by women owing to their 'natural' predispositions, like medicine (Partyka, 2000, pp. 71–84). This attitude persisted into the Enlightenment, when the first Polish non-religious poetesses emerged, including Elżbieta Drużbacka, Kanstancja Benisławska, Franciszka Urszula Radziwiłłówa, Antonina née Jełowicka Niemieryczowa, and Teofila Glińska. Their poetic activity supports the thesis that the initial female writers in a nation's literature are typically upper-class women. According to the historian Maria Bogucka, in the First Republic of Poland, women's literary works were mostly written by the members of aristocracy and affluent nobility (Bogucka, 1998, p. 185).

No wonder this was the case; in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it was women aristocrats and (exceptionally) wealthy noblewomen who enjoyed more privileged positions than women from other spheres. Living in the capital and near the royal court, they travelled freely and were cosmopolitan and well-versed in the ideals of the Age of Reason. What is more, women magnates – rich, well-educated, liberated and savvy – had real chances of influencing the worlds

of politics and culture as mothers, sisters, daughters, or wives of respected male aristocrats. It was these women and the social class they represented that were the first to easily leave what scholar Janusz Tazbir calls "the circles of dependency" in the eighteenth century: "state, church, and family" (Tazbir, 1997, p. 164). It is within these institutions that the ideal of submissive womanhood was established: as a wife, along with children and domestic help, the woman was expected to submit to her husband, father, and master of the house, just as a subject submits to the state ruler, and a believer submits to God's steward, the priest.

Romanticism – the dawn of the Polish reflection on women's literature. Polish literary criticism of women's writing that emerged in the early nineteenth century was not engendered by the appearance of the first women writers on the literary scene. It stemmed from ideas of Romanticism as a mixture of nationalism and the cult of the bygone and of folklore. Romanticism marked a shift from a universal community founded on ancient models to smaller national units. It was a time when the classical tradition declined, as it became juxtaposed with local folklore. It is also an era marked by political emancipation and the unification of oppressed or partitioned countries. Within this tumultuous period, there was also a conviction that women's creative work was akin to that of the common people, representing a source of nation's untainted wisdom free from foreign and urban influences.

In one of the earliest studies on women's creative work entitled *O uczonych Polkach* [*On Schooled Polish Women*] by Jan Sowiński (1821), the idea of national literature is referred to as a 'trend' or a way to compensate for what Polish literature was lacking, and what becomes evident when comparing it with foreign literatures, first and foremost French and Italian. Sowiński acknowledges that he was inspired by a work on the influence of women on French literature. He states, "Since I did not observe such an impact in our Polish language, and was eager to contribute to national literature, I found the strength and motivation to write a brief history Polish women's literature" (Sowiński, 1821, p. 1). However, he expresses disappointment with the limited source material available to support his research, as the popular 'catalogues' by Feliks Bentkowski (1814) or Adam Tomasz Chłędowski (1818) were of little help. Therefore, he had to explore private libraries to find literary works written by Polish women and, after much

effort, completed his own study of these works. As a result, his history of Polish women's literature was necessarily brief (Sowiński, 1821, p. 1).

Jan Sowiński's compendium was initially intended to be more of a collection of Polish women rather than 'female authors.' This is evident in his dedication to Aniela née Błędowska Kropińska, where Sowiński clarified his goals: the need to preserve the names of those Polish women whose fame is "part of the national glory, […] whose gallant and civil honours are something this land boasts about," and whose "learned works [are] our pride and joy" (Sowiński, 1821, p. 4). This approach to women's literary work was the main reason why Sowiński had to actually create the history of women's literature rather than compile it. For example, his collection includes the names of Old Polish women writers who are now considered legendary rather than historical. Moreover, he attributed the authorship of certain texts to the women to whom they were dedicated, such as Zofia Oleśnicka of Pieskowa Skała. These controversial examples of women writers were included by Sowiński into the mainstream as national culture worthy of protection. Similarly, in a late-nineteenth-century study, another Polish writer, Zygmunt Kaczkowski (1895), emphasised the role of old storytellers in preserving Polish people's national wisdom. Thus, the nineteenth century saw the creation of women's literature where it had not previously existed, and redefined literature by women in those countries where it had already been developing. Literature written by women has become an integral element and medium of national tradition.[15]

It is important to emphasise that nineteenth-century Polish authors were aware that the absence of women writers in national literature until the early eighteenth century did not stem from women's supposed inherent lack of 'mental powers,' as conservatists claimed. Rather, it was a cultural standard, particularly strong in Poland at the time, to view women's writing as inappropriate and suggestive of 'moral decadence.' These attitudes were observed by noblemen both at court and in the cities, populated by educated and tolerant individuals, who were open to foreign ideas. Historian Kazimierz Wóycicki noted that the conservative segment of nineteenth-century society aimed to "protect women from such depravation" (Wóycicki, 1845, pp. XI, XV). In effect, women's access to

15 See e.g. Czarnecka, 2004; Filipowicz, 2008; Komisaruk, 2009.

education and intellectual pursuits after formal education, according to cultural historian Wacław Aleksander Maciejowski, was limited for a longer period than elsewhere (Maciejowski, 1852, p. 192). The guardians of morality claimed that the said 'depravation' results from women's reading as well as writing, activities that fostered independence, self-awareness, and self-dignity, and thus could lead directly to rebellion against authority.

Throughout the entire nineteenth century, the argument that reading and writing literature corrupts women's morality did not subside, but rather underwent frequent modifications. With the establishment of women's reading practices and the availability of literature, female morals became threatened not so much by reading and writing *per se,* but rather by reading and writing literature that was deemed to be in 'bad taste'. The definition of 'bad' literature metamorphosed in tune with the nation's current needs. For instance, literature considered to be in 'bad taste' included the 'highwayman's tale,'[16] as it reinforced women's individualism and rebelliousness. The romance could also be seen as a genre in 'bad taste'. This lower, non-normative genre had already been viewed as an urban tale of adventure and love in ancient times (Rychlewska, 1970, pp. V–LXXXIV).[17] The romance's younger sister, the novel, this child of the eighteenth-century cultural transformations, could also be considered 'bad' literature, as it affirms the everyday, the private, and the regional. After all, its origin is intertwined with the political, financial, and social emancipation of the middle class, and the novel became part of middle-class women's 'leisure time' (Watt, 1957/1964, p. 43).

The evolution of these genres was conjugated with the transformations and dilemmas arising from the modern print culture, commented on and criticised by Ignacy Krasicki in his articles published in 1803: "O piśmie" [On

16 The 'highwayman's tale' is a literal translation of the term 'książka zbójecka,' which was coined by Adam Mickiewicz in his *Dziady Part IV*. It refers to a text that stimulates the reader's imagination and evokes dangerous excitement. The English equivalent of this genre at the time, which was also known for its scandalous plots and forbidden emotions, is perhaps the Newgate Calendar, often featuring infamous pirates and highwaymen.

17 See e.g. Witkowska, 1971; Zawadzka, 1997; Setecka, 2000; Holmgren, 2001; Martuszewska & Pyszny, 2003.

writing], "Biblioteki" [Libraries], or "Romanse" [Romances]. According to Teresa Kostkiewiczowa, the Enlightenment had already viewed the print culture as a phenomenon that arose from "the desire to profit from the scribbling entertainment; it was the culture of readers who were undiscriminating and unprepared for contact with the book, who recklessly consumed petty, worthless publications, treated as objects of trade" (Kostkiewiczowa, 1990, p. 167).

Such accusations were soon directed at both male and female authors and readers of novels. However, the dark side of print culture soon became associated almost exclusively with women's literature and readership. According to critics, the novel, in particular in its realist,[18] naturalist,[19] and psychological[20] forms, posed particular dangers to women's morality. These literary forms appealed to emotions, promoting those affects that were unusual and violent, and located those sensations both in the private and public sphere and in urban and rural areas alike. As the main consumers of novels, women became aware of their emotional, financial, social, and political needs, which eventually exposed men to female discontent and demand for changes.

In partitioned Poland, tirades against romances and novels included an additional element of the criticism of the foreign influences. The critics pointed out that Polish women, inhabitants of the occupied state, did not enjoy the native 'high' literature that was engaged in the national service and was associated with nobility, but instead preferred foreign novels (French or English) that centred around love and were associated with the middle class. To address the psychological, literary, and social desires for emancipation that these foreign

18 For instance, although Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (1859) was tried in court and acquitted, it continued to face attacks for obscenity (See Auerbach, 2013; Szary-Matywiecka, 1974; Jauss, 2005, pp. 3–45).

19 For instance, the *Rougon-Macquart* cycle by Émile Zola exposed bourgeois ideology, an unforgivable sin (Auerbach, 2013, pp. 504–515).

20 Stories of the 'restless age' excited the imagination and brought to light the individual longings and distress, novel and unheard of at the time, for they made their readers aware of their existential loneliness (See Walas, 1986; Kłosińska, 1988; Sadlik, 2004).

influences exerted upon the 'souls' of Polish women, the Biedermeier trend emerged as a solution.[21]

The writings of Klementyna neé Tańska Hoffmanowa illustrate how women's literature was perceived at the time. In the early nineteenth century, she codified the beliefs about women's nature and duties, and created a model of the Polish woman that served as a benchmark in discussions between conservatives and advocates of women's emancipation for another century. In *Pamiątka po dobrej matce* [Remembrance of a Good Mother] (Hoffmanowa, 1876), one of her most popular texts, Hoffmanowa writes: "nothing teaches or enlightens you more than reading, and if done tastefully, it can easily supersede education" (Hoffmanowa, 1876, p. 380). At the same time, Hoffmanowa warns against excessive intellectual activity for women, stating that reading should "enrich the mind, but leave the heart untouched" (Hoffmanowa, 1876, p. 380). Consequently, young ladies should read "very little, just good and useful books, no romances, God forbid" (Hoffmanowa, 1876, p. 381), and any "excess in reading is reprehensible" (Hoffmanowa, 1876, p. 381). Another of Hoffmanowa's writings, *O powinnościach kobiet* [On the Duties of Women] (Hoffmanowa, 1875), provides specific guidelines for women's reading: it should be an equivalent to studying a few, consciously selected texts that are "thoroughly moral and educational" (Hoffmanowa, 1875, p. 83), highlighting and noting important excerpts. Regarding literary genres suitable for women, Hoffmanowa disqualifies *belles-lettres* and poetry, approving only of "histories of countries and nations […], travelogues, moral writings on education and on the destiny and duties of women; these are the only good readings. A jewel among them is, naturally, the Bible" (Hoffmanowa, 1875, p. 83).

Hoffmanowa's reading programme for women emerged from her personal experience of a lack of more profound education. While it was aligned with the principles of the Enlightenment,[22] and therefore progressive at the moment

21 See e.g. Opałek, 1924; Wasylewski, 1962; Żmigrodzka, 1966.

22 In Chapter VII "O Czytaniu książek" [On Book Reading] of his *Grammar for the Third Level*, Onufry Kopczyński, an eighteenth-century author of textbooks, explained how to approach the "greatest treasure of humanity:" "Delight that one feels while reading better books should be a motivation for reading, rather than the ultimate goal. Enlightening the mind with wise sentences, enriching memory with varied

it was formulated (Dąbrowska, 2008, pp. 173–174), in time the programme became increasingly outdated, limiting women's intellectual activity. In her introduction to Hoffmanowa's *Works* published in 1876, Narcyza Żmichowska, her most outstanding student and a writer herself, did not hesitate to criticise her mentor's views on women's reading habits (qtd. in G. Borkowska, 1993, pp. 59–72). Nevertheless, throughout the entire nineteenth century, women's magazines referred to two reading models from Hoffmanowa's programme. Jerzy Franke, a scholar researching women's magazines, has confirmed the enduring popularity of these models, both in the periodicals for female opponents of emancipation and in those for suffragettes from the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries:

> The first [model], the negative one, was synonymous with superficial and hasty reading of literary novelties, succumbing to fashion, lack of sensible text selection, and finally, the prevalence of romances that appealed to emotions and imagination of female readers. The other [model], the positive one, promoted sensibility and the art of restraint, also in terms of literature selection. In this context, a careful choice of texts becomes a method of eliminating harmful books, undesirable content, and dangerous temptations (Franke, 1999, p. 36).[23]

According to Franke, throughout the whole of the nineteenth century, female advocates and opponents of emancipation shared the belief that 'bad' readings, especially the romance, were detrimental for the imagination of readers. The views of conservative and emancipated women diverged only when it came to selecting 'good' readings. While conservatives recommended pious readings

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information, encouraging the heart to show affect, so useful to us and our country – these are the true benefits of book reading." The reading itself, according to Kopczyński, must be "reasonable, memorable, and stimulate mature judgement" (Kopczyński, 1787, pp. 82–83).

23 In the same source, there is another interesting comment from an anonymous article titled *Matka do córki. List drugi* [From a Mother to a Daughter: Letter Two] from issue 1 of the journal *Pamiętnik dla Płci Pięknej* [A Diary for the Fair Sex] (1830), quoted by Franke in his note 80: "One symptomatic recommendation reads: 'let us restrain our reading choices like we restrain our desires'" (Franke, 1999, p. 36).

that reinforced the *status quo*, emancipated women promoted texts that advocated rebelliousness.

The fact that women's writing involved earning and possessing money, and hence, possessing real power rather than symbolic, proved to be equally difficult for critics to accept. Women's reading habits became almost exclusively associated with "idleness, sensual pleasure, and secret intimacy" (Chartier, 1989, p. 147). A woman's reading was seen as inciting "sensuous imaginings […] fill[ing] her mind with disturbing images and arous[ing] her senses" (Chartier, 1989, p. 146). Women writers entered the study, that is, a space specifically designed for men, thus competing with men as literary professionals (Iwasiów & Zawiszewska, 2014). Conversely, by reading, women took over the library, which until then had been a space exclusively for men to experience entertainment, relaxation and delight. Still, it is important to highlight that, in nineteenth-century Polish territory, creative freedom was severely limited by a double censorship. The first type of censorship was codified and official, imposed by the states that had partitioned Poland. The other type of censorship was an unwritten, uncodified, and unofficial agreement among all members of the oppressed nation (Dąbrowska, 2012, pp. 147–189).

In his lecture entitled "Literatura a życie polskie" [Literature and Polish life], delivered in Zakopane in 1915, writer Stefan Żeromski voiced and criticised the prevailing beliefs of Polish society regarding the relationship of literature and 'mores,' which unequally restricted the freedom of a male and a female writer. A male writer was, first and foremost, a Pole, and only then a writer; the female writer was primarily a woman, and secondarily a Pole and, finally, a writer. In the lecture, Żeromski enumerated the significant demands formulated by one of the women writers of the period, directed towards writers working in partitioned Poland:

> for a work of art created in our country to be widely accessible and understood; for writings to be appropriate and morally valuable, and without unnecessary erotica or frivolous expressions, because our book will be read by young people; for a published book to be uplifting to the heart and spirit; let it protect a broad audience of readers from immorality, denial, and pessimism […] (Żeromski, 1957, p. 41).

Żeromski's commentary on these propositions is as follows:

> Apart from numerous external censorships, the writer in our country must listen to his own internal preventative censor, both in the initial stages of conceptualisation of a literary work, and throughout the whole writing process. The role of this internal censor is to review the writer's original ideas, restrict the expansion of his 'wings of inspiration,' and reject anything that whiffs of eroticism, pessimism, lack of faith, or sadness – in other words, anything that defies the accepted principles of education, moral health of the masses, and the nation's spiritual strength (Żeromski, 1957, p. 41).

Positivism and emancipation. The emancipatory aspirations of Polish women writers became more pronounced by the end of the nineteenth century, as positivist ideas began to dominate. Polish literature on women's history and women in history (ancient, European, Polish) started to be published, following the example set by foreign models. In addition to numerous articles and books on "women in Old Poland" or "Polish authoresses" created by advocates of emancipation and critics of women's literature, new, explicitly feminist journals and magazines emerged, such as *Świt* [The Dawn] (1884–1886) and *Ster* [The Steer] (1895–1897) (Franke, 1999, pp. 173–181, 225–251). Some scholars, like historian Bronisław Chlebowski (1893/1912), continued to hold onto the romantic vision of women's presence in the 'nation's spiritual life.' Others, like historian Piotr Chmielowski, associated emancipation with progress and explored the Polish past in search for glorious moments of 'civilizational acceleration,' that is, moments when Polish women writers were particularly active. In the introduction to his study on *Autorki polskie XIX wieku* [Polish female authors of the twentieth century] (1885), Chmielowski writes:

> Similarly to all civilised nations, traces of women's co-participation in Poland's intellectual life can be found in those epochs or moments when the rhythm of progress accelerates. This rhythm seems to awake the hidden forces that consider themselves weak, encouraging them to emerge bravely and cheerfully (Chmielowski, 1885, p. 1).

According to feminist critic Grażyna Borkowska, Piotr Chmielowski took an interest in "women writers with expressive writing styles, original biographies, and unusual personalities," who brought "new values, new demeanour, new language" to literature, and rejected the "traditional division of social roles

and the obviousness of tasks culturally ascribed to women" (G. Borkowska, 1995, p. 32). One such independent woman writer, both in life and her literary work, was the aforementioned writer Narcyza Żmichowska, who developed and implemented the first coherent project of women's literature. This concept, defined by Żmichowska "intuitively rather than rationally" (G. Borkowska, 1995, p. 33), included:

> not all that is penned by a woman, but everything that women write in relation to their own fate, existence, and biography; everything that concerns women themselves and provides answers to important questions for them […]. Żmichowska perceives women's literary work as literature whose functionality is limited by the biographical and existential conditions of the writing subject. The semantics of such literature are not simplified at all because its essence lies in the complex connection the woman writer has with her constructed reality and the outcome of her creative work (G. Borkowska, 1995, p. 33).

Diagnosing the interdependence of modernization and the aspirations of emancipation among socially and publicly marginalised groups, Chmielowski made these groups partly responsible for their own marginalization, asserting that they perceive themselves as weak. Suffragettes, who were increasingly gaining strength at that time, agreed with Chmielowski's diagnosis, but assigned blame to men (in the feminist version) or capitalism (in the Marxist version) for the social and artistic disadvantages faced by women. Therefore, in the late nineteenth century culture, women's emancipation and creative work became intertwined with romanticised discussions on the 'national spirit,' positivist notions of 'progress,' and left-wing concepts of the 'social revolution.' However, it was only the feminist activists who contemplated the emancipation of women as 'guardians' of national customs or 'domestic angels,' and women as both objects and subjects of art and literature.[24]

Apart from academic books and articles written in the last decades of the nineteenth century by Polish humanists of diverse views, numerous writers, literary critics, and reviewers expressed their informal opinions on women's literature and women writers in the press. Reconstructed by literary critic

24 See Hoszowska, 2005; Dormus, 2006; Stawiak-Ososińska, 2009.

Krystyna Kłosińska, the "phantasmatic portrait of an authoress" (Kłosińska, 1999, p. 15) of that time highlighted the position of a woman writer as transgressive towards social norms and gender identity, as had been considered since antiquity. It therefore advocated for a women's silence in the public sphere and marginalised the unique nature of female creative work. The woman writer was thus reduced to a 'nature's mischief' and seen as a sham; a hybrid, a monster, a non-woman, believed to "have deformed private parts, to be physically unattractive, and possess limited intellectual capacities" (Kłosińska, 1999, p. 15).

Male critics of women writers often resorted to natural metaphors to describe their creative work. It was compared, firstly, to the force and violence of the elements, such as a volcanic eruption of matter that has been dormant for ages. Another common metaphor used in the context of women's literary work was that of an instinct, an unconscious drive that, unlike the work of men, could not be controlled rationally and therefore was not intentional. Yet another metaphor used in this context was that of lust – women writers were seen as compelled to write by their wanton erotic desires. The act of writing, symbolised by the use of a pen (a phallic symbol), was thus perceived as an act of sublimation and a way to challenge man in his natural role. The metaphor of the kitchen was used to compare women's literary work to cooking a meal, implying that women writers mistake the salon for the kitchen; they were thus instructed that literature is not something that can be prepared with a use of a recipe. Finally, the metaphor of gossip and dirt was used to denounce women's literary work as a space constructed from shameful details of human life, essentially a literary "wastebin."[25]

Thus, although women's literature was supposedly being analysed, these analyses were actually aimed to expose those qualities of women's work which could justify negative assessments. The fundamental argument of critics evaluating women's work was that male writers use their intellectual capacities in the service of literature. They "composed with an aim in mind" and "in accordance with [their] knowledge of the subject and of artistic techniques" (Kłosińska, 1999, p. 15). On the other hand, women writers were seen as simply

25 A more detailed analysis of the metaphors deprecating women's literary work has been carried out by feminist writer Kazimiera Szczuka (2000).

"watch[ing] and depict[ing] what [they saw]," so that her "engagement in observation gets transformed into her disengagement from writing" (Kłosińska, 1999, p. 15). Male writing was considered the universal standard of creativity, reflecting the existing male-female division where all things male were viewed as 'naturally' superior and more important. In contrast, women's texts were defined by their perceived 'lack' and were labelled as "defective and incomplete" (Kłosińska, 1999, p. 16). Women were accused of disregarding poetic rules in their writing, with their plots being described as episodic, and the cause--and-effect chain being disrupted, while small occurrences of everyday life were elevated to the level of catastrophes. The belief that male experience was universal resulted in the treatment of women's experience as mere "frippery of fiction," "flair for upholstery," "yarn of banal reality," and "story of the trifle" (Kłosińska, 1999, pp. 18–19). Women writers who were appreciated, like Eliza Orzeszkowa, were subtly assimilated into male literature, and their gender identity was metaphorically neutralised. This was accomplished by separating them from the community of women writers and highlighting the 'masculine' traits of their texts and bodies, such as Orzeszkowa's 'semi-masculine' head.

Interwar discussions on women's literature.[26] Despite the fact that the question of women's writing existed in Polish literary reflection prior to the First World War, the first serious discussion on this issue took place in the interwar period. The writers and critics participating in this debate examined it in a milieu shaped by previous convictions on womanhood and literature, but also in new political, moral, and literary conditions. This interwar debate had two stages. The first, in the late 1920s, concentrated on the discussion of the style of women's writing and analysed examples of individual texts. During the second stage, which occurred in the 1930s, critics abandoned detailed scrutiny of specific texts in favour of synthetic discussions of the origins, worldviews, style, topics, and protagonists of women's literature. Consequently, according to Joanna Krajewska, the interwar period was "the first era in the history of Polish

26 This subsection includes excerpts from a chapter entitled "Ideologia" [Ideology] from my monograph *Życie świadome. O nowoczesnej prozie intelektualnej Ireny Krzywickiej* [A conscious life. On the modern intellectual prose of Irena Krzywicka], 2010, pp. 235–249.

literature that created a coherent and precise category of women's literature that was well-known among literary reviewers" (Krajewska, 2010, p. 12).

The aforementioned debate was sparked by the publication of a short story collection titled *Przymierze z dzieckiem* [A convent with the child] by Maria Kuncewiczowa (1927), and the release of Ewa Szelburg-Zarębina's early novels: *Polne grusze* [Pear trees] (1926), *Dokąd?* [Whereto?] (1927), and *Dziewczyna z zimorodkiem* [A girl with a kingfisher] (1928). Initially, these books were critically assessed as typical examples of women's literature. Kuncewiczowa's *Przymierze z dzieckiem* was published earlier in the conservative women's weekly *Bluszcz* [Ivy]. Its readers resented the 'unorthodox' way in which the author depicted motherhood, and the text caused division within the *Bluszcz*'s editorial office. Eventually, this led to the creation of a new progressive weekly called *Kobieta Współczesna* [*Modern Woman*] (Kuncewiczowa, 1986, p. 5). Stefan Napierski, the most prominent critic of the liberal weekly *Wiadomości Literackie* at the time, seemed enthusiastic about Kuncewiczowa's short stories; but when it came to reviewing them, he reactivated the well-known stereotypes on the animality, physiology, and particularness of women's literary work. The fact that Napierski used the same arguments in his review of Szelburg-Zarębina's *Dokąd?* demonstrates how deeply ingrained these stereotypes were in his consciousness and in the consciousness of his generation (Napierski, 1927a, 1927b).

Kuncewiczowa's short stories and Szelburg-Zarębina's novels were only a fraction of the literary output by women in the late 1920s. For one, there was prose belonging to the so-call 'high' literature, written by Zofia Nałkowska, Maria Dąbrowska, Maria Kuncewiczowa, Ewa Szelburg-Zarębina, and Zofia Kossak. There were also reprints and new books by women who wrote popular literature, such as Maria Rodziewiczówna and Helena Mniszek, who had started their literary careers in the previous era. Additionally, the interwar period saw new female writers and writers that were so far associated with other literary types and genres: Kazimiera Alberti, Anna Zahorska, Zofia Dromlewiczowa, Aniela Kallas, Wanda Miłaszewska, Maria Helena Szpyrkówna, and Irena Zarzycka. Given the political, revisionist and retrospective nature of literature from the early years of independence (for instance, by Juliusz Kaden-Bandrowski, Andrzej Strug or Stefan Żeromski), it is not surprising that there was such a quick and violent reaction to this entirely novel kind of women's literature. These new literary works were aimed at both sophisticated female readers and those who preferred sentimental romances. Reviews of these books

in the press clearly revealed the confusion of their male authors. They attempted to evaluate women's works using the tools typically applied to modernist 'high-brow' literature, even though this new writing by women consciously employed the previous literary conventions of the Young Poland, or equally knowingly referred to the models of popular novels, adapting these conventions to their own purposes (Kirchner, 1993, p. 827).

The late 1920s were, therefore, referred to as the "invasion of women" ("Kobiece niebezpieczeństwo," 1927, p. 1) onto Polish literature. Male editors of the literary periodicals of the time typically expressed their discomfort with the new state of things, searched for its origins, and coined new definitions to 'domesticate' it. However, women editors and feature writers in cultural magazines gladly accepted this new literary *status quo* as a sign of a changed legal, professional, and moral situation for women. The war metaphor used by representatives of both conflicting parties while commenting on the situation is suggestive of the atmosphere that prevailed in the interwar literature, when so many women appeared on the literary scene. This male-female tug-of-war is illustrated by the article "Kobiece niebezpieczeństwo" [Female jeopardy] published anonymously in *Gazeta Literacka* [Literary Gazette] in 1927. The eponymous 'jeopardy' refers to the trend of 'feminine writing' that secures financial and social success; one that distracts male writers from the tradition of "Konrad and Anhelli, of Krzysztof Cendro and Cezary Baryka" and from "great questions and transformations" to redirect them towards contemplating "carpet patterns" ("Kobiece niebezpieczeństwo," 1927, p. 1).

By that time, women who were engaged in reading and writing were well aware of what women's literature should encompass and what its characteristics should be. Among the female authors who addressed that subject were Maria Grossek-Korycka, Stefania Podhorska-Okołów, Henryka Zylbertowa, and Herminia Naglerowa. In a series of essays published in *Bluszcz* in the mid-1920s and later compiled into a book titled *Świat kobiecy* [A woman's world] (1928), Grossek-Korycka asserts:

> So far, we have only known about women based on what men have told us. But what they presented to the world was not an accurate reflection of a woman, but rather a reflection of a reflection left by a woman in the mirror of male consciousness. It is a reflection prettified with his own amorous illusion and distorted with the sharp angle from which he sees things. Women writers settled for a blind imitation of this model, as they were too unschooled, or perhaps too shy to write, even testify, as

> they pleased. Who a woman really was, what she was thinking and feeling – used to remain a mystery (Grossek-Korycka, 1928, p. 19).

Poland's regaining independence in 1918 was a significant moment for Polish women, which, according to Grossek-Korycka, should be utilised to formulate new standards of femininity in various aspects of life, including literature. Women's exhortation of women to write 'as they please' could be 'heard' in women's press, but so were male jeremiads and tirades against such writing.

Stefania Podhorska-Okołów, in the pages of *Bluszcz*, and Henryka Zylbertowa, in *Kobieta Współczesn*a, replied to one such anonymous article printed in *Gazeta Literacka*. In her column, Podhorska raised an argument that was frequently debated in the press during the interwar period: if it were not for the First World War, the emancipation of women would not have happened, or at least would have taken much longer. This is because the war "unleashed the reserves of female strength that had been accumulated through [women's] underground work" (Podhorska-Okołów, 1927, p. 8) and gave them an opportunity to prove themselves in fields that were previously inaccessible to them. Owing to this, after Poland regained its independence, the "woman-titan of organic work […] spread her wings" and finally broke free from male dominance, achieving her individuality (Podhorska-Okołów, 1927, p. 8). According to Podhorska-Okołów, "female jeopardy" is not about "giving up on great issues, the pathos and panache, for sake of petty virtuosity in producing petite trinkets" (p. 8). It is about a "distinct approach to life seen in sudden creative possibilities for contemporary women; something beyond the reach of male criticism" (p. 8). This "distinct approach to life" was at the time already portrayed in Zofia Nałkowska's *Romans Teresy Hennert* [The Romance of Teresa Hennert] (1923), Maria Dąbrowska's *Ludzie stamtąd* [People from Yonder] (1926), and Maria Kuncewiczowa's aforementioned *Przymierze z dzieckiem*.

Writing for *Kobieta współczesna*, Henryka Zylbertowa also viewed the "great influx of women's contributions to contemporary literature" (or, as male critics would see it, an 'invasion' of women writers) as a positive phenomenon (Zylbertowa, 1928, p. 6). However, she avoided entering into a dispute about it, instead stating that the "involvement of new forces in enriching humanity's cultural heritage can only be desirable" (p. 6). Zylbertowa, therefore, outlines two conditions for women writers that would "contribute to the resources of human culture with elements so far non-existent in it", namely, "genuine artistic

value" and "true novelty" (p. 6). Like Grossek-Korycka, Zylbertowa makes the following appeal to women writers:

> be honest, free yourself from the influence of male thinking, boldly voice your female thoughts about yourselves, men, and the world, and express your own, long misguided emotions. Discard the misconception imposed by men that excellence in all areas of life, art included, is men's domain. It is time to realise that the greatest recognition for a woman writer is when her book is deemed truly feminine (Zylbertowa, 1928, p. 6).

She then proceeds to offer her readers the traditional division between what is masculine and what is feminine. According to Zylbertowa, female writing involves capturing emotional states, mood changes, impulsiveness, profound religiosity, and a drive towards other people and relationships. The columnist believes that the novel is the most feminine genre, because it aligns best with women's "narrative capabilities and interests, and, having a less rigorous form than other types of writing (created by men to express *their* psyche), is therefore less psychologically stifling for a woman" (Zylbertowa, 1928, p. 7). Zylbertowa claims that a woman should write about "things that she is passionate about and what she experiences *as a woman*" (p. 8). According to Zylbertowa, women's literature described in such a way is best represented by Nałkowska, Kuncewiczowa, and Dąbrowska.

It was Herminia Naglerowa who summed up the "ten years of women's literary work" in *Bluszcz* (1927). Naglerowa considered the "tremendous development of women's literary gifts" (Naglerowa, 1927, p. 10) to be a result of their "active and creative capitalisation on their attained position and energy" (Naglerowa, 1927, p. 11), comparable only to a war victory. The list presented by this columnist provides insight into the literary awareness of the epoch, particularly in the late 1920s. When it comes to playwrights, Naglerowa primarily mentions Magdalena Samozwaniec, Maria Pawlikowska, Felicja Kruszewska, and Maria Jehanne-Wielopolska. Among women writing for children, she enumerates Zofia Rogoszówna, Bronisława Ostrowska, Janina Porazińska, Helena Bobińska, Zofia Żurakowska, Janina Mortkowiczowa, Ewa Szelburg, Maria Dąbrowska, and Maria Buyno-Arctowa. The women essayists whom Naglerowa particularly admires are Karolina Bielańska and Stefania Zahorska; she also pays tribute to the Grand Dame of Polish women journalists, Bronisława Neufeldówna.

Naglerowa also created a canon of women poets and prose writers. The first of category consists of the following poetesses: Bronisława Ostrowska, Kazimiera Iłłakowiczówna, Maria Pawlikowska, Felicja Kruszewska, Anna Słomczyńska, Janina Brzostowska, Hanna Mortkowiczówna, Stefania Podhorska-Okołów, Herminia Naglerowa, Maria Niklewiczowa, Zofia Rościszewska, Maria Czerkawska, and Róża Czekalska-Heymanowa. As for women prose writers, Naglerowa lists Zofia Nałkowska, Maria Jehanne-Wielopolska, Maria Dąbrowska, Zofia Kossak, Helena Maria Szpyrkówna, Ewa Szelburg, Mortkowiczówna, Wanda Miłaszewska, Wanda Melcer, Zuzanna Rabska, Beata Obertyńska, and Maria Kuncewiczowa.

The appearance of so many women writers in 1927 and 1928 allowed critics to discern the 'condensed' qualities of women's literature. The most noticeable of these qualities was the metaphorical style, found not only in the prose of Kuncewiczowa or Szelburg-Zarębina, but also in the works of the majority women and men writers during that time. This prompted Irena Krzywicka to voice her concerns about women's literature in an article entitled "Jazgot niewieści, albo przerost stylu" [Female yammer, or on the hypertrophy of style] published in *Wiadomości Literackie* in 1928. Krzywicka's text concerned the influence of Stefan Żeromski and Juliusz Kaden-Bandrowski on young prose, which she perceived as extremely detrimental to Polish literature, especially women's literature. This article represents the left-wing perspective on the subject, and sparked a lengthy discussion in *Wiadomości Literackie* (Krzywicka, 1928a, p. 2; "Kobieta współczesna," 1927, p. 2; Stawar, 1927, pp. 1–10).

Krzywicka's article begins by stating that the prevalence of "descriptiveness and handling every nonsense with kid gloves" is also a male literary "sin;" yet, "women really excel in using this mannerism" (Krzywicka, 1828a, p. 2). Krzywicka disapproves of the mindless "pursuit of new metaphors or original phrases," as it "obscures the good sense and clear thought," dulls "sensitivity to the richness and vibrancy of words," and above all deprives the writer of "a sense of proportion in depicting events" (p. 2). The columnist also protests against the "passion for overstating even trivial and unimportant things," "embellishing mundane details with stylistic frills," "exaggerating unnecessary observations," "piling up epithets," using adjectives "in their superlatives," and searching for "rare and weighty" nouns regardless of their necessity (p. 2). While these practices may be tolerable as a manifestation of creative individuality in a particular text, when they become the dominant style of the whole generation

of women writers – as was the case in the 1920s, according to Krzywicka – they create an overall impression of "monotony and lack of individuality" (p. 2). The "ornate" style, which Krzywicka sees as a form of the "contemporary *culteranismo*" of "pseudo-*les précieuses*" and regards it as a language of "ingratiation, hysteria, excessiveness, and artificiality," typically used for coquetry and "unwitting dishonesty" (p. 2). She also claimed that, both in life and literature, the "excessive use of flowery language overwhelms nuance" and amplifies "partial truths superimposed with lies" such as "syrupy adoration for parents, unwavering patriotic fervour, and hysterical attitudes toward love" (Krzywicka, 1828a, p. 2).

The above reflections on women's literature were presented by Krzywicka as way to introduce her own concept of modern literary language. She highly valued the use of a 'logical' metaphor as a genuine expression of reality. In terms of Polish literature, she admired the stylistic mastery of poetess Maria Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska (Krzywicka, 1929, 1933) and Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński (Krzywicka, 1930), as well as Antoni Słonimski (Krzywicka, 1931a). She also appreciated foreign authors such as Marcel Proust, Thomas Mann, and Herbert George Wells. According to Krzywicka, these "writers who intellectualise the Polish literary language" have the courage to deviate from the obligatory formula of creating a "romantic aura, poetic quality, and ornateness" in *belles-lettres* and literary critique (Krzywicka, 1928a, p. 2). Instead, they use a "rational thought and interpretation to capture the unprecedented transformations of the human being and society today" (p. 2). The columnist hopes that Polish male and female writers will take Western prose as a model, as it is "intellectual and in line with the latest psychological and social achievements, and perhaps other developments as well" (p. 2). According to Krzywicka, "the language of Proust, Mann, or Wells is an obedient tool that serves them not only as poets but also as thinkers" (p. 2).

Moreover, Krzywicka believes that it is urgent to rectify the disregard for Polish literature, which has so far been primarily used for patriotic purposes. She urges Polish writers to let go of these "inherited burdens" and swiftly "embrace modernity" (Krzywicka, 1928a, p. 2). To achieve this, writers must work on reshaping "the language into a more precise tool for expressing thoughts and style"; it should be "a language that is clear, simple, well-constructed, and beautiful in itself, not for its ornateness" (p. 2). Krzywicka refers to this new attitude towards language as "a new classicism" (p. 2). At the end of her article, she hopes that women writers would abandon "the artificially bloated

emotionality, unnecessary descriptiveness, and artificial stylistic tricks" (p. 2) and that the "truly modern woman, thoughtful, courageous, and triumphant, will prevail over the image of a weak, simpering little woman who belongs in the past" (Krzywicka, 1928a, p. 2).

It was Maria Kuncewiczowa who stepped in to defend the metaphorical style that Krzywicka criticised, as some of the sentences Krzywicka quoted in her article came from Kuncewiczowa's short stories. Basically, Kuncewiczowa agreed with Krzywicka's diagnosis, but she protested against the columnist's evaluation of women's literature. In her article "Metaforyzm a męskie kasztele" [Metaphorism and male strongholds] (Kuncewiczowa, 1928c),[27] Kuncewiczowa admitted that metaphorism is "the only artistic practice available in certain genres" and an "emanation of a psyche, not a learned mannerism! – it is rather an externalisation of a religion" (Kuncewiczowa, 1928c, p. 1). In other words, the metaphorical style serves best those creative personalities who are sensitive to multiformity and multidimensionality of the material and spiritual world, and to mysterious bonds between people, objects, and animals. However, it remains alien to the "bourgeois psyche" which prioritises "any sequester [or] an anecdote about adventures of a European" over ambiance (Kuncewiczowa, 1928c, p. 1).

Kuncewiczowa's argument suggests that women's literature, with its characteristic "sensualism that speaks with metaphors" is in relation to male texts as Polish literature is to Western European literature, such as French. Because of this, the writer appeals to contemporary critics, readers, and future 'canon'-makers to treat women's texts, for the benefit of both sexes, as a contribution to the common cultural heritage, instead of ridiculing or neutralizing them. She merges the aesthetic postulate with the ethical one, promoting "the multiplication and cultivation of each difference" and co-participation in the world's abundance (Kuncewiczowa, 1928c, p. 1).

Krzywicka responded to Kuncewiczowa with an article titled "Metafory and metatwory" [Metaphors and metaformations] (1928c) in which she specified her own stand on women's literature. She emphasises that her intention was not to attack women's literature *per se*, but rather to critique literary mannerisms:

27 Kuncewiczowa touched upon this topic in her other texts as well. See: Kuncewiczowa, 1927a, 1927b, 1928a.

> Squandering empty words, flamboyance, flaunting uncertain erudition, lack of clarity in thought, wantonness of language, showiness, and lack of understanding are the seven deadly sins, commonly found in contemporary Polish novels and criticism. It would be unfair to accuse only women of committing these literary sins. Therefore, even though this discussion primarily concerns women's literary work, it would be a mistake to narrow the debate to matters of only one gender (Krzywicka, 1928c, p. 2).

Antoni Słonimski, Paweł Hulka-Laskowski, and Karol Irzykowski agreed with Krzywicka, although each for different reasons. Thus, the discussion that took place in the pages of *Wiadomości Literackie* in late 1928 not only revealed the "difficulties in specifying the stylistic attributes of women's writing" (G. Borkowska, 1995, p. 37),[28] but also highlighted the differences between Krzywicka's perspective and the views of Kuncewiczowa, Hulka-Laskowski, Słonimski, and Irzykowski. While Kuncewiczowa valued metaphor as an important element of female discourse, Hulka-Laskowski, following Napierski's approach and that of his nineteenth-century predecessors, rejected the concept of female discourse entirely (Hulka-Laskowski, 1928a, p. 4). On the other hand, the Skamander poet, Słonimski, also rejected the metaphorical style as a legacy of the Young Poland movement (Słonimski, 1928, p. 4), whereas Irzykowski saw bad metaphors as evidence of the stylistic and intellectual weakness of the entire literary scene in Poland (Irzykowski, 1928, p. 4).

Krzywicka assessed the highly metaphorical style negatively because she viewed it from the perspective of the literary left. She believed that this style suggested detachment from reality, intellectual laziness, and ideological

28 Discussing the debate, Grażyna Borkowska also referred to a statement included by Stanisława Przybyszewska in her article "Kobieca twierdza na lodzie" [Women's fortress on the ice"] prepared for *Wiadomości Literackie,* but never published (the manuscript is located in the archives of Polish Academy of Science in Poznań, shelf mark P.III.52a). G. Borkowska notes that "[a]ccording to Przybyszewska, women's literature used no 'special material', and even if female authors resorted to a specific, common style, they did not do so willingly. The metaphor was a woman writer's 'fortress on the ice', functioning as a camouflage for her authorial self-knowledge. If women, therefore, succumb to a metaphorical writing style or a mannerism, it is out of fear both of being unmasked and of facing severe public criticism" (G. Borkowska, 1995, pp. 36–37).

blindness on the part of the writers. According to her, instead of exploring new ways of addressing issues related to Poland's newly-found autonomy, these writers resorted to anachronistic and long worn-out literary techniques. Krzywicka had specific expectations for women's literature, which included portraying the life of the New Woman and expressing a new female identity. Therefore, it was necessary for women's literature to find a suitable language for describing women's changing status and condition. It is important to note that Krzywicka's criticism was primarily aimed at the highly metaphorical style of women's literature, rather than its themes and protagonists. Considering that Kuncewiczowa's *Przymierze z dzieckiem* centralises on debunking the myth of motherhood, and Krzywicka regarded the parent-child relationship as the most deceitful theme in Polish literature, then it becomes evident that the views of both writers were not as divergent as the aforementioned press squabbles would suggest.

The discussion of women's literature (or, more precisely, novels written by women) in literary press in the late 1920s touched on several social and literary issues. Firstly, it acknowledged the significant presence of women in the public sphere, including literature, and the impact this presence had on social and artistic life. Essentially, what was observed was the feminization of these disciplines, which had previously been dominated by men.

Secondly, the fact that women wrote literature and that their writing differed from that of men and previous female writers, was not widely appreciated by male critics (with a few exceptions), but was cherished by female critics. Men writers felt threatened by women challenging their monopoly in the literary market and introducing a trend for 'feminine writing.' As a result, there was a decrease in demand for books about 'deeds' and an increase in the popularity of literature about 'daily life.' On the other hand, women writers felt that the time for historical justice had finally arrived: they became citizens in literature as well, and for the first time ever, they could 'speak with their own voice' about topic that had previously been silenced by national or moral taboos.

Thirdly, popular literature – in the 1920s associated with women's writing – had attracted critics' attention and surprisingly became a serious rival of 'high-brow' literature. Critics used this phenomenon to demonstrate that women writers more often than men opted for commercial writing, which had, as they claimed, a detrimental effect on national literature. Moreover, the discussion on women's literature was part of a larger conflict between 'the expressionist' and

'the classical psychological realism' (Kwiatkowski, 2000, pp. 262–263) in Polish prose during the interwar period.[29]

Furthermore, as a feminist and leftist critic, Krzywicka also emphasised class issues in the context of emancipation. In her view, the Young Polish style of numerous contemporary novels and short stories by women sprung from the emotional and mental conservatism of the pre-war 'little woman,' which was no longer in line with the post-war New Woman consciousness. According to Krzywicka, women were no longer obligated to mask their truth with metaphor, but were ready to take responsibility for themselves and express their demands directly.

Last but not least, despite projecting women's literature as 'New Woman's literature,' or persuasive, feminist-oriented literature, Krzywicka herself used the 'organic metaphor' in her writings, which had previously been used to mock women's texts. According to Krzywicka, women's manneristic writing is tantamount to performing strange, uncontrolled, and puzzling sounds such as 'yammer' or 'slurp'. Thus, the concept of New Woman's literature attacked the language of existing women's literature.

The second phase of the interwar discussion on women's literature appears to be more toned down. Additionally, its context has changed: the debate shifted from social-cultural periodicals to textbooks. Consequently, reviews by literary critics and writers have been replaced by synthetic articles written by literary researchers. Polemics have given way to balanced speculations, and instead of interpretating particular works, scholars and critics analyse tendencies visible across various literary texts. It seems that the phenomenon of women's literature has finally been embraced by participants in cultural life, who now wish to fully understand and appreciate it. These critical texts from 1930s were characterised by a conviction that mass contribution of women after 1918 to the public sphere, including literature, had profoundly transformed it by introducing a female experience that had previously been largely absent from it. However, it is

29 Kwiatkowski only expanded on Leon Piwiński's (1928) observation regarding the conflict between the "stylistic baroque" movement, exemplified by Maria Kuncewiczowa, Hanna Mortkowiczówna, and Ewa Szelburg-Zarębina, and the "construction and psychological analysis" movement, primarily represented by Maria Dąbrowska, Zofia Kossak-Szczucka, Wanda Melcer, and Zofia Nałkowska (Piwiński, 1928, p. 32).

challenging to find an opinion from a respectable critic or writer of the 1930s expressing contentment with what women writers had achieved so far. In this regard, the following press articles are worth mentioning: "Zmierzch cywilizacji męskiej" [The decline of male civilization] by Irena Krzywicka (1932), "Zalew kobiecości" [The flood of femininity] by Ludwik Hieronim Morstin (1933), "Powieść kobieca" [The women's novel] by Paweł Hulka-Laskowski (1935), as well as synthetic texts by Kazimierz Czachowski (1934) and Ignacy Fik (1939).

In the early 1930s, Krzywicka still had high expectations for women's literature and anticipated revelations in terms of its themes, plots, protagonists, and significance. She believed that the historic moment referred to by Oswald Spengler as the "decline of the West" and by herself as the "decline of male civilization," opened up new possibilities of expression for women, both socially and artistically. According to Krzywicka, modern women's literature represents a literature of 'true' womanhood that had been supressed by the 'male civilisation' for ages. This literature is contrasted with literature by women that reproduced male creative models and the male perspective on femininity (Krzywicka, 1932, p. 15). Taking a feminist approach to women's literature, Krzywicka disapproved of women's literary work in the 1920s. She argued that their texts failed to accurately portray the actual situation of the New Woman, instead offering a distorted image of femininity due to its anachronistic nature. Krzywicka's views on women's literature sprouted from her belief that a woman's soul evolves as a result of changing political, economic, and moral conditions (Krzywicka, 1932, p. 15).

On the other hand, both Morstin and Hulka-Laskowski believed that the portrayal of women in existing literature was realistic. They claimed that this literature depicted *das Ewig Weibliche*, and for that reason it was displeasing as it confirmed all their convictions about women. Their thinking about women, therefore, revolved around the belief that there is a universal essence of femininity that manifests itself in all times and places through such traits as loquaciousness, irresponsibility for words, focus on details of everyday life, and prioritising emotion over reason, body over soul, and analysis over synthesis. For Morstin and Hulka-Laskowski, the novel, as the youngest and the least codified prose genre, was an ideal vehicle to express the sense of 'perennial womanhood" (Morstin, 1933, p. 5; Hulka-Laskowski, 1935, pp. 337–340).

Czachowski and Fik, authors of two important synthetic texts on the topic from the interwar period, occupy a position between Krzywicka and Morstin

and Hulka-Laskowski. In the chapter entitled "Proza i poezja kobiet" [Women's prose and poetry] from his book *Obraz literatury polskiej* [A Portrait of Polish Literature] (1936), Czachowski discusses the literary works of over two hundred women writers. In introducing this work, he also offers the reader his own views on the process of women's emancipation, which was accelerated by the First World War:

> The emancipation of women from the overwhelming dominance of male affairs, and their maturation, which became reality after the First World War due to sociological changes, was the reason for women's invasion on literature. This is hardly surprising, as contemporary women enrich literature with new content, thus enhancing our overall understanding of humanity, expanding the range of our sensitivities, refining out thoughts and emotions. It helps us discover previously inaccessible and unknown resources of the human psyche, and intuitively permeate a certain sphere of human truths (Czachowski, 1936, p. 404).

Czachowski has a positive view on the effects of women's emancipation on social life and literature. He differentiates the impact it has on female and on male literature. Thus, he first discusses an 'exhibitionism' that is, the courage and sincerity with which women writers "address most feminine, intimate, and embarrassing issues with an enthusiasm of a female slave, freed from her biological, social, and moral shackles" (Czachowski, 1936, p. 404). Since women, "with an enthusiasm of a female slave," are more interested in what they want to say than with how they say it, they often neglect to pay enough attention to their means of expression. As a result, a significant portion of their literary work is deemed unoriginal and indicative of their "preference for naturalist method" and "literary reportage" (Czachowski, 1936, p. 404). Czachowski also suggests that this "limitation of female imagination" and "uncompromising attitude towards life" is associated with support for "social revolutions" (Czachowski, 1936, p. 405).

The other consequence of women's emancipation mentioned by Czachowski concerns men and involves the necessity for men to re-evaluate their worldview. This is because women's literature serves as a "test whose results are not always favourable to men – they burst the bubble of certain [male] illusions, and various one-sided laws and superstitions break down. Oftentimes we, [men] need to reconsider our simplified views so that a new truth about us can emerge and liberate us. The magnitude of these changes is still difficult to assess"

(Czachowski, 1934, p. 405). According to Czachowski, these two significant effects of emancipation – women's courage and sincerity, and men's re-assessed attitudes – primarily relate to the private sphere, particularly motherhood, child-rearing and sexuality, as these issues seem to be of importance to all female authors discussed in his book.

Fik, a leftist critic, does not treat the question of women's literature as benevolently as Czachowski, even though he refers to the same conditions of its origin and characteristics as Czachowski does. Still, Fik begins the chapter "Kobieta, miłość" [Woman, love] in his monograph entitled *Dwadzieścia lat literatury polskiej* [Twenty Years of Polish Literature] (1939) with an observation that is similar to that of Czachowski:

> In the past, women have always been a subject of literature, and quite often they were writers themselves. Yet, it is only after the First World War that we can speak of women's literature and a feminine subject matter. It must be noted that there has been a significant increase of women in Polish literature, especially in the novel, with over half of recent novels being written by women. What is more, in the past, women wrote on the same topics and used the same techniques as men, but at present they introduce topics on which men have little to say.
>
> It was believed that women's literature would be different from men's literature, being emotional, romantic, discreet, and idealistic. Alas, none of this has come true. The most characteristic literary works by women are marked by both cold intellectualism and scepticism, as well as impetuous and brutal sensuality, qualities considered to be typically male. However, the topics of women's works have not disappointed our expectations, for women write, almost without exception, about love and its vicissitudes. Still, the way they write about love is completely unexpected and a revelation (Fik, 1961, pp. 525–526).

While Fik perceived women's emancipation as a positive phenomenon in terms of changes in social reality, he saw women's literature that stemmed from emancipation in a negative light. He accused women's literature of "having a tendency to exaggerate, to be extreme and flamboyant," having "a basically descriptive approach to reality, […] blabbing through all artistic possibilities" instead of "demonstrating well-considered propositions" (Fik, 1961, p. 527). He also reproached them for "amorality" resulting from women's feminist rebellion and for "a habitual anarchism that breaks away from all social bonds or, at best, the liberalist narcissism of self-absorbed female egotists" (Fik, 1961, p. 527). For

Fik, the worst defect of women's literature was the absence of a modern woman in it. The critic could hardly agree to call the protagonists of women's literature 'modern' when he saw them as "passionate sensualists for whom modernity equals succumbing to free love, […] asocial dolls, […] busy and desperate social workers," or "poetesses intrigued by the 'strangeness of being'" (p. 527). He believed that the "new woman will surface first and foremost among those classes for whom the struggle of the new man is tantamount to the struggle of a new social order" (p. 528). Thus, in Fik's view, the New Woman should neither be a townswoman nor a representative of the intelligentsia, but a proletarian female, that is, a "new woman-human being" (p. 528).

Another accusation from Fik, directed also at men's literature, concerned the refusal to "accept an outlook upon the phenomena of life" (Fik, 1961, p. 526) as regards social reality; in other words, the omission of class issues and the topic of social revolution. The critic remarks that the feminine philosophy is "pessimistic, laden with elements of irrational fatalism" (p. 526). That is why, Fik believes, even if women take the side of the disenfranchised, this arises more from their "sensitivity" than "thoroughly considered viewpoints" (p. 526). Ambivalent, for Fik, is also the "split in the hierarchy of [literary] topics" (p. 527) that took place because of women writers. On the one hand, women write about "everyday life" and "ordinary people"; on the other hand, however, such a "democratization of [literary] content" excludes the "voices of low-class writers" (p. 527) and invites those of the bourgeoisie instead. That is why, Fik claims, "there is hardly a proletarian or a village woman in the literature by Polish women that would be depicted as a social individual" (Fik, 1961, p. 527).

Fik also disapproves of the topics that women introduced to literature after the First World War, namely "physiological-sexual processes", such us pubescence, menstruation and intercourse, or "animals' love antics" (Fik, 1961, p. 528) in the texts by Irena Krzywicka. Nevertheless, Fik does appreciate the innovative writings by Maria Kuncewiczowa, Herminia Naglerowa, Zofia Nałkowska, and Ewa Szelburg-Zarembina on the experience of pregnancy and motherhood. Fik is also displeased by the unflattering portrayal of men that crops up in women's literary works. He thinks that female authors intentionally "discredit men" by creating "wretched and boring" partners for women protagonists in their novels, which leads to "bad love" (Fik, 1961, p. 529), so masterfully analysed by Zofia Nałkowska. Consequently, Fik's leftist viewpoint only allows him to appreciate a limited number of female authors protagonists, such as Barbara from Maria

Dąbrowska's *Noce i dnie* [Nights and days] (1931), Róża from *Cudzoziemka* [The stranger] by Maria Kuncewiczowa (1936), and Sabina from *Całe życie Sabiny* [Sabina's whole life] by Helena Boguszewska (1934).

The statements made by prominent interwar literary critics and journalists mentioned above help us reconstruct the 'model' of a literary text by a woman. Firstly, it is important to note that a 'woman's literary work' amounted to a text in prose. The list of its characteristics equals to a list of accusations against preferred topics, literary conventions and genres, characterisation, setting, and style. Some of the favoured themes of women's literature included love (various male-female dynamics), family (spouse relations, parental relationships, motherhood), the female body (eroticism and physiological processes like menstruation, pregnancy, and childbirth), close connection with nature, and relationships between women. In terms of literary conventions used by women writers, the critics identified realism, naturalism, verism, psychologism, and sometimes expressionism. The preferred literary genres included the novel, short story, reportage, and erotic poem. Regarding the protagonists of women's literature, they were mainly women (oftentimes pubescent girls experiencing an initiation into love, their body, or social life, but also mature women with past or current burdens), toxic men, children, and animals. Stylistic figures commonly found in women's literary works included the use of coordinated compound sentences rather than non-coordinated multiple complex sentences, organisation of plot events through association rather than the cause-and-effect chain, metaphorism, emotionality, and concrete descriptions. The critics also noted fragmentation, extensive descriptions, and a focus on detail and everyday existence in the creation of the fictional world in women's literature.

Thusly re/constructed model of women's 'novel' that the majority of Young Poland and interwar literary critics perceived negatively has been rehabilitated in seminal works of feminist critics such as Grażyna Borkowska (1991–1992, 1995), Krystyna Kłosińska (1995), and Ewa Kraskowska (1993, 1999, 2007), who have hailed it as a milestone in the history of Polish women's literature. Moreover, the interwar disputes over literary works by Polish women became a platform for the crystallisation of theories, methodologies, and interpretative tools for Polish feminist critique. The next generation of female literature experts concentrated on the subsequent phases of this critique's development. Thus, Joanna Krajewska and Maciej Duda (2010) discussed its early twentieth-century phase; Izabela Filipiak (1999) initiated the debate on the Polish feminist critique of the political

breakthrough in Poland in the 1990s, whereas Katarzyna Majbroda (2013) reflected on the development of Polish women's literature during the turn of the millennium. It is interesting to note that these younger feminist critics and writers suggestively point out that in both popular and academic discourse, the gender-focused literature continues to occupy, in the words of Izabela Filipiak, "the dark realm defined by vaginal discharge, murkiness, abdominal pain, shame and exhibitionism" (Filipiak, 1999, p. 6).

Women and Literature in the Interwar Period

Introduction.[1] The literature of the interwar period is a fascinating subject to study. It is surprising how quickly it incorporated the most important artistic innovations of European literature from late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Its use of a wide range of genres and its thematic diversity are also impressive. Anyone interested in literature of earlier periods knows that the rankings of authors, the canons of works, and the criteria for evaluation used by readers back then often differ significantly from those used today, which makes exploring the past even more exciting. Feminist criticism offers new perspectives in the study of interwar literature, as it proposes reconstructing the history of women's writing and its reception, and reinterpreting national literary history so as to include gender as a criterion.

In order to illustrate one of these perspectives, I will examine dictionary entries concerning biographies and literary works of Polish women writers from the early twentieth century. Additionally, I will explore the reception of the so-called women's literature, focusing primarily on reviews scattered throughout the literary and socio-cultural press during the interwar period.[2]

1 This chapter includes excerpts from my previously published works. The subchapter 'Women in interwar society' features a modified fragment of Part I ('Genealogy') of my book *Życie świadome. O nowoczesnej prozie intelektualnej Ireny Krzywickiej* [A conscious life. On the modern intellectual prose of Irena Krzywicka] (Zawiszewska, 2010, pp. 112–122). The following subchapters, 'Women in the interwar literature: their biographies' and 'Women in the interwar literature: their works' are condensed versions of my article titled "Literatura kobiet w latach 1918–1939 z perspektywy feministycznej. Rekonesans" [A feminist perspective on women's literature in 1918–1939: An overview] (Zawiszewska, 2006, pp. 173–192).

2 These discussions concern bibliographical entries from the following sources: Korzeniewska, 1963–1966; Czachowska, 1977–1980; Kowalewska, 1968; Hierowski, 1969; Kądziela, Kwiatkowski, Wyczańska, 1979; Maciejewska, Trznadel, Pokrasenowa, 1993; Bełkot, 1982; Mrozek, 1992; Bartelski, 1995; Hutnikiewicz & Lam, 2000; Czachowska &

I am particularly interested in how the intimate and artistic biographies of women are constructed, how literary criticism addresses women's writing, and whether women's literature created between 1918 and 1939 shows an awareness of its multiple conditions. If it was, I would like to consider if it offers an effective diagnosis of the social situation of women in the early decades of the twentieth century. I wish to clarify that the remarks made in the following pages are preliminary observations rather than definitive conclusions, more akin to notes and index cards than a final version of an projected synthesis which, for my own purposes, I would call 'A history of interwar literature from a feminist perspective.'

In 1885, Piotr Chmielowski opened his study dedicated to the nineteenth-century Polish female writers by stating that:

> Similarly to all civilized nations, traces of women's co-participation in Poland's intellectual life can be found in those epochs or moments when the rhythm of progress accelerates. This rhythm seems to awake the hidden forces that consider themselves weak, encouraging them to emerge bravely and cheerfully (Chmielowski, 1885, p. 1).

In this excerpt, Chmielowski reveals how the neoclassical and positivist Reason plays hide-and-seek with itself. On the one hand, Chmielowski recognises that modern rationality's all-regulating agendas, such as cultural progress and emancipation of marginalised groups, are interconnected. On the other hand, he shifts the responsibility for marginalization onto marginalised groups themselves, suggesting that they "consider themselves weak" (Chmielowski, 1885, p. 1). During Piotr Chmielowski's times, women were one such group, viewed as inferior to men in physical strength, power of character and mental agility. Although women increasingly participated in literary life, it did not fundamentally change how they were perceived. As a result, their talent was often dismissed. Delegated to the private sphere of home and family, assigned to

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Szałagan, 1994–2007; Iwasiów & Kuźma, 2003. The source for all the abovementioned compendia is the files and entries of *Polski słownik biograficzny* [Polish biographical dictionary] (1935–2013), overseen by the Institute of History at the Polish Academy of Sciences (see: https://www.psb.pan.krakow.pl/).

the roles of wives, mothers, and homemakers, and deprived of the opportunity to express their sensual and intellectual needs, women of the late nineteenth century undertook the effort to change their situation. The 'priestesses of the home hearth,' 'guardians of national customs,' and 'angels of kindness' gradually obtained the right to education at all levels and to professional work, and, when they gained their voting rights in 1918, finally were able to participate in making decisions on the fate of their own country.

Granting women full political rights in independent Poland after 121 years of partitions marked a turning point in women's struggle for equality. In this new era, Polish society could, for the first time, experience the effects of emancipation on a wide scale. The consequences of the First World War, such as the democratization of interpersonal relations, the emancipation of previously marginalised groups, and general modernization brought about significant changes in the manners and morals of interwar society.[3] The modernised lifestyle,

3 The years 1918–1939 marked a period of turbulent change, which was difficult to avoid both in the young state consisting of three post-partition entities and in Europe rebuilding itself after the First World War. Over these twenty years, Poles went from enthusiasm and joy to disappointment and unrest stirred by their country's domestic and foreign policies. In this short period, they experienced the Greater Poland and Silesian uprisings, national plebiscites in Silesia and Masuria, the war with the Bolsheviks, the process of limiting the role of the Sejm and Senate in successive constitutions (the March Constitution of 1921, the August Constitution of 1926, and the April Constitution of 1935), monetary reform, and economic crisis. They became disillusioned with the politics of the Belvedere camp and the policies of our foreign allies towards European totalitarian states in Europe, which slowly but surely moved towards another war. Over the course of twenty years, Poland's population increased from 27 million (according to the 1921 census) to about 35 million (just before the outbreak of the Second World War), with women constituting over half of that number. At the onset of the interwar period, within the borders of the new state, approximately 65% of the population comprised Poles, 15% were Ukrainians, 10% were Jews, 5% were Belarusians, 2% were Germans, and 4% belonged to other ethnic groups. Consequently, the majority of the population of Poland at the time (62% of citizens) declared Roman Catholicism. The remaining religious denominations included: Greek Catholics (12%), Orthodox (about 11%), followers of Judaism (about 10%), and nearly 4% were Protestant. Despite its urban and industrial development, Poland remained an agrarian country, with 60% of residents living in rural areas and 30%

initially limited to the intelligentsia and affluent bourgeoisie, gradually became accessible to the general population. This was manifested in the democratization of social relations, the standardization of urban dwellers' attire, conversation and entertainment (radio, cinema, sports), as well as greater social freedoms. Although certain professions remained inaccessible to women, and they received lower wages than men for their work, yet the new status of women who studied, worked, and created influenced a change in the family model and family life. Again, primarily among the intelligentsia, due to new Western intellectual trends, the focus of family life shifted to the child, and economic relations as the basis of marriage were superseded by emotional relationships. Additionally, the use of conscious parenting methods led to a reduction in the number of children per family. It was also among the intelligentsia where the idea of a partnership marriage became widespread most quickly, as women's educational level increasingly equalled that of men. However, in most intelligentsia families, the traditional division of roles persisted, with the man being the sole provider for the family, while the woman managed the household and raised the children. It is worth noting, however, that employing domestic help was a widespread practice, even in moderately affluent intelligentsia households and beyond. In effect, women's mobility was greater than what might be inferred from the observation of traditional gender roles.

Mass culture, literature, and high-brow art reflected these social changes. Just as modern apartments had at their centre a kitchen with an adjoining room for servants, a children's room, a bedroom, and a bathroom – previously peripheral but now valued areas of the emotional sphere – so did literature and art, especially that created by women, which addressed themes of daily life, illness, and motherhood. The so-called 'woman question' surfaced in public discourse as a term encompassing a range of issues otherwise referred to as 'sensitive matters.' These issues were primarily related to the sexual and emotional coexistence of women and men. In literary criticism, discussion took place about the so-called

working in various levels of the workforce. There were about 300,000 representatives of the financial and ruling elite (less than 1% of the total population), 3–4 million petty bourgeois, and about 1.5 million of the intelligentsia and their families. Almost 30% of the Polish interwar population lived in cities.

women's literature. Its participants drew on nineteenth-century notions while supplementing them with new observations.

Despite the fact that in the interwar period no one questioned the emergence of new and intriguing social and artistic phenomena, labelling them as 'women's issues' revealed a male perspective. Adopting this viewpoint implied a dismissive attitude toward certain consequences of male-female relationships, such as infidelity, unplanned pregnancy, or abortion, and reveals a disdain toward women artists and their art, which heavily relied on 'sensitive matters.' While in previous eras, literary critics were more dismayed by *how* women wrote, in the interwar period *what* women wrote became the cause of scorn. In other words, in the nineteenth century, women who were seen as the 'priestesses of the home,' the 'guardians of morality,' and the 'angels of kindness' created literature that reflected male perceptions of women and repelled male readers with detailed descriptions of clothing and interiors, a focus on psychological subtleties, and affectation. After the First World War, the 'angel' revealed – with equal attention to detail – that she also had a body; the 'guardian' confessed to having sinned in thought, word, deed, and omission, while the 'priestess' lamented her homelessness, for she never recognised the place where she served rather than resided in as her own.

Simplifying, it can be said that the political, economic, and social situation of independent Poland was greatly influenced by politicians and activists who had developed their programs in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The core of the most important political groups of the interwar years, including the Belvedere camp, the National Democrats, the Socialists, and the Peasants' Party,[4] consisted of individuals who entered Poland's independence as mature

4 By the end of the interwar period, four major parties had shaped Poland's political landscape alongside the dominant Belvedere camp: the Polish Socialist Party (PPS), the Labour Party (SP), the People's Party (SL), and the National Party (SN). Meanwhile, the communists and radical nationalists remained on the fringes. The ruling camp, known as the Belvedere or Sanation camp, operated under the authority of Józef Piłsudski and advocated for a strong state, extensive presidential powers, and Poland's autonomy on the European stage, while rejecting nationalism. The Polish Socialist Party supported an eight-hour workday, paid holidays, social insurance, guarantees of civil rights and freedoms, cultural and territorial autonomy for national minorities,

individuals with well-defined views on public and private matters. The cultural landscape of independent Poland was significantly influenced by representatives of two generations of writers. The first group, born between 1880 and 1890, included figures such as Zofia Nałkowska, Maria Dąbrowska, Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz, Juliusz Kaden-Bandrowski, and Jerzy Szaniawski. These writers originated from the Young Poland movement and to varying degrees still had a spiritual connection to that era. The second group, born around 1900, included Maria Kuncewiczowa, Maria Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska, Kazimiera Iłłakowiczówna, and Irena Krzywicka; these were the Skamander poets and avant-garde writers.

For creators born at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the defining experience of the generation was independence. They suddenly found themselves free from national obligations and aware of participation in European culture. This coincided with a social revolution and a democratization of life, which created opportunities for social advancement. Thus, discussions about reorganization of family life and the emergence of the so-called women's literature took place among representatives of different generations, ideologies, and artistic programs.

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agrarian reform, partial nationalization of industry, and the separation of church and state. The PPS aligned with Piłsudski's policies and played a central role in the Belvedere camp until the Brest Affair. The National Party, the main opposition to the Piłsudskiites, aimed to establish a Catholic national state and a hierarchical society, and to restrict the freedoms and rights of national minorities, particularly Jews. The Labour Party consisted of Christian democrats who upheld Christian values, condemned totalitarianism, supported democracy, a parliamentary system, private property in the economy, agrarian reform and industrial nationalization, and advocated for the cultural autonomy of national minorities. The People's Party represented the interests of peasants, advocating for a democratic-parliamentary system, expropriation of large estates, and the elimination of economic exploitation through modifications of capitalism and the development of cooperatives. The Catholic Church, freed from restrictions imposed during the partitions, strengthened its political and social influence, consistently aligning with right-wing forces while opposing the left and liberal ideology and customs. Intellectual Catholic circles also emerged in Poland, inspired by the French Church, although religious life primarily relied on adherence to tradition and ritual rather than personal faith.

It is important to remember that generally speaking, only a portion of society participates in national culture, and it may not necessarily be representative. During the interwar period, this portion constituted less than 10 percent of adult Poles (approximately 2.7 million at the beginning of the 1920s and 3.5 million by the late 1930s). Within this group of conscious participants in Poland's national culture, Stefan Żółkiewski further distinguishes 'newspaper readers,' who read newspapers three to four times a week and considered them their main source of information. Another group, 'true readers,' Żółkiewski defines as adults who regularly read books, had specific reading needs, and could make individually motivated reading choices. He estimates the number of 'true readers' to be about 750,000 at the end of the 1920s and about 850,000 at the end of the Second Polish Republic (Żółkiewski, 1973, pp. 282–287).

It should also be clarified that the model of Poland's national culture in the interwar period was equated with the culture of the intelligentsia. It was shaped by a social group characterised by higher education degrees, a distinction that only about 80,000 individuals could claim. The group was made of intellectuals, including artists, publicists, critics, writers, and scholars, particularly those in the humanities. Although they were relatively few in number (around 1,000 people), they possessed a strong sense of their unique identity, unity, and social mission. Considering these figures, it becomes apparent that the phenomena I am interested in were relevant to only a relatively small portion of Polish society between 1918 and 1939.

Women in interwar society. In the interwar period, a radical change occurred in the political, legal, economic, and social situation of European and Polish women.[5] As Hanna Kirchner writes:

> the impact of the emancipatory ideas of positivism and the modernist elevation of gender to a higher status can be seen in the profound economic and social changes that occurred. The rise of capitalism, the growth of the mass culture market, the increasing number of educated working-class individuals, the disruption of landowning families, and democratisation of society coincided with

5 For further information, see e.g. Ciechomska, 1996; Walczewska, 2000; Żarnowska & Szwarc, 2000b.

> women's involvement in the workforce, their desire for higher education, and their participation in social and political organizations. […] Women were compelled to work, both physically and mentally, due to economic pressures (Kirchner, 2000, p. 243).

Women's changing attitude towards professional work had a significant impact on the private sphere, leading to changes in lifestyles and family organization. The most profound transformations occurred in the mentality of women from privileged classes, but aspirations of women from lower classes – such as peasants, factory workers and servants – also increased (Żarnowski, 1965, 1973, 1999). The pacifist sentiments and the desire to challenge the 'male' value system shared by the generation responsible for the First World War, also contributed to the elevation of women's status during the interwar years. Both progressive and conservative circles expressed the belief that the new post-war order would be improved by the significant involvement of women in the public sphere, especially in politics, and by enriching it with 'feminine' values, such s altruism, caregiving, and empathy.

The constitutional 'citizenship' of women prompted many of them to believe that the goals of the first wave of feminism, that is, obtaining full voting rights, had been achieved in Poland at the moment of regaining independence. Not only in Poland but also in other European countries, "feminism came under heavy scrutiny and fire by the end of the 1920s" (Cott, 1987, p. 271). According to Nancy F. Cott,

> From one point of view, feminism appeared archaic, a polemical stance perhaps needed to storm bastions of male privilege early in the century when women had been confined to their own sphere, but now superseded by the reality that women and men worked and played together every day. In the eyes of other critics, feminism looked too fearsomely futuristic, projecting a world in which women's self-seeking destroyed gender assignment, family unity, kinship bonds, social cohesion, and human happiness. […] Feminists constantly had to shadowbox with two opposing yet coexistent caricatures: the one, that feminism tried to make women over into men, the other, that feminism set women against men in deadly sex antagonism (Cott, 1987, p. 271).

'Modern women,' therefore, accepted the gains of feminism, that is, legal provisions for equality, but neither they nor the rest of society abandoned

the belief that the primary sphere of female activity remained the home and family (see e.g. Żarnowska & Szwarc, 2001, 2004, 2006). The awareness of a separate 'female world,' shaped by biology, law, and social beliefs about the 'nature' of women, was not widespread among members of various Polish groups, associations, and women's parties. These organisations included women's issues as one of their many statutory goals, rather than prioritising them (Kałwa, 2001, p. 28). Even women's organisations interested in equal rights focused not so much on analysing the situation of women as on encouraging them to take advantage of their acquired rights. These rights included pursuing higher education, entering new professions, and engaging in political life at all levels, in order to demonstrate that granting women new rights was justified (see e.g. Janiak-Jasińska, Sierakowska, Szwarc, 2009).

The concept of equal rights was understood by women's activists in two ways. Some believed it meant that women and men should be treated the same in all aspects of life, without any special privileges for women due to their maternal and domestic responsibilities. Others, however, thought that because women bear and raise children, there should be protective laws to equalise their opportunities, especially in the labour market. In Poland, the prevailing opinion was that the concept of equality between men and women should respect the differences between the sexes. This opinion was based on the widely shared belief in the unchangeable 'nature' of men and women, which was founded on biological differences, and the specific predispositions of each sex for certain activities. Interwar women who wanted to be seen as modern found themselves in a difficult situation because they rejected both the traditional model of womanhood and the masculinised model of early twentieth-century emancipation. On the other hand, the model proposed by feminist activists was full of contradictions. Realising such a model required women to "liberate themselves from habits developed throughout the centuries of legal and political restrictions and social conventions, while at the same time remaining true to their 'nature'" (Kałwa, 2001, p. 31).

The modified – yet no less demanding – requirements placed on women along with the wartime and post-war lifestyle changes in European society resulted in the emergence of new images of womanhood, which no longer conformed to the clear dichotomies of 'good' and 'bad' femininity known from the *belle époque*. The New Woman, regardless of her age, could dress like a young girl and behave 'freely,' while still maintaining the 'respectability' of her status as a wife, mother,

and homemaker. Deep necklines, shoes that revealed the foot, visible makeup, public smoking, and attending dances were no longer seen as signs of moral decline; they now became attributes of a new lifestyle (Boucher, 1987, p. 411).

The emergence of new models of femininity led to conversations about the regulations and constrains on women's involvement in public life (see e.g. Żarnowska & Szwarc, 1996, 1997). During the interwar period, there were two main approaches to women's activism. The liberal approach, represented by women's groups associated with such periodicals as *Kobieta Współczesna* [The Modern Woman], rested on the belief that equal rights were an inevitable global progression, and there were no longer any obstacles for women to fully participate in the labour market, culture, and politics, on par with men. The conservative approach, represented by women's groups connected to such periodicals as *Bluszcz*, was based on the conviction that equal rights should not come at the expense of the family. Accordingly, women's domestic and familial responsibilities should take precedence over their public activities, which, in turn, should be aligned with women's 'natural' predispositions (Chwastyk-Kowalczyk, 2003).

According to the liberal approach, any woman could pursue social and professional work if she wished. Contrary to that, the conservative approach deemed such work inappropriate for married women with children. However, in interwar Poland neither approach took an extreme form: female advocates of both options believed that society needed women's presence outside the home. They also emphasised the importance of balancing women's public and domestic responsibilities, although they placed different emphases on each. Still, regardless of the type of public activity a woman engaged in, she was expected to fulfil her tasks as a housewife and mother. Neglecting these duties was commonly perceived as disqualifying the work women undertook for their society, nation, or state. Therefore, women presented as role models – social activists or political activists, or women who were professionally active and successful in their professions – were idealised in the media as exemplary mothers, wives, and homemakers.

Thus, the concept of the 'modern woman' still depicted her as being in line with her biologically determined 'nature,' which meant she was seen as a potential mother and educator. These 'feminine' qualities included dedication, caring, empathy, and readiness to express emotions, and were believed to enable her to fulfil her maternal and educational responsibilities. During the interwar

period, motherhood was seen as a vital aspect of discussions regarding the future of Polish society. Representatives of all ideological formations agreed that the nation's future depended on how women carried out their maternal roles (see Janiszewski, 1933). As a result, concerns about the nation's future were typically linked to campaigns raising awareness about the importance of hygiene and diet for mothers and children. Mother-protecting laws were introduced, but there was also polarizing propaganda surrounding birth control, contraception, and the legalization of abortion (Gawin, 2003).

In contrast to motherhood, the topics of upbringing and education did not generate significant controversy, as this aspect of women's activity was ingrained in Polish consciousness and accepted. It was up to mothers to shape the attitudes of future generations. However, each political or social group in interwar Poland had different expectations concerning upbringing and education. For example, supporters of the Sanation movement stressed the importance of instilling respect for the idea of a strong state, while Catholic circles focused on promoting Christian morality as part of upbringing, and socialist organisations emphasised raising children with a sense of class solidarity. Mothers were encouraged to actively participate in the educational process by engaging in school activities, working as teachers and caregivers in preschools, and undertaking social work related to women's groups, associations, and parties. They were also expected to extend their educational influence to their colleagues at work, husbands, and neighbours. The belief that women played a positive role in society only when fulfilling their roles as educators was evident in press campaigns aimed at promoting women in fields that had previously been difficult for them to access. Advocates of women's activism dispelled fears of the negative effects of the feminization of public life, pointing out the benefits of women's contribution to 'civilizing' political relations and easing social and professional conflicts.

A lasting element of the concept of 'female nature' in the early twentieth century was the belief in women's higher ethical standards and moral superiority over men. Alongside educational activities, the defence of morality was women's fundamental task, ingrained in the traditionally accepted understanding of the female role. Still, parallelly to this philogynous stance, there was an opposing opinion that questioned the idea of women as the guardians of moral values, instead promoting the concept of women as amoral

beings driven by sexual instincts.[6] While proponents of both philogynous and misogynistic views referred to common opinions, defenders of women's high moral standards treated their own views as self-evident and not requiring justification. Conversely, misogynists attempted to support their stance not only with 'natural' arguments but also 'scientific' ones, often using pseudonyms to hide their identities. Therefore, Dobrochna Kałwa hypothesises that "the view [of women's moral superiority over men] was, at least in the normative sphere, widespread and deeply rooted in public consciousness" (Kałwa, 2001, p. 66).

In the interwar period, women continued to focus on the areas in need of moral improvement. Much like in the previous period, women fought against alcoholism, trafficking in women and children, prostitution, double standards of morality, and the demoralization of servants. After the First World War, women's ethical activism extended to public life, as they started to express their views on such issues as pacifism, pornography, and the secularization of culture. Advocates for women's activism, referring to their 'nature,' believed that women were particularly suited to improve moral relations in both private and public spheres.

Women's social activism in the interwar period did not face opposition because it aligned with the widely accepted vision of women's public activity that emerged in the late nineteenth century. This activism involved work for local communities, the needy, the sick, the poor, orphans, as well as organizing donations and other charitable initiatives.[7] All organisations and social environments supported women's social activism, which was based on the idea of the specific 'female nature' that could bring new values into social life, distinct from those of men. However, this expectation of 'feminine' activism was contradictory. Traditional supporters of women's activism believed that women should focus on those areas of social life which are in obvious conflict with

6 The misogynistic arguments gathered by Otto Weininger in *Sex & Character* (1903/1906) remained popular until the outbreak of the Second World War. They were replicated and defended by scholars in the fields of medicine and law. During the interwar period, Polish authors Żmurko (penname Dr Sapere Ausus) (1930) and Józefczak (penname Adam Drowicz) (1934) published works that reflected Weininger's misogynistic discourse.

7 For further reading, see Leś, 2001; Kępski, 1993; Piotrowska, 1999.

Christian values in order to 'repair' them. On the other hand, liberal women's groups expected modern women to 'reform' outdated customs, oftentimes rooted in Christian ethics. Thus, social activists of all backgrounds referred to the 'female nature,' but, belonging to various ideological formations, they expected different outcomes from the same idea of women's social engagement.

In light of the postulates of the women's movement, the moral aspect of women's social activities was realised in two ways. Firstly, women were expected to work on their own ethical stance. Secondly, they were encouraged to participate in solving problems that arose from the poor moral and ethical condition of society. Self-education was considered a fundamental prerequisite for a woman's social activism, as there was a belief in a strong correlation between personal characteristics and moral stance. Social activism conducted by an immoral person simply could not yield positive results. An interest in social issues was becoming evident in the strong representation of women in the social sections of the press, including prominent activists, intellectuals, and writers (Krawczyńska, 1930, pp. 167–168).

In the interwar period, such activities undertaken by women as professional work, political involvement, and cultural or educational activities were equalled with social work in order to gain social acceptance. These women often assured that their motivation for social engagement was rooted in a desire to serve the family, society, homeland, the Church, working class, nation, and so on, which also aligned with the ethos of the intelligentsia. Women's professional work was a constant topic of interwar discussions on the so-called women's question, as women's presence in the labour market was connected to broader social issues, like unemployment and economic crises (see e.g. Żarnowska & Szwarc, 2000a). The work of women (especially married) from affluent, intellectual backgrounds was a subject of controversy, while the necessity for single women, single mothers, peasants, and working-class women to earn a living was met with understanding.

The women's press focused on promoting the image of successful women who achieved high professional positions, which was unusual for women at the time. These female professionals included writers, artists, lawyers, engineers, architects, police officers, teachers, and nurses. A key aspect of the successful woman was her motivation for pursuing professional work. The press presented exemplary portraits of modern successful women who emphasised that their main motivation was to serve society, the state, or the local community. This

model advocated for combining professionalism with social activism in two ways. Firstly, the ideal successful woman engaged in social activism outside of her professional work. Secondly, the professions such as kindergarten teacher, schoolteacher, labour inspector, social journalist, and professional social activist were presented as suitable for women due to their compatibility with their 'natural' predispositions. A necessary element of the positive image of a working woman was her exemplary performance of domestic and family duties.

Dobrochna Kałwa summarised the multiple demands placed on the modern woman in the interwar period as follows: "woman's multifaceted presence in social life is a 'total activity' in the private, domestic and familial, professional, and social spheres" (Kałwa, 2001, p. 108). Contemporary feminist researchers view this early emancipation discourse as a trap, as it postulated an accumulation of women's obligations to society, family, and themselves. However, women in the interwar period saw these obligations as a given, and believed it was necessary to seize opportunities and prove that equality benefits both society and the family. An anonymous author of the 1927 text tellingly titled "Kobieta współczesna" [The Modern Woman], published in the progressive women's magazine also titled *Kobieta Współczesna*, still believed that a woman could not only be 'good enough' in various areas of life, but rather be 'the best' in each field she must and wants to engage in ("Kobieta współczesna," 1927, p. 2). Interestingly, in the same periodical, a few issues earlier, in an interview with Danish writer Karin Michaelis, a popular "advocate for women" at the time, the situation of the New Woman was evaluated quite differently:

> Nowadays, too much is required of a woman. For a man, it is enough that he is a good worker in his profession and earns money. But a woman who works professionally must also be a good housewife and a good cook, manage the home, bear and raise children well, and be a friend and lover to her husband. It is impossible to reconcile all this (Michaelis, 1927, p. 14).

Women in the interwar literature: their biographies. In the biographical entries of women writers from the interwar period included in encyclopaedias and dictionaries, important dates and facts about their lives, such as family and marital relationships, motherhood or childlessness, and serious illnesses, are often left out. As a result, the editors of these biographies use hierarchical and universalised – hence, actually, masculine – approaches to describe female

reality.[8] At first glance, the protagonists of these biographies may appear to have no families, but in reality, the majority of them were married and had children. This undoubtedly influenced their self-perception as women and as artists, their priorities in life, and their model of work. Notably, writers who are considered outstanding, such as Maria Dąbrowska, Maria Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska, Hanna Malewska, and Zofia Nałkowska, are those who chose not to have children. Questions about childlessness are deeply personal, and therefore answers to them should be sought with particular sensitivity. It is important to bear in mind that these intimate decisions often reflect societal expectations towards women and their personal experiences within specific historical contexts.

When biographies mention family relationships, they overwhelmingly focus on men – fathers, sons, brothers, husbands, friends – suggesting that the most significant relationships in the lives of creative women are with creative men. For example, in most encyclopaedias, Franciszka Arnsztajnowa is mentioned as the sister of French philosopher Emil Meyerson, Maria Czapska is noted as the sister of Józef, Maria Morstin-Górska is described as the sister of Ludwik Hieronim Morstin, Helena Boguszewska is referred to as the wife of Jerzy Kornacki; Maria Dąbrowska is noted as the life partner of Stanisław Stempowski; Irena Krzywicka is described as the daughter-in-law of Ludwik Krzywicki and a friend of Tadeusz Żeleński, and Maria Kuncewiczowa is mentioned as the wife of Jerzy. However, this pattern does not work in reverse – the names of women associated with or related to a man generally do not appear in his biography. Thus, in comparison to men's biographies, the accounts of literary women's lives thus reveal the silent assumption of women's intellectual dependence on men. This situation is perhaps understandable in the case of a daughter or granddaughter of a famous writer, for example: Aniela Gruszecka (daughter of writer Artur Gruszecki, wife of linguist Kazimierz Nitsch), Zofia Nałkowska (daughter of geographer Wacław

8 In Polish literary studies, the only compendium that consciously applies gender criteria in constructing biographies and describing women's literary works is *Wielkopolski alfabet pisarek* (Kraskowska & Marzec, 2012). However, gender differences affecting the practice of the literary profession can be observed in three classic commentaries on surveys conducted among Polish writers in the interwar and postwar periods by Krzywicki (1932) and Siciński (1966, 1971).

Nałkowski), Zofia Kozarynowa (grand-daughter of writer Tomasz Teodor Jeż), or daughters of a famous painter, such as Maria Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska and Magdalena Samozwaniec from the Kossak family, or Maria Gerson-Dąbrowska (daughter of painter Wojciech Gerson, wife of writer Ignacy Dąbrowski). Yet, it is hard to imagine that in writer marriages, for instance, only the male side exerts influence.

More importantly, however, the biographies of female authors from the interwar period constructed by editors in the late twentieth century have little to do with the perception of these writers by their original interwar audience. In their times, Maria Czapska, Helena Boguszewska, Maria Kuncewiczowa, Maria Dąbrowska, and others were perceived as independent authors, both personally and artistically separate from men. The only connections and influences that their contemporary critics pointed to as inspirations for Polish writers were works of foreign female authors, such as Selma Lagerlöf, Sigrid Undset, and Colette. To this day, this remains an underexplored avenue worth pursuing.[9]

Rarely do biographical entries include information about the intellectual and emotional friendships between two women writers (such as Maria Dąbrowska and Anna Kowalska), their literary fascinations (for example, Irena Krzywicka's admiration for Maria Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska's work), or the passing on and continuation of a writer's ideological or creative legacy (exemplified by Stefania Sempołowska and her student Halina Górska). In defence of the dictionary editors, it must be noted that during the interwar period, creative women rarely maintained close relationships with other creative women, or with women in general, due to competition and lack of time, which hindered closeness. This attitude is confirmed by their diaries, memoirs, and letters. The same sources also confirm the existence of close relationships between women writers and their mothers, sisters, daughters, and other household members, like servants. These relationships are often overlooked by biographers.

Following this line of inquiry, one could expand this list to include mothers who supported their daughters' literary endeavours (such as Irena Krzywicka and Zofia Nałkowska) as well as mothers who had unconventional aspirations for

9 See, for instance, the annex on the reception of Collette in Poland in: Ledwina, 2006, pp. 135–140.

their children's lives (e.g. Maria Kuncewiczowa). Consequently, we can examine the varying influences that mothers and fathers have on a woman's choice of a creative path. Is there a psychological and artistic distinction between being a 'mother's daughter' and a 'father's daughter,' and if so, how does it manifest? On the other hand, by exploring the presence of domestic service, we can shed light on the previously marginalised issue of gender and class identity of both female employers and employees. Some relevant material on this topic can be found in personal notes and certain examples from interwar literature, such as the aforementioned *Całe życie Sabiny* by Helena Boguszewska and *Przymierze z dzieckiem* by Maria Kuncewiczowa, as well as *Granica* [Boundary] by Zofia Nałkowska (1935/2016) and *Święta kucharka* [Saint Cook] by Wanda Melcer (1930).

Finally, it is worth mentioning the particular anthropocentric bias of biographers, which often results in disregard of the importance of pets in the lives of artists. During the interwar period, authors such as Irena Krzywicka, Zofia Nałkowska, and Maria Jehanne-Wielopolska offered literary portraits of pets, thus contributing to the development of a trend that, relatively weak in Poland, has had a long and esteemed tradition in European countries, such as Great Britain and France. And another thing – did creative women in the interwar period pursue any hobbies?

Interwar period female writers were, for the most part, representatives of the intelligentsia.[10] This seemingly obvious observation about their class affiliation obscures one of the most important phenomena that transformed Polish society between 1918 and 1939, and enabled social mobility for women and members of previously politically insignificant classes (cf. Żarnowski, 1973). There had been a radical change in the significance of the intelligentsia, which became one of the three middle classes (alongside white-collar workers and the petty bourgeoisie), positioned between the affluent bourgeoisie and gentry on one hand, and the proletariat on the other. During the interwar period, the

10 The information provided above regarding the social background, education, and circumstances of literary debuts of female writers active during the interwar period is consistent with the research conducted by Ludwik Krzywicki, Andrzej Siciński, and Aleksander Wallis. For further reading, see: Krzywicki, 1932; Siciński, 1966, 1971; Wallis, 1971.

intelligentsia included various specialists, from professionals to engineers, as obtaining an academic degree became the defining characteristic of belonging to this group. At that time, a higher education degree was held by approximately 80,000 people working as free professionals, managers, specialists, civil servants, teachers, clergy, officers, and engineers. Women, however, were a minority in this group. The intelligentsia was internally diverse: its upper echelons (the 'diploma holders') were close on the social ladder to the wealthy landowners and bourgeoisie, while the majority of white-collar workers with incomplete secondary education, low incomes, and limited opportunities for a professional advancement were closer to the petty bourgeoisie.

A particular group within the intelligentsia consisted of intellectuals, including artists, journalists, critics, writers, and scholars, especially in the humanities. Although they were small in number, they possessed a strong sense of identity, unity, and social mission. In the interwar period, the culture of the intelligentsia was closely associated with the concept of national culture model, particularly with its – let us call it official – version.

Teachers formed a separate group within the intelligentsia. Owing to the low salaries and the mass nature of their profession, in class hierarchies teachers were closer to the lower tier of white-collar workers, even though their social function connected them to the higher-qualified intelligentsia. The interwar period saw the first large-scale phenomenon of the feminization of the teaching profession at the lowest levels of education. This trend can be traced back to the nineteenth century, when teaching was a profession women gained access to the soonest, as it was considered to align with their 'natural' inclinations and social roles. In 1919, the Teachers' Parliament advocated for a uniform and free public school system, a seven-year compulsory schooling, and the integration of all education levels. This was intended to provide equal opportunities for higher education regardless of financial status, background, or type of secondary school completed. However, it also sealed the fate of female teachers.

The organization of public education required an immediate employment of a large number of teachers. In practice this meant that men taught science subjects and modern and classical languages in the upper grades of public schools because they held higher education diplomas or at least a high school diploma. On the other hand, women taught in the lower grades because most of them had obtained their professional qualifications through pre-war courses and training. Female teachers predominated not only at the early school level

but also in educational institutions beyond schools, such as community centres, libraries, and daycare centres, where they conducted courses and lectures. Women, therefore, performed positivist grassroots work, popularizing the canon of Polish culture and high literature among those social strata that had previously remained on the margins of the interests for the political elite.

The biographies of interwar female writers seen in the context of changes within the intelligentsia reveal that many of them worked in schools, community centres, rural centres, daycare centres, and libraries, and thus were in daily contact with children and the youth. This was not only due to their incomplete education but also to their social backgrounds: teachers who had left the proletarian or petty bourgeoisie class shared the intelligentsia's conviction of being responsible for the rest of the nation. Consequently, they felt obligated to repay the debt to the communities they had left behind thanks to their education. Many of these writers favoured socialist ideals. Helena Bobińska, Melania Kierczyńska, and Wanda Wasilewska, for example, were declared communists who viewed their educational activities as part of an awareness campaign. This, in turn, made it difficult for communist female educators, such as Janina Broniewska or Wanda Wasilewska, to find and keep steady jobs. The importance of the task of unifying the Polish nation at the lowest level after the partitions was also manifested in children's and young adult literature. Created mainly by teachers and educational activists, this literature referred both to the realities of life for various social classes and to memories from their own childhood, incorporating elements of folklore from different regions. Thus, the intellectual and emotional background of the generation that later participated in the Warsaw Uprising of 1944 included not only Jan Kochanowski's *Treny* [The Laments] (1580), Adam Mickiewicz's *Dziady* [Forefathers' Eve] (1923–1932), and Stanisław Wyspiański's *Wesele* [The Wedding] (1901), but also Silesian, Kashubian, and Masurian fairy tales, as well as characters from popular children's books: Pyza the Wanderer, Hałabała the Gnome, and Plastuś [The Plasteline Man]. These childhood protagonists were the heroes of collective imagination in Poland from the 1930s until the system transformation of 1989.

Most Polish female writers who grew up and reached maturity in the interwar years obtained a university education, regardless of whether they came from gentry families, like Maria Czapska or Maria Morstin-Górska, artistic families, like Aniela Gruszecka, Wanda Melcer, and the Kossak sisters, or Jewish families, like Zuzanna Ginczanka, Gustawa Jarecka, Lucyna Krzemieniecka, and Irena

Krzywicka. Many women writers studied Polish philology. Some combined it with other philological studies, such as English (for instance, Kazimiera Iłłakowiczówna and Felicja Kruszewska), Romance studies (Janina Brzostowska, Lucyna Krzemieniecka, and Henryka Łazowertówna) or classical philology (Karolina Beylin). Others combined it with non-philological fields, such as music (Kazimiera Alberti and Maria Kuncewiczowa), art history (Izabela Czajka-Stachowicz), and cultural history and pedagogy (Maria Czapska). Maria Czerkawska studied philosophy, Wanda Melcer – philosophy and sculpture, Janina Mortkowiczowa – philosophy and psychology, Zuzanna Ginczanka – pedagogy, Halina Górska – sociology, Stefania Kossowska – law, Aniela Gruszecka, Hanna Malewska, and Herminia Naglerowa – history, and Krystyna Krahelska – history, geography, and ethnography. Anna Kowalska studied Romance and classical philology. Studying abroad, which before the First World War was the only way for women to obtain a diploma from a renowned university, remained popular even after 1918. Among women writers who received their education at foreign universities were, for instance, Franciszka Arnsztajnowa (natural sciences), Julia Dickstein-Wieleżyńska (philosophy), Maria Gerson-Dąbrowska and Zofia Kossak-Szczucka (painting), Aniela Gruszecka (exact sciences), Amelia Hertzówna (Egyptology, chemistry, and mathematics), and Zofia Kozarynowa (Romance and Italian studies).

The predominance of female graduates in the humanities, including Polish and foreign philology, philosophy, sociology, pedagogy, and history studies, can be explained in several ways. One explanation is the persistent belief in the 'natural' predispositions of women to care for others, to educate and teach children and the youth. Another explanation for this predominance is the enduring influence of the post-nobility model of aristocratic education which emphasised foreign languages. Yet another reason why women chose the humanities as their field of studies is the opportunity to find employment in professions such as teaching, writing, journalism, translation, and clerical work. Indeed, during the interwar period, female writers dominated three fields where societal beliefs about female nature, humanistic education (particularly philology), and individual interests overlapped. These fields were teaching at the lowest level of education (reflected in children's and youth literature), journalism (related to women's periodicals), and translation studies (closely linked to popular literature).

Women in the interwar literature: their works. Discussing the creative achievements of interwar female writers, Hanna Kirchner rightly observes:

> It is delicate and risky to associate the development of artistic forms, trends, and genres with gender characteristics. However, it should be noted that female writers were encouraged by the tendencies in literature after the First World War, such as the so-called poetics of everyday life, exploration of the exoticism of the everyday, autobiographical writing, and popularity of documentary forms. Some of these trends were co-created by women themselves or were solidified and enriched by the excellence of their artistic accomplishments (Kirchner, 2000, p. 249).

Despite the cultural circumstances that encouraged women's creativity, and contrary to the alarming reports by male critics about the 'flood of femininity' in Polish literature, there were actually not that many female writers. According to the data contained in the successive volumes of *Rocznik Literacki* [The Literary Yearbook] from the 1930s, women's poetic output in the interwar period amounted to about 10 percent of all lyrical production.[11] In drama, women also constituted about 10 percent of the authors, but the influence of female playwrights on the interwar theatre was much greater than the impact of female poets on interwar lyric poetry.

Plays written by women for the theatre can be categorised into three main groups: works that address broadly understood social issues, works that focus on women and love, and historical works. Although there were significantly fewer social and historical dramas compared to the number of 'women's' dramas, they constitute some of the best illustrations of the social and historical genres that were created in the interwar period. The intensification of social issues in texts written for the stage between 1918 and 1939 was the result of the sudden devaluation of patriotic themes at the moment of regaining independence, which had been important for dramaturgy of the previous era. The tools used in both Young Poland and the interwar period to address social themes primarily came from expressionism, which is commonly associated with the works of Emil Zegadłowicz or Jerzy Hulewicz.

11 I only signal this fact here as I discuss it further in later parts of this book.

Despite these associations, in addition to the works of Karol Hubert Rostworowski, the texts by Felicja Kruszewska and Ewa Szelburg-Zarembina were among the most remarkable accomplishments of interwar expressionist drama. Socialist activist Zofia Wojnarowska also wrote socially radical works, while Halina Dąbrowolska utilised the approaches previously employed by Jerzy Szaniawski to explore themes of existential anxieties in her plays. Amelia Hertzówna, Maria Dąbrowska, Zofia Kossak-Szczucka, and Stanisława Przybyszewska represented the genre of historical drama.

Interwar female playwrights specialised in exploring social mores and conventions, with each of them creating her own variation of social realist drama. Most notable among them were Maria Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska, Maria Morozowicz-Szczepkowska, Maria Kuncewiczowa, and Zofia Nałkowska. Maria Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska focused on the psychology of a woman who seeks the right partner and makes unconventional choices, such as accepting a much younger lover, foregoing motherhood, or deciding to have a child with someone other than her husband. Maria Morozowicz-Szczepkowska, on the other hand, proposed that women adopt a male, hedonistic attitude towards love, as only in this way they could achieve autonomy and become equal partners to men. Maria Kuncewiczowa explored two models of love, romantic and pragmatic, ultimately portraying the triumph of the latter. Zofia Nałkowska, both in her plays as much as in her entire oeuvre, maintained a feminine perspective. The melodramatic variation of drama was the domain of Pola Gojawiczyńska, Marcelina Grabowska, Aniela Kallas, and Janina Morawska.

The opposition to the modernist heritage that was most evident in lyrical poetry of 1918–1939 was also manifested in the novel. This was particularly true at the turn of the 1920s and 1930s, when three major trends – realistic, psychological, and grotesque prose – became firmly established. Female writers were often associated with the first two trends. Within the realistic trend there were two groups of works, the first of which included novel series, a genre variation that was hugely popular in early twentieth-century European literature. The second consisted mainly of populist works. Novel series by authors like Marcel Proust, John Galsworthy, Sigrid Undset, Georges Duhamel, Roger Martin du Gard, and Jules Romains served as inspiration for Maria Dąbrowska, Herminia Naglerowa, Zofia Kossak-Szczucka, Irena Krzywicka, Ewa Szelburg-Zarembina, Pola Gojawiczyńska, and Wacława Potemkowska, whose works coexisted with nove series written by Polish male authors, such as Andrzej

Strug, Juliusz Kaden-Bandrowski, and Jerzy Braun. These family sagas tended to place the individual against the backdrop of their immediate surroundings, environment, social class, and nation, telling the story of at least two generations. In consequence, these novels assumed an epic, historically distant perspective, allowing readers to maintain a sense of detachment from the past and present. The publication of the novel series *Noce i dnie* [Nights and Days] (1931–1934) by Maria Dąbrowska was undoubtedly groundbreaking for the Polish interwar novel, as it liberated prose from the influence of the stylistics of Stefan Żeromski, Wacław Berent, and Juliusz Kaden-Bandrowski, which persisted in the Polish literary context until the end of the 1920s.

The group of populist novels included works created within the influence of the "Przedmieście" [The Suburbia] group or adhering to its programme. The key characteristic of the populist novel was the portrayal of communities and social classes functioning on the broadly understood 'peripheries' of society: factory workers, the rural poor, and the unemployed. These novels combined factual data with authentic depictions, often employing literary tools developed by realism, naturalism, the environmental novel, and of the reportage, which was youngest prose genre of the twentieth century. They also frequently utilised the character's point of view in narration. Women writers played a significant role in this trend, with notable contributions from Kazimiera Alberti, Helena Boguszewska and Jerzy Kornacki, Janina Brzostowska, Marcelina Grabowska, and Wanda Melcer. Women with leftist, socialist, and communist sympathies, such as Gustawa Jarecka, Halina Krahelska, and Wanda Wasilewska, bore witness to the emancipatory aspirations of the proletariat. On the other hand, Halina Górska and Gustawa Jarecka depicted the left-wing consciousness of intellectuals and social activists disillusioned with the false philanthropy of the ruling classes.

An equally significant participation of female authors was noted in the genre of psychological novel. Its characteristic focus on the inner lives of the characters remained in tune with the conviction that psychology was the domain of women and women's literature. Dreams, the rhythm of memory, mechanism of desire, the emergence of gossip, the instinct of death, and the chaos of maternal feelings were of concern to the greatest prose writers of the interwar period: Helena Boguszewska, Tadeusz Breza, Michał Choromański, Aniela Gruszecka, Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz, Maria Kuncewiczowa, Zofia Nałkowska, Adolf Rudnicki, and Elżbieta Szemplińska. These writers broke with the chronological

arrangement of events and the tradition of creating coherent 'characters,' while resorting to retrospection as a major narrative technique. Additionally, they explored the subconscious and utilised the discoveries of psychoanalysis, which typically exposed them to a barrage of criticism from representatives of various ideological and artistic leanings.

Women also wrote novels that were traditionally the domain of men or were products of twentieth-century mass culture. For example, Helena Boguszewska and Maria Kuncewiczowa wrote the first radio novels. Historical and biographical novels were authored by Anna Ludwika Czerny, Zofia Kossak-Szczucka, and Hanna Malewska. In the early decades of the twentieth century, the increasing trend of women travelling alone, as frequently and as far as men, led to the emergence of female travel writing. Karolina Beylin, Alina Centkiewicz, Zofia Kossak-Szczucka, Wanda Kragen, Maria Kuncewiczowa, Hanna Mortkowicz, Zofia Nałkowska, and Stefania Zahorska were among those who wrote travel books.

Reportage, a young genre in between fiction and documentary, was dominated by women from the very beginning. Women in this genre typically positioned themselves between the ideologised reportage of left-wing writers and the political reportage represented by Aleksander Janta-Połczyński, Ksawery Pruszyński, or Melchior Wańkowicz. While male reporters analysed social issues by tracking the mechanisms of power and the absurdities of the system, women writers highlighted the human impact of the economic crisis and individual pain. They depicted daily life in marginalised environments and on the fringes of society, in Jewish enclaves, hospitals, convents, homeless shelters, orphanages, jails, and prisons. They also portrayed the lives of prostitutes, criminals, justice system workers, peasants, and workers. Among those women writers of reportage were Nina Berg, Helena Boguszewska, Halina Dąbrowolska, Halina Górska, Maria Grossek-Korycka, Irena Krzywicka, Maria Kuncewiczowa, Wanda Melcer, Maria Milkiewiczowa, Mirosława Parzyńska, Elżbieta Szemplińska, Wanda Wasilewska, Ewa Szelburg-Zarembina, and Stefania Zahorska.

Children's literature, women's magazines, and translations, being niches in the publishing market, quickly became dominated by women. Again, these literary interests were associated with traits traditionally attributed to the female sex: emotionality, empathy, patience, reproducibility, meticulousness, etc. On the other hand, the typically male traits: rationalism, ambition, creativity, originality, innovation, synthesis, directed men towards high-brow literature,

adult literature, and serious journalism (such as politics, economics, and art). If a man ventured into children's literature (like Julian Tuwim), he would display formal virtuosity, and if he spoke on so-called women's issues (like Tadeusz Żeleński-Boy), he would take on the role of a defender and spokesperson for women. When translating (like Boy, Julian Tuwim, and Józef Wittlin), male translator would choose masterpieces and compete with the original.

These three literary fields – children's and young adult literature, women's magazines, and translations – became territories where women 'settled' and worked with a sense of mission understood in a positivist way. They performed their work methodically, collectively, and anonymously, because they were focused on the goal and on other people – on the emotional, intellectual, and ethical shaping of future Polish citizens, improving the fate of women in society, and assimilating the artistic achievements of other nations into national culture. Men came to these territories as 'guests,' more to experience an adventure, gain new experiences, and test their skills, than to simply work. Focused on themselves, they loudly proclaimed their presence in these literary territories. The activity of women in the three discussed fields also corresponded to the social stereotype of women's creativity: they were described as 'lace-makers,' 'embroiderers,' or as 'ants' and 'bees' – always humble, hardworking, and satisfied with imitative work. In other words, within the literary field, women's role was also to fill existing shapes and forms, while painstakingly working on details.

The number of magazines aimed at women systematically increased. For example, by the mid-1930s, there were around thirty of them (cf. Zaleska, 1938; Paczkowski, 1980). The dynamic development of this sector of periodicals reflected the general trends of twentieth-century mass culture, particularly the evolution of the press as a primary medium for information and entertainment. This evolution corresponded to the rising literacy and diversification of readers' preferences. An example of the expanding and diversified readership of women's magazines can be observed in the development of the *Bluszcz* publishing house. Initially, Bluszcz published one of the oldest women's weeklies under the same name, but it gradually expanded its offer with new titles, such as *Kobieta w Świecie i w Domu* [The Woman in the World and At Home], *Dziecko i Matka* [The Child and The Mother], *Życie Kobiece* [Woman's Life], *Kultura Ciała* [Body Culture], *Ja To Zrobię* [I Will Do It], *Życie Praktyczne* [Practical Life], *Praktyczna Pani – Dobra Obywatelka* [A Practical Lady – A Good Citizen]. Although *Bluszcz*, edited by Stefania Podhorska-Okołów, maintained its nineteenth-century

approach with more traditional views, its satellite titles attracted various readers, who periodically sought out content related to, for example, infant care or a healthy lifestyle.

Readers more interested in the country's public life purchased the weekly *Kobieta Współczesna* edited by Emilia Grochowska. *Kobieta Współczesna* mainly focused on the legal situation of working women and prepared them for participation in public life. There were also fashion magazines, among which the most pre-eminent ones were the biweekly *Świat Kobiecy* [The Woman's World], edited by Janina Łada-Walicka, and the short-lived monthly *Pani* [Mrs], edited by Jan Żyznowski. The aforementioned titles belonged to a group of exclusive magazines, as they were published in editions not exceeding 10,000 copies. They targeted educated readers who were interested in the changing situation of women in the family and society. These magazines offered high-quality literary content, including prose works by Maria Dąbrowska, Zofia Nałkowska, and Maria Kuncewiczowa, as well as poetry by Kazimiera Iłłakowiczówna and Maria Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska.

Political parties and religious organizations also published women's magazines, such as *Głos Kobiet* [Women's Voice], which was the publication of the PPS (Polish Socialist Party). *Gazetka dla Kobiet* [The Women's Gazette] was a periodical of the National Women's Organization, and *Praca Obywatelska* [The Citizen Work] belonged to the pro-government Civic Work Union of Women. Catholic Action also had its own magazine. *Wiadomości Kobiece* [Women's News], edited by Stefan Gacki, represented a typical example of a popular twentieth-century women's magazine. Devoid of illustrations, this periodical usually contained one or two articles on social topics, practical advice, reader correspondence, a serial novel instalment, and information about the lives of other women. Another example of a popular magazine was *Moja Przyjaciółka* [My Friend], edited by Anna Krzycka. It was an illustrated biweekly that focused on advice for 'every wife and mother' responsible for running the household cheaply and efficiently.

The model of woman propagated by interwar women's magazines differed radically from the pre-war model. It portrayed a modern woman who successfully balanced professional work with household duties. The modern woman who was the positive heroine of the women's press was expected to excel in family duties and housework. Any shortcomings in this sphere would undermine women's value and disqualify them from professional work, thus reinforcing the

arguments of those who opposed women's professional activity, as they believed it threatened the stability of the family. The new model anticipated women's involvement in domestic, professional, and social spheres. This implied that women's increased contribution to society was a form of compensation for their emancipation, and an assurance that women's emancipation was not a loss for society. Therefore, in discourse surrounding women's professional work during the interwar period, its supporters emphasised the social utility of traditional female virtues outside of the family sphere. Only secondly did they focus on women's individual professional satisfaction and the financial aspect of work. Editors and collaborators of modern magazines[12] addressed women who were similar to themselves, thus promoting a lifestyle they themselves led, combining work for the editorial office with the family. Based on their own experience, they knew that although balancing two jobs was challenging, it was even harder to give up professional work once they had tasted its psychological and economic benefits.

Interwar women's magazines require comprehensive re-reading and a holistic approach, despite the recent publication of several significant but fragmentary works on the topic. Special scholarly attention should be given not only to the programmes of individual magazines and their stances on key issues of the time, such as the legal aspects of civil divorce, abortion, prostitution, the death penalty, conscious parenthood, companionate marriage, women's situation in the labour market, etc. It is also important to examine the differences in views among female collaborators who worked in the same editorial office, for

12 The most well-known contributors to *Bluszcz* were Natalia Jarzębska, Jadwiga Krawczyńska, Herminia Naglerowa, Julia Świtalska, Maria H. Szpyrkówna, and Dioniza Wierciochowa. *Kobieta Współczesna* collaborated with Wanda Pełczyńska, Karolina Bielańska, Irena Jabłonowska, Helena Boguszewska, Czesława Wojeńska, Cecylia Walewska, Maria Czapska, and Natalia Samotyhowa. The journalists working for socialist periodicals included Stanisława Woszczeńska, Zofia Wojnarowska, Dorota Kłuszyńska, and Władysława Weychert-Szymańska. Supporters of nationalist ideas included Aniela Zdanowska and Zofia Zaleska, while Helena Ceysingerówna worked as a journalist for a pro-government periodical. In *Moja Przyjaciółka*, contributors included Konstancja Hojnacka, Zofia Zawadzka, Zofia Konrad-Gluzińska, and Helena Bartoszek-Zastawnikowa.

instance. One might also explore how the opinions of female journalists were affected by the programmes of the magazines with which they collaborated, or how the thematic focus of literary works by writers such as Pola Gojawiczyńska, Herminia Naglerowa, Helena Boguszewska, Maria Czapska, Zofia Nałkowska, Maria Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska, etc., depended on the place of publication. What is also worth examining are the criteria for selecting books by Polish and foreign authors for review in exclusive magazines and the preferred model of reading. The status of so-called women's literature in literary-themed materials should also be investigated. A preliminary query reveals that the diversity of opinions among female collaborators within the same editorial office on specific issues is greater than expected, while the diversity of opinions among different editorial offices is less than presumed.

However diverse were the voices of female journalists in women's magazines of the interwar period, they shared the conviction that women and men are meant to live, reside, and work together. Therefore, any modifications to the traditional gender roles, which were of interest exclusively to women, had to be negotiated with men who opposed these changes out of fear of losing their privileged position. The only female voice that clearly advocated for true emancipation, which could only be achieved by complete – emotional, intellectual, and economic – liberation from men, was Irena Krzywicka. However, the concept of 'victorious solitude' proposed by the columnist of the liberal weekly *Wiadomości Literackie* could not rely on understanding, let alone acceptance from the average reader of women's periodicals, who still aspired to build a life with a man.

Women were prolific translators who tackled a variety of genres and forms: from sentimental romances and detective novels, to children's and youth literature, to masterpieces of world literature (cf. Żółkiewski, 1973; Kurowska, 1987). This does not mean that male translators were rare; on the contrary, they were prevalent. Yet, male translators rarely treated the field of translation as their primary or sole domain of literary activity. For male writers, translation usually complemented or expanded their original work, or served as an expression of their artistic fascinations and intellectual pursuits. The issue of low remuneration for translators in the interwar period was also significant. A female translator was generally considered a skilled craftsperson who completed her work quickly and efficiently. For most women, translation was their only or main field of literary activity, so they usually collaborated with large publishing houses, working on commission and for profit. The outcome of their work was often a utilitarian

object, a book regarded as a source of knowledge or entertainment rather than a work of art, because they primarily adapted 'deficit' genres into Polish: crime novels, adventure stories, thrillers, travel literature, and romance novels – in other words, well-written B-class novels for both adult and young readers.

Alongside the remnants of aristocratic education for women that emphasised language learning, the absence of Polish equivalents for authors such as Edgar Wallace, Agatha Christie, William Somerset Maugham, William Babington Maxwell, and Elinor Glyn, who were immensely popular across Europe in the interwar period, created an opportunity for women of various generations to find work and make their mark in the interwar literature. The names of aforementioned authors imply that the English-language literature and prose written within the broadly understood realist convention was favoured by Polish female translators. Women constituted over seventy percent of all translators from English; a statistic suggestive of the emerging popularity of this language in Poland. Since men traditionally monopolised translations from other languages, primarily French, German, and Russian, women had no choice but to venture into this new territory. Men also held a monopoly on translating poetry and modernist prose, which required mastery of poetic craft in the native language, a deeper understanding of foreign language structure, and familiarity with the philosophical context of the era. Such knowledge and skills were only being acquired by the first generation of graduates from Polish and foreign philology departments in independent Poland, that is, individuals who entered literary circles in the late 1930s and after the Second World War.

In light of the above, the traditional beliefs regarding women's intellect that were carried over from previous eras appeared justified to interwar observers of literary life. Female translators primarily played an intermediary role, introducing Polish culture to the accomplishments of foreign literatures, presenting someone else's ideas, and treating language as a means of communication rather than a subject for creative processing. Criticism both depreciated and reinforced this model of female translation work, as references in the interwar press indicated that fidelity and precision were more often demanded from female translators, while artistry was expected from male translators.

Discoveries made at the dawn of the twentieth century in the fields of psychoanalysis, pedagogy, and philosophy also changed the landscape of children's and youth literature (cf. Białek, 1987). Childhood began to be seen as a distinct and significant phase in a person's adult life, characterised by heightened

sensitivity to the external world and by the predominance of emotions, intuition, imagination, and play, dominating over reason, knowledge, and a sense of duty. Adopting the child's perspective, the creators of children's and youth literature approached young readers as subjects rather than objects of didactic efforts. The new tendencies reached Poland primarily through educational activists, teachers, pedagogues, and sociologists who had been educated before the First World War, either at foreign universities or at the Polish Flying University. Many of these educators were associated with the Polish Socialist Party or held socialist sympathies. They also participated in creating state structures after 1918 and influenced the formulation of universal education policies. The generation in question also wrote new curricula, reading lists, and textbooks, founded the most important journals for children and youth, and ushered in the first wave of modern children's and young adult literature. In so doing, they slowly but surely replaced Heinrich Hoffman's or Stanisław Jachowicz's macabre stories for children with an optimistic and cheerful outlook on the world and people.

Among the most popular periodicals for children were *Płomyk* [The Flame], *Płomyczek* [The Flicker] and *Mały Płomyczek* [The Little Flicker], which were aimed at primary schools pupils and hence were the most democratic in their programme. Other successful magazines for children included *Moje Pisemko* [My Little Gazette], which targeted the middle class and intelligentsia, as well as *W słońcu* [In the Sun] and *Słonko* [A Little Sun]. Many of these magazines were edited by women, such as Maria Buyno-Arctowa, Stefania Sempołowska, Janina Mortkowiczowa, and Janina Porazińska. Children's and young adult literature was published in a variety of forms, including magazines and books, hardcover and cheap softcover editions, poetry, prose, plays, radio broadcasts, and recordings. This diverse range of formats allowed children's and young adult literature to be considered one of the most significant outlets through which women made their mark in 'serious' or 'high' literature, alongside translation and reportage, contributing to the development of national culture. Some of the most popular authors in this genre included Maria Czeska-Mączyńska, Janina Broniewska, Maria Buyno-Arctowa, Maria Dynowska, Maria Gerson-Dąbrowska, Joanna Gillowa, Amelia Hertzówna, Kazimiera Iłłakowiczówna, Hanna Januszewska, Jadwiga Korczakowska, Zofia Kossak-Szczucka, Maria Kownacka, Lucyna Krzemieniecka, Michalina Mossowiczowa, Janina Porazińska, Zofia Rogoszówna, Zuzanna Rabska, Waleria Szalay-Groele, and Ewa Szelburg-Zarembina.

The dominance of women is reflected in prose for children through a different choice in book themes and protagonists. For example, these stories typically take place in settings that are familiar to children, such as the family or peer group. Additionally, they emphasise values traditionally considered feminine, regardless of the gender of the main characters. The family relationships, solidarity, cooperation within the group, responsibility for loved ones, selfless help, and joint play and learning that women wrote about differed from the solutions used in Kornel Makuszyński's novels, which depicted a girl growing up to be a 'real' woman, and Janusz Korczak's 'treatises' that showed a boy confronting the 'evil' world. Women's poetry for children also differs significantly from the model of children's poetry practiced by Jan Brzechwa and Julian Tuwim, which is rooted in the Western tradition, especially in English nursery rhymes and native pure nonsense. One reason for these differences might be male writers' attitude towards poetry and the Polish language. For instance, for creators of the Jewish origin, especially Julian Tuwim, Polish was a 'homeland,' and thus an object of love and play, not just a means of communication. For Tuwim, then, children's poems were simply the opposite pole of poetic experimentation. The interwar women poets in Poland were still far from such experimentation.

In the 1930s, the same trends as in literature for adults appeared in children's and youth literature. The leading representatives of the social trend in children's literature, such as Janina Broniewska, Helena Boguszewska, Halina Górska, Ewa Szelburg-Zarembina, and Elżbieta Szemplińska, did not shy away from contemporary issues and wrote books about the lives of children from various social strata. The protagonists of their works were homeless children and those depraved by poverty, children with disabilities, residents of working-class tenements, frequenters of community centres, and newspaper sellers; children known to the writers from personal contacts or observations conducted in schools, community centres, and care centres. The best books in this trend, authored by Helena Boguszewska and Halina Górska, combined social issues with character development and created role models of active, courageous heroes capable of noble feelings and conduct for the benefit of others. Works by communist authors such as Wanda Wasilewska and Helena Bobińska additionally promoted respect for work and faith in human solidarity. The girls'

novel[13] was the most formulaic and resistant to change of all the varieties of youth literature of the interwar period. Only Maria Kann and Halina Auderska managed to overcome the sentimental and tearful formula. Their heroines bravely discussed the meaning of life and derived satisfaction from learning, sports, and girls' friendships.

Summary. After the eras of Positivism and Young Poland, we can speak of the influx of the 'third wave' of women writers in the Polish literature that occurred between 1918 and 1939. These women found their place in the traditionally female-dominated areas, such as children's and young adult literature, translation, and women's magazines, but they also ventured into traditionally male domains, like lyrical poetry and drama. Yet, prose writers were the most significant group among the female writers. They left their mark on various genres, for instance social and psychological novels, *Bildungsromane* and the girls' novels, radio plays, popular novels, romances and melodramas, stories and novellas about childhood and animals, essays and reviews as well as social and travel reportage. Literary critics of the time termed this kind of literature 'feminine.' This label was particularly commonly used in relation to social and psychological novels, in which female authors used their own experiences, observations, and reflections to reveal a different social reality than that portrayed by men. Women writers explored environments and areas, both real and metaphorical, that were previously perceived as strange, inferior, or marginal. The protagonists of their texts were inhabitants of the peripheries of society and the psyche – prostitutes, the unemployed, the homeless, and neglected and disabled children – and they explored the dangerous forces of the subconscious and taboo bodily functions. The perspective of female authors was that of an outsider, looking from the margins or from below, stripping the inhabitants of the mainstream – the political, financial, and intellectual

13 In Polish literary scholarship, there are terms "powieść dla dziewcząt" (novel for girls) or "powieść pensjonarska" (girls' boarding school novel) that do not have equivalent nomenclature in English, even though some of the most prominent representations of the genre come from anglohophone literature (Lucy Maud Montogomery's novels, for instance). We therefore decided to translate the Polish term as "the girls' novel."

elite, residents of Warsaw, the city, modern homes, Polish mothers and their apologists – of their false nobility and self-satisfaction.

Polish interwar female writers, whether producing high art or popular literature, emphasised the situation of women in an androcentric culture. In their view, the areas traditionally considered to be women-oriented in a patriarchal society and culture, that is, Love, Home, Family, and the Man, were not sources of personal happiness, joy, and fulfilment. Rather they were portrayed as sources of emotional, intellectual, and economic dependence for women. In most female-authored works of this period, the man was the beloved enemy who tempts his spiritually and physically innocent partner only to abandon her later on as 'tainted,' or else betrays her, insists on abortion, and fails to fulfil his traditional duties as a protector, husband, father, and head of the family. Erotic passion was often seen as an internal enemy, and the woman's own body was seen as a traitor, for both sexual desire and a woman's body made her dependent on men. Even though a passionate body potentially brought women success in the male world, understood as winning a man, it at the same time led to her downfall, that is betrayal and abandonment. Motherhood, thusly, became problematic – the heroines of female-authored works either had no control over their own bodies, or, aware of the unreliability of available methods of contraception, feared unplanned pregnancies. Female protagonists were often depicted in life situations that did not favour having children, such as being involved with a married man or with a partner who was unwilling to legalise the relationship. Female readers accompanied them in their decisions about single motherhood or abortion, sharing their anxiety about life and health, about difficulties in finding new housing, work, and partners.

The body was a theme of a particular importance in women's literature of the interwar period, as it broke the erstwhile literary and cultural taboos surrounding female physiological processes. For the first time, women writers openly discussed menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, breastfeeding, women's erotic needs and experiences, the tyranny of beauty and youth, the dramas of abortion, illness, and aging. Sometimes they celebrated the biological and natural aspects of their existence, while at other times women writers hated themselves for their animality which subjected them to their senses, and imperilled them to parasitic foetuses and newborns fed like 'one of the litter' by a 'bitch.' They took pleasure in the awareness of their own beauty attracting men's gazes, while

also despising their bodies for wrinkles, grey hair, and infirmity, which make women 'invisible' to men's eyes.

Thus, women's literature after the First World War not only documented the mechanisms of patriarchal culture, but also bore witness to the fears it generated among women. It is significant that the majority of women writers' chose the realist method of literary writing, which assumes objectivity of narration, identifies the author with the narrator, and establishes a subtle communication between the receiver and the sender. Such a realistic mode was a means through which women, as writers and readers, communicated in ways that escape those uninitiated in women's matters. They told each other stories about what they heard, saw, or experienced. However, these women always defined themselves in relation to men. It seems that they were still unable to imagine themselves as emotionally and financially independent individuals for whom a relationship with a man, marriage, and motherhood could be just one of many equivalent life models. Interestingly, the proposals for 'completing' the emancipation, that is, recognizing that the most important love relationship in a woman's life is with herself, appeared not in the main, highly artistic stream of women's literature, but on its fringes, in the social comedies of Maria Morozowicz-Szczepkowska, the novels of Elżbieta Szemplińska, or the journalism of Irena Krzywicka (Walczewska, 2001).

Women Poets in Anthologies

Women Poets of Young Poland. While reading various collections of Young Poland's lyrical poetry compiled over the past century, initially by writers and critics, and later by researchers of the literature of that era, I often thought about the non-existent interwar anthology of women's poetry. Although women poets had been present in the Polish literature before, it was not until the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that they began to appear in literary life in greater numbers. Consequently, it was only then that women poets were recognised as a new and significant group of creators. The artistic product they offered to readers was acknowledged as a distinct sociological and aesthetic phenomenon referred to as 'women's poetry.' This phenomenon attracted critical and other forms of attention throughout the entire twentieth century, even though the reasons for such an interest were changing along with the shifts in the political, philosophical, or artistic consciousness. For instance, during the time of modernism, reflection on women's creativity was shaped by concepts of gender struggle and emancipation movements. After the Second World War, however, the socialist ideology invalidated the category of gender in social life, science, and art. After 1989, poststructuralist methodologies, primarily feminist criticism, reintroduced this category into scientific research and artistic activities.

Therefore, the critical and historical literary narrative about women poets of Polish modernism was influenced by both the worldview of subsequent decades, and the beliefs about literature and gender held by individual creators of various Young Poland narratives. However, literary syntheses and anthologies of modernist poetry published in the early twentieth century typically considered women's poetry more as a sociological phenomenon than a literary one. This was because the increasing presence of women in the public sphere, including the artistic realm, was in itself perceived as a profound social change, reflecting emancipation that was observed and experienced daily by all members of the national community. However, in the late twentieth century, as the presence of women in the public and artistic spheres became commonplace and Young

Poland became just a period in literary history, there was a heightened interest in what women were able to express during that time.

Thus, it is worthwhile to research several important poetic anthologies and literary history textbooks from the early twentieth century. These texts provide knowledge on two significant approaches to the work of women poets of Young Poland. These approaches arise from the internal contradictions of the modern era, namely, simultaneous universalism and particularism, homogenisation and differentiation of reality, and the exclusion and reintegration of all Otherness (Bauman, 1991). Both ways in which the works of women poets were presented, as well as the aforementioned modern tendencies, which were both inclusive and exclusive to women's creativity, were established by Wilhelm Feldman's classic works: the anthology *Wybór poezyj 'Młodej Polski'* [A selection of Young Poland's poetry] arranged in 1903 (re-issued as *Wybór poezyj 'Młodej Polski' 1886–1918*, 2nd expanded edition, Lwów 1919) and the textbook *Współczesna literatura polska 1864–1917* [Contemporary Polish literature, 1864–1917], published in 1918–1919.

Although the first *Album współczesnych poetów polskich* [The album of contemporary Polish poets] was compiled by Jan Kasprowicz (1898), it was only in the "whole forest of new names" (Feldman, 1903, p. IV) included in Feldman's *Wybór poezyj 'Młodej Polski'* that female names appeared. These women poets included Zofia Trzeszczkowska (under a pseudonym 'Adam M…ski,' not yet decoded at the time), Maria Komornicka, Kazimiera Zawistowska, Maryla Wolska, and Maria Markowska. Feldman did not group these names based on gender, but rather arranged them in a "chronological order – according to the sequence in which the authors began publishing their works, although this was not always possible to determine or consistently implement" (Feldman, 1903, p. V). This chronological order allowed women writers to be seen as co-creators of modernist poetry, on equal footing with men. However, Feldman placed them among the *minorum gentium* poets, as evidenced by the smaller number of their poems included in the anthology (three works by Trzeszczkowska, Wolska, and Zawistowska, two by Komornicka, and one by Markowska). Despite this, his arrangement was not discriminatory: similarly to the lesser-known male poets, the women poets provided context for the pioneers and leading figures of Young Poland such as Andrzej Niemojewski, Franciszek Nowicki, and Kazimierz Przerwa-Tetmajer. The works of these women poets showcased the internal diversity and richness of modernist poetry, but – significantly – they

were not presented as representatives of love lyricism. Women poets appeared in this anthology as poets of individualistic rebellion, sorrow, admiration for nature, religious exaltation, and stylised folk themes. Feldman wrote:

> Everyone is represented here, no one is omitted. There are rather too many names – but the picture had to be nuanced if it were to approximately reflect reality. Everybody who has something to say has a voice here, not for the sake of the trend – trends come and go, only talent endures… And it is undeniable that, like trees in a mighty forest, so from our Young poetry powerful talents shoot up to the sky, and even the flowers that grow in the shadow of these trees have their own allure and fragrance (Feldman, 1903, p. VII).

Therefore, Feldman did not single out female poets as a distinct group, nor did he treat women's poetic writing as one of the 'trends' of Young Poland's poetry. However, he did so in the textbook on contemporary Polish literature published in the early twentieth century, and repeatedly updated afterwards. In the textbook's sixth edition entitled *Współczesna literatura polska 1864–1917* [Contemporary Polish literature, 1864–1917] (1918–1919/1985), issued just after the First World War, Feldman included a chapter on female Poets (Vol. VI, Ch. XV, Part 2). In this section, he listed the names of women poets who would frequently be mentioned in subsequent epochs: Franciszka Arnsztajnowa, Maria Czerkawska, Maria Grossek-Korycka, Maria Komornicka, Flora Hufnagel, Zofia Nałkowska, Bronisława Ostrowska, Zuzanna Rabska, Zofia Wojnarowska, Maryla Wolska, and Kazimiera Zawistowska. While characterizing these poetesses, Feldman resorted to the discourse on 'women's literature' from the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (see Kłosińska, 1999, pp. 7–36). Among other things, he pointed out the multi–layered conflict between humanity and femininity, originality and conventionality, artistry and craftsmanship, reason and emotion, and 'service' and 'love' as the dominant feature of women's creativity, particularly evident in the works of Maria Komornicka.

I propose to examine two excerpts from Feldman's account of women's poetry, one focusing on Komornicka's writing and another discussing Zawistowska's poetry. Both excerpts demonstrate that when a female writer abandons her femininity and emotionality in order to develop as an individual and to prioritise reason, she experiences spiritual turmoil and artistic dissatisfaction:

> Under the power of awakened emotionality, poetry came alive in the souls of those who had no desire to 'serve' (as in the positivist era), or 'work with the pen' for the common good. Instead, they longed to be themselves, to authentically express their own true selves…
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> Maria Komornicka (*1876) abandoned her natural inclinations in order to exist in a precarious space between intellect and emotion. Unlike other female writers, who were often very talented but impersonal in their writing, Komornicka reveals a greater sense of individuality rather than artistic ability. Hers is an inconsolable individuality of transition, turbulence, search, and rebellion; too strong to be a vine, yet too weak to be an oak. An impatient intellectual, […] [she poured] all her subsequent works [into a] ferment that never achieved harmony. There is so much pain in these cries, occasionally punctuated by flashes of brilliance […]. A living person during the time of cultural upheaval, she confesses the struggles and impulses of a woman who yearns to unleash her inner humanity.
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> Happier still are those women who sought to liberate their femininity in art and succeeded. Several such notable figures emerge, blessed with extraordinary gifts from above (Feldman, 1918–1919/1985, pp. 181–182).
>
> Indeed, she [Kazimiera Zawistowska] was truly a woman and had the courage to be genuine, to reveal female secrets, to bare herself in her poetry, with nothing to hide behind but the cloak of her artistry. In reading her work, we feel the pulsating rhythm of her feminine instinct, as it longs languidly in the purple twilight. […] We feel her youthful joy, so charming only in children and lovers (Feldman, 1918–1919/1985, p. 183).

In the summary of his chapter dedicated to female poets, Feldman wrote: "[t]he name of women who write is legion, for they are as numerous as domestic pianists" (1918–1919/1985, p. 183). He saw the sources of their inspiration mainly in love and literature. Feldman believed that literature in particular was a "problematic and all the more dangerous" muse of writing women, for it "dictate[d] multiple volumes of poems that [were] full of sentiment and very cultured in form" (Feldman, 1918–1919/1985, p. 183). This way of discussing women's poetry as 'cultural' work, derived both from emotions and other texts (which were, significantly, always authored by men), perpetuated the stereotype of women's artistic activity as emotional, autobiographical, and derivative. This allowed Feldman to interpret, for example, Wolska's works as more or less successful imitations of contemporary French poets, or to trace influences of Edward Burne-Jones and Jan Kasprowicz in Ostrowska's poetry.

The decision to place female poets in a separate chapter in Feldman's textbook excluded women writers from the mainstream poetic production of Young Poland. This contradicted the earlier inclusion of women writers in his *Wybór poezyj 'Młodej Polski*.' Admittedly, women's poetic output had grown immensely over the years separating the publication of Feldman's *Wybór poezyj 'Młodej Polski'* and *Współczesna literatura polska*. Nevertheless, in contrast to what he wrote at the beginning of the twentieth century, Feldman now categorised women's poetry as predominantly focused mainly on love themes. This effectively marginalised the diverse styles and themes found in women's poetry: the folk overtones of Arnsztajnowa's works, Wojnarowska's revolutionary engagement, generational anxieties in Czerkawska's texts, or the Parnassian attempts made by Rabska. The critic thus assigned female poets to erotica because, in seeking a common denominator for women poets, he found nothing else – so diverse were their individualities.

A few more words must be uttered regarding Feldman's irony, specifically his comparison of female poets to amateur pianists. Contrary to the critic's intentions, this analogy highlights the issue of the evolving model of women's education. Writing poems may have become a new element of (self-)education for girls in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. On the one hand, this practice could be seen as a form of rebellion against traditional domestic education, based on the rote memorization of foreign words and the repetition of scales. On the other hand, similar to Young Poland's women turning to painting, poem writing could fulfil the emancipatory needs and a desire for a creative life for many intellectually aspiring women. In this context, conventionality would be a significant aspect of women's literary activity, since it served as the first step towards original creativity, even if most writing females would never take that step. It is also worth remembering that women's salon poetry has a long tradition of *album amicorum*, or a book of friends, dating back at least to the pre--Romantic era; hence, this particular poetry should be revisited and examined within that context.

The solutions employed by Feldman in his anthology and his textbook thus reveal the conflicting tendencies of modernity. His poetry anthology, accompanied by a concise introduction, presents modernist female poets as fully-fledged co-creators of the era, representing various *–isms*, rather than naïve newbies fixated on love themes. On the other hand, the literary synthesis and evaluative commentary contained in Feldman's textbook excludes female

poets from the literary landscape of the era, portraying them as a group solely concerned with their own gender and focused on erotica, while imitating male masters.

At the end of the Second Polish Republic era, Tadeusz Żeleński-Boy creatively reworked Feldman's early solutions. In 1939, Boy compiled an anthology titled *Młoda Polska. Wybór poezji* [Young Poland. A selection of poetry] for the *Biblioteka Narodowa* [The National Library] series. This publication came at a time when the modernism of the interwar period was in decline. In consequence, Polish literary critique could consciously draw from modernism and make mature selections from it. Boy's perspective replaced Feldman's as a co-creator of Young Poland and a participant in its most significant literary battles. In contrast, Boy was a great – though not uncritical – admirer of the era of Young Poland that coincided with his youth. He also promoted the secular trend in French culture, emphasising the significant role played there by female writers, organisers of literary salons, and patrons.

In the anthology he compiled, Boy combined both of Feldman's texts, thus annotating his own selection of female poems with extensive commentary. The dependence of Boy's endeavour on his predecessor's ideas is evident at first glance. For instance, in one of the subchapters in the introduction titled "The Female Element," the arrangement and selection of poems replicate the majority of Feldman's concepts. However, while Boy upheld Feldman's opinion about the 'new tone' that Young Poland's poetry introduced to erotica, he did not attribute such a tone solely to women, recognizing it in two complementary and dialoguing versions: male and female.

Moreover, he reminded his readers that Young Poland's lyric poetry was a significant rebellion against the positivist worldview which "considered rhyming verses as a trivial pursuit for rational individuals" (Żeleński-Boy, 1939/1947, p. V). He also pointed out that positivism deemed love poetry as particularly unworthy and a waste of time. According to Boy's interpretation, all authors of Young Poland's erotic poetry, regardless of gender, were literary and social revolutionaries. Yet, he credited his cousin, Kazimierz Przerwa-Tetmajer as the most prominent innovator in lyric poetry. These innovations would include "the social note, often inspired more by the plight of workers than peasants, the pathos of nature in the Tatra mountains, the 'melancholy, longing, sadness, disillusionment,' and… women" (Żeleński-Boy, 1939/1947, p. V).

Equally importantly, Boy wrote about female poets without using the infantilizing terms applied by Feldman. He perceived conventionality or mannerism in the "chatter" of all the voices of Young Poland – again, without making a distinction based on gender:

> The participation of women in the Young Poland movement was significant and it cannot be overlooked. Although the greatest female talent, Zapolska, expressed herself in another field, there were many very gifted female writers who emerged in poetry. These writers introduced a different tone than what was somewhat imposed on their predecessors by their era. This tone is equivalent to the values that Tetmajer brought to poetry; the previous monologue of love poetry becomes a dialogue. […] Besides, what a chatter of young voices! This lesser-known women's poetry represents the 'Young Poland' style of the era, in which a female speaks of her 'beauty' – trapped in a corset and a solid dress with puffed sleeves – and 'scornfully' throws 'the royal gift of her body' to someone. Among men, there is a certain style that prevails among lesser bards, which was later severely ridiculed. It was characterised by nirvanas, swans, temples, lyres, Greek mythology married to Hindu terminology, and many other props, which were, in fact, overused (Żeleński-Boy, 1939/1947, pp. XLIV–XLV).

At this point it is impossible not to acknowledge the consequences of using certain imagery and metaphors in the critical discourses found in the anthologies discussed above. While both editors share a worldview rooted in positivism that encourages them to draw upon the imaginative reservoir of natural sciences in their narratives about literary phenomena, Feldman more frequently describes the group of great poetic individuals as "a mighty forest" and poets of lesser stature as "flowers" that "have their own allure and fragrance" despite "grow[ing] in the shadow of these trees" (Feldman, 1903, p. VII). Expanding on these comparisons, we reach the image of seeds from which certain plants grow because such is their 'nature'. Accordingly, a tree will never become a flower, and a flower will never become a tree; mediocre poets will never achieve greatness because that is simply how they were born.

In contrast, Boy consistently described Young Poland as a dynamic period, characterised by the movement of various individuals. They are "[n]ot a group or a school, but an entire era; a collection of diverse, often conflicting individualities who, acting simultaneously, met, converged, diverged, influenced each other – in other words, lived" (Żeleński-Boy, 1939, p. IV). He also noted that "Young

Poland – in its broadest sense – was not a static phenomenon, nor was it merely a literary school. It was a movement, and this movement had various phases and physiognomies" (Żeleński-Boy, 1939, p. VII). Such an image allows one to recognise that a poet's greatness does not rely solely on their innate talent, as even someone naturally gifted requires education and interaction with other people to refine their gift.

For the perception of women's creativity, both ways of thinking have far-reaching consequences. According to Feldman, a woman poet can only be seen as a 'flower,' because according to the perspective on women's nature as emotional, receptive, and imitative that prevailed at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, she simply cannot be a 'tree.' On the other hand, Boy believed that a woman poet could achieve the same level of artistry as a male poet, provided she led as intellectually active a life as he did. The fact that her intellectual and artistic aspirations were significantly limited by law and social conventions was another matter, of which Boy – unlike most of his generation – was aware and systematically discussed it in his journalistic texts.

It seems that Boy achieved a good balance in his selection, including and excluding femininity and women's poetry from/to the literature of Young Poland. His commentary acknowledges the presence of a distinct gender group of creators and gives them due recognition, while the anthology section presents female achievements in various trends, genres, and themes. This balance, which remained unchanged when the National Library reissued the pre-war edition of Boy's compilation in 1947, was disrupted in the late 1950s and early 1960s by Jan Zygmunt Jakubowski's publishing efforts. Jakubowski compiled two anthologies: *Młoda Polska* [Young Poland] (1962) for school use, and *Poetki Młodej Polski* [Female poets of Young Poland] (1963). Like other textbook authors at the time (Smulski, 2011, pp. 325–335), in *Młoda Polska* Jakubowski attempted to fit literary history into ideological frameworks. He aimed to prove that the literature from the turn of the century illustrated the "revolutionary and liberatory aspirations of the masses, particularly the working class" (Jakubowski, 1962, p. 7).

Nevertheless, the poetry of this time resisted such interpretations. According to Jakubowski, instead of being truly 'patriotic' or socially engaged, Young Poland's poems were characterised by "poetizing"; these were "poems glaringly empty in thought and feeling," evoking "moods of discouragement, weariness, and disbelief in life" (Jakubowski, 1962, p. 34). In other words, this poetry was full of decadence that was rejected by the optimistic materialist worldview. Only

in passing did Jakubowski acknowledge that Polish lyrical poetry owed "new artistic achievements" such as "bold associations of poetic words with visual and musical elements" (Jakubowski, 1962, pp. 35–36) to the modernist poets. These marginalised achievements are represented by the works of Komornicka, Ostrowska, and Wolska (one poem each) because they were the only female poets considered by the anthology editor. Interestingly, none of their texts address the theme of love, except for Ostrowska's poem "Otwórz, Janku!" [Johnny, open!] (1915), which is an example of folk song stylisation.

In including women's poems in a school anthology, Jakubowski echoed the universalizing gestures of Feldman and Boy. Yet, soon afterwards, he continued his predecessors' work on the 'female element,' publishing *Poetki Młodej Polski* [Female poets of Young Poland] (1963). However, in the introduction to this anthology, he honestly acknowledged that he saw no artistic reason to categorise literature by gender, stating that "poetry should rather be discussed without adjectives (If it is bad, it is not poetry at all, and no specification of gender matters)" (Jakubowski, 1963, p. 5). Thus, he drew upon an argument that had long been present in literary discourse, and would continue to be employed in the future. Nevertheless, he recognised the historical and psychological factors, such as the emancipation resulting from social movement and the theme of love woven into narratives by women endowed with a newfound consciousness.

According to Jakubowski, the work of Young Poland's women poets represents the second stage of the 'struggle' for women's equality both in life and literature. The first stage was positivism, when the participation of women poets in national culture (with Maria Konopnicka at the forefront) involved addressing "general themes (philosophical, national, social)" (Jakubowski, 1963, p. 6). In Young Poland, by contrast, women's creativity is characterised by a "rebellion against the pathos of civic service that marked much of [Konopnicka's] work" and "increasingly bold efforts to transform distinctly feminine experiences into *bona fide* poetry, as exemplified in the interwar works of Maria Pawlikowska, the greatest Polish female poet (and perhaps one of the most original poetic phenomena altogether) of the twentieth century" (Jakubowski, 1963, p. 6).

For Jakubowski, the achievements of Young Poland's women poets connect the humanistically infused work of Konopnicka with the purely feminine lyricism of Pawlikowska. However, this connection is tainted by the imitation of Konopnicka's diction, which can exemplified by the works of Arnsztajnowa, Grossek-Korycka, or Trzeszczkowska. Besides, Jakubowski considered both

Konopnicka herself and her followers to be inept students of Juliusz Słowacki, and, later, of Charles Baudelaire and Kazimierz Przerwa-Tetmajer. Particularly the latter two, as the editor emphasised, emboldened the 'imagination' of turn--of-the-century women poets to abandon ascetic conventions of previous eras and embrace 'exhibitionism.' This, in turn, brought about the bold erotic poems written by Liliana (Flora Hufnagel), for instance. Notably, Jakubowski did not include her poems in his anthology.

Considering the 'artistic' reasons, i.e. answering the question of "what in this abundant production of women's poetry has retained lasting value and whether it has brought original contributions to the history of literature", Jakubowski simply stated that "it was certainly not a link of pure gold" (Jakubowski, 1963, pp. 8–9) and suggested that among the 'legion' of women writers, there were many scribblers. This is the main source of his clear aversion to the women poets he wrote about (with the sole exception of Ostrowska and Wolska). He accused them of being derivative and schematic, reducing common themes, moods, and motifs of modernist poetry to caricature, and utilising workshop solutions associated with Adam Asnyk, Maria Konopnicka, Stanisław Przybyszewski, and Kazimierz Przerwa-Tetmajer. Jakubowski thus seems oblivious to Boy's remarks from twenty years earlier about conventionality being a flaw also in modernist works by men.

Like Feldman's irony, Jakubowski's critical passion offers a fresh perspective on the obsessions of the era and conventional approaches. For example, it prompts us to reconsider the motif of the 'lonely soul' wandering through dark wastelands, revealing in such obsessive returns something beyond mere imitation of male patterns. Accordingly, Jakubowski explores feminine expressions of melancholy and powerlessness in the poems of Sława Pruszyńska, Ida Loś Pilecka, and Maria Markowska. He also contemplates "authentic female emotions," appreciating them in Kazimiera Zawistowska's sonnet "Ksieni" [Prioress] (1909), for instance. In this sonnet, however, we should question if "genuine tears [that] fall on the image of a child in the psalter" truly are, as Jakubowski suggests, "authentic tears of sorrow and longing for motherhood" (Jakubowski, 1963, p. 19), or if they stem from mystical experiences or mourning of lost opportunities for creative expression, which may manifest through metaphors and imagery associated with pregnancy and childbirth. To Jakubowski's credit, he expanded the list of the female poets initially compiled by Feldman and restated by Boy, including the names of Anna Zahorska-Savitri, Anna Neumanowa, Krystyna

Saryusz–Zaleska, Sława Pruszyńska, and Wanda Stanisławska. As mentioned already, he did not include the poems of Liliana in the anthology.

Anthologies and commentaries on the works of Young Poland poetesses curated by Feldman, Boy, and Jakubowski have their continuations in the collections edited in the last decades of the twentieth century. Their authors find their methodological rationale in the pioneering research of Maria Podraza-Kwiatkowska, including a chapter titled "Salome i Androgyne: Mizoginizm i emancypacja" [Salome and Androgyne: Misogyny and emancipation] in her monograph *Symbolizm i symbolika Młodej Polski* [Symbolism and symbols of Young Poland] (1975), and her article "Młodopolska Femina" [Young Poland's Femina] (1993). Additionally, Agnieszka Baranowska published a collection of essays titled *Kraj modernistycznego cierpienia* [A country of modernist pain] (1981), where in biographies of lesser-known poetesses, such as Maria Iwanowska (Theresity), Maria Komornicka, Marcelina Kulikowska, Ewa Łuskina, Zofia Trzeszczkowska, and Kazimiera Zawistowska, she explores the complex relationships between literature and life (Baranowska, 1981, p. 11) as well as the consequences of the 'naked soul's' body and gender, such as homoeroticism, madness, or suicide. In the early 1990s, Ireneusz Sikora published two collections: *Antologia liryki Młodej Polski* [An anthology of Young Poland's lyrics] (1990) and *W kręgu Salome i Astarte. Młodopolskie wiersze miłosne* [Among Salome and Astarte. Young Poland's love poetry] (1993). Through these anthologies, Sikora aims to reconcile the criteria of 'representativeness' of women's poetry with its "decent artistic level, judged from today's perspective" (Sikora, 1993, p. 13). In his collections, the works of the most well-known poetesses from earlier anthologies are given equal prominence with male texts.

The end of the twentieth century brought another anthology – the collection *Poetki przełomu XIX I XX wieku* [Poets of the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries] (Zacharska, 2000b) prepared by a research team under the supervision of Jadwiga Zacharska. It is important to note that this is the first such project undertaken by women scholars, as previous selections were the work of male critics and historians. The editor of the collection does not seek to justify the application of gender criteria in literature, as feminist criticism published after 1989, including academic publications by Zacharska herself (2000a, 2002), has already provided confirmation responses to this question and detailed arguments. Therefore, the introduction to this collection simply highlights that,

due to the lack of reprints of Jakubowski's anthology, the collection compiled by Zacharska's team primarily serves an educational purpose, aiming to:

> present the diverse and generally rich output of women writers who engaged in literary activity as a result of the ongoing process of emancipation in the second half of the nineteenth century, thereby illustrating the thesis of the feminisation of literature. The repeated assessments found in literature history textbooks regarding the quantitative and qualitative increase of women's contributions to Young Poland literature have not been confirmed in the analyses and examples found in this literary output, or in available reading selections (Zacharska, 2000b, p. 15).

The anthology discussed here presents a new theoretical and historical literary awareness, also demonstrated in the literary guide *Pisarki polskie od* średniowiecza *do współczesności* [Polish women writers from the Middle Ages to contemporary times], published in the same year (Borkowska, Czermińska, Philips, 2000, p. 6).

Feminist criticism has therefore allowed to include the poetic output of Young Poland women in the mainstream history of the literature from that period, not only as a sociological phenomenon, as was the case at the beginning of the twentieth century, but also as an inseparable part of the artistic achievement of the era.

Apart from literature researchers addressing their work to more or less professional readers such as students, philology majors, and other literary scholars, there are editors who aim to popularise the achievements of modernist poetesses among a wider audience of literature enthusiasts. These initiatives continue the ideas of Feldman who associated women poets with the theme of love. This is seen, for example, in the miniature edition of *Wiersze miłosne poetek Młodej Polski* [Love poems of Young Poland's poetesses] compiled by Andrzej K. Waśkiewicz (2010). However, Waśkiewicz's project had a different goal compared to that of his esteem ed predecessor. Out of the poetic heritage of modernism, Waśkiewicz aimed to select those poems which, in his opinion, remained comprehensible to the contemporary reader who might not have an academic background in literary studies. Therefore, the abovementioned collection includes most of the poems that were previously published and discussed in anthologies.

Women Poets of the First World War. As mentioned earlier, only a small group of female poets from the Young Poland period were recognised in the first half of the twentieth century by researchers and poetry enthusiasts as having written works worthy of inclusion in anthologies and textbooks. This group was only slightly expanded by scholars in the second half of the century and at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This occurred because, while researchers treated women's poetry as a sociological phenomenon, they primarily evaluated poems based on aesthetic criteria, which are more resistant to erosion than ideological criteria. The situation was different for female poets writing during the First World War: their participation in anthologies published between 1914 and 1918 was indeed significant. However, it was not until the end of the twentieth century, with the publication of war poetry collections and studies, that the extent of women's contributions became evident. These collections revealed the number of women who wrote poems about the war and variety of their voices, despite their undeniable conventionality.

Thus, it is worth exploring which war anthologies included women's works, when and where they were published, and what the anthologists and later researchers have to say about women writing about the war. It is also worth examining whether women's texts stand out in any way compared to male-authored texts, or if they blend into the background of male poetry. If they do blend in, one may consider the conclusions that can be drawn from this fact.

The publication dates and places of most war poetry anthologies – primarily those compiled by Stanisław Lam, Ludwik Szczepański, Antoni Euzebiusz Balicki, and Stanisław Łempicki and Adam Fischer – indicate their association with the Austrian partition and the idea of the Polish Legions. The motivation for creating these anthologies declined by 1916, when the Act of 5th November was seen by many Poles as the realisation of their dream of state sovereignty, and by the Legionnaires as the result and culmination of their fight for independence. Essentially, there are no anthologies aiming to consolidate the poetic output of 1914–1918, including works by both military poets and poets not directly involved in armed activities, which were published in the Prussian and Russian partitions. The exception from this rule is the song supplement "Nad rzekami Bablionu" [By the rivers of Babylon] published in *Kalendarz krwi i łez polskich na rok 1917* [The 1917 calendar of blood and tears of the Poles] by Father Dionizy Bączkowski in Kiev (1916). The poems collected in the anthologies compiled by the aforementioned authors thus complemented the picture of poetic creativity

during that period, which emerged from anthologies of songs and Legionary poems published, among others, by Leopold Kronenberg and Adam Zagórski.

The number of women poets' names included in collections increased from volume to volume, but it did not significantly grow after 1916. In the earliest poetry volume *Pieśń nowych Legionów (1914/1915)* [The song of the new Legions] (1915), Stanisław Lam included works by Maria Czerkawska, Kazimiera Greczynówna, Anna Neumanowa, Zofia Krupska, F.C. Kuczyńska, Maria Majchrowiczówna, Melania Medlingerówna, and Maria (neé Fredro) Szembek. In *Poezje wybrane 1914–1916* [Selected poetry, 1914–1916] (1916), Antoni Euzebiusz Balicki included Maria Bażeńska, Zofia Mrozowicka, Wanda Krzyżanowska, and Zuzanna Rabska. In *Pieśń polska w latach wielkiej wojny* [The Polish song during the Great War] (1916), Ludwik Szczepański presented the poems by Maria Czerkawska, Jadwiga from Łobzów (Strokowa), Maria Leszczyńska, Maria Majchrowiczówna, Jadwiga Marcinowska, Rena Maryth, Anna Neumanowa, Anna Wiśniowiecka (pseud. Zofia Zawiszanka), and Gabriela Żółtowska. In the anonymous *Antologia poezyj współczesnych: Rozdzielił nas mój bracie* [An anthology of contemporary poetry: We were separated, my brother] (1916), the following female poets' names appeared: Maria Czerkawska, Maria Czeska (later Czeska-Mączyńska), Maria Konopnicka, Maria Majchrowiczówna, Lila Małecka, Maria Markowska, Anna Sokołowska, and Maryla Wolska. The most space was given to women poets by Stanisław Łempicki and Adam Fischer in their *Polska pieśń wojenna* [Polish war songs] (1916); the editors included poems by Aleksandra Dziubówna, Kazimiera Iłłakowiczówna, Zofia Krupska, Wanda Krzyżanowska, F.C. Kuczyńska, Kazimiera Lityńska, Maria Majchrowiczówna, Lila Małecka, Maria Markowska, Maria Marossanyi, Melania Medlingerówna, Anna Neumanowa, Bronisława Ostrowska, Maria Szczepanik, Maria (neé Fredro) Szembek, Maria Strońska, Maryla Wolska, Helena Zbierzchowska, and Gabriela Żółtowska. In *Kalendarz krwi i łez polskich na rok 1917* (1916) published in eastern Poland by Fr. Dionizy Bączkowski, the names of women poets included were: H. Arciszewska, Janina Górska, Zofia Karpowicz, Felicja Kruszewska, Janina Kulesza, Maria Linowska, Ina Lutyń-Orska, Eliza Podczaska, Izabella Rolińska, Irena Sielicka, Teresa Słomińska, Stanisława Szczepańska, and Zofia Szymanowska.

In the three anthologies published after the First World War, the names of Maria Kazecka and Maryla Wolska were included in the chapter "Wilno – Legiony 6/VIII 1914 r. – 6/VIII 1928 r." [Vilnus – the Legions 6 Aug 1914 – 6 Aug 1928] (1928) from the collection *Lwów w pieśni poetów lwowskich. Antologia*

1.XI.1918 – 1.V.1919 [Lviv in the songs of its poets: an anthology, 1 Nov 1918 – 1 May 1919] (1919) by Kazimierz Bukowski. Additionally, *Antologia współczesnej poezji polskiej* [An anthology of contemporary Polish poetry] (1926) by Edward Słoński included the names of Janina Kirtiklisowa, Eugenia Masiejewska, Maria Markowska, Janina Olszewska, and Anna Zahorska-Savitri. Many women's poems recurred in the aforementioned volumes because the anthologists used the work of their predecessors, as they openly acknowledged. Thus, one can say that the anthologies included a greater number of women poets' names, but not an increased corpus of their works. It is also possible that the unidentified initials with which the texts in the discussed collections were signed may conceal the names of female writers.

The occurrence of increased poetry production during the First World War was not limited to Polish literature; Germany also witnessed a similar phenomenon (Orłowski, 1968, pp. 365–387). The authors of war poetry collections attributed this phenomenon to the historical significance of the moment, while literary critics examined its internal dynamics, such as the interplay between political events and the psychology of the nation and the individual. In the following excerpt from the 1916 issue of *Nowa Reforma* [The New Reform], Karol Irzykowski offers an ironic commentary:

> First off, we must get rid of the banal conviction that 'Inter arma silent Musae.' […] [W]hile literature does not thrive when treated as a business, it still emanates from people throughout their whole beings. Structured and monopolised production gives way to spontaneous and mass production (Irzykowski, 1916, pp. 215–216).
>
> Quantity, of course, is inversely proportional to quality in this case. However, it is not about the quality of this literature, but rather its spontaneous spread, which shows the extent and nature of the poetry that exists within the people and the populace. This average measure of poetry, which every person who is not engaged in its creation during normal times possesses for their own use, has now found its voice. People are writing such poems, hymns, and other elucubrations that correspond to the average spiritual culture of the nation. The quality of these works is quite low […].
>
> War is like love. […] [E]ven a salesman can become a poet if need be. The greatest philistine will write their first and last poem during courtship, discovering that "May" rhymes with "hooray." This is even more true in the case of war. And it is death, its omnipresence, that causes this.

> Today, when war affects not only soldiers but also the less martial citizens, when everyone has lost someone or something, and everyone faces some danger or holds some hope, the universal cataclysm of souls is most evident. After all, this war is different for us compared to previous ones. […] The significance of Poland's most serious problems is being reassessed and reviewed: the state, the homeland, society – these concepts become dynamic, they come alive. Death, the great equaliser, looms over all. Without it, these problems would not exist (Irzykowski, 1916, p. 216).

The recognition of the close connection between literature and external circumstances led anthologists and researchers of First World War poetry to view it as a sociological phenomenon, rather than an artistic one. Accordingly, they openly refrained from evaluating poetry based on aesthetic criteria. One notable example is Stanisław Lam's preface to *Pieśni nowych Legionów*. As a literary scholar and author of a previously published anthology of January Uprising poetry (Lam & Brzeg-Piskozub, 1913), S. Lam had a profound understanding of the motivations behind such publications, as well as a keen recognition of literary traditions referenced by the war poets. His insights were utilised by the authors of subsequently published anthologies and by researchers of Polish literature throughout the twentieth century.

S. Lam formulated his remarks in 1915 when the extensive scale of Polish war poetry was not yet clearly visible. Unlike Irzykowski, S. Lam confirmed the wisdom of the ancients, stating that war "has scared away inspiration" and "all cultural and intellectual life has died" (S. Lam, 1915, p. 4). He claimed that there is "no corner of the Polish land where one can devote oneself to creativity," therefore great poetry could not arise there, and the poetic output of the Legions was "modest" and "relatively sparse" compared to German poetic production (S. Lam, 1915, p. 4). S. Lam justified compiling an anthology of war-themed poetry, despite its 'modest' output, in two ways. Firstly, he aimed to document his times and record "the feelings and views of contemporaries in their most essential manifestation," with future readers in mind, for those who "will one day desire to reach into the poetic treasury of the years of the Great War but will have neither the time, nor the means to review today's already difficult-to--assemble emigration writings" (S. Lam, 1915, p. 4).

Secondly, S. Lam aimed to "uplift hearts" by offering a vision of a bright future; he wanted to bring consolation through "a little book that, amidst the darkness of the present, will bring a ray of comfort and hope. This book will

showcase the vitality of ideas and the nobility of slogans through the words of a freshly written song" (S. Lam, 1915, p. 5). The documentary and consolatory goals of S. Lam's endeavour were intertwined with a prophetic element, evident in the arrangement of the collection and its development:

> Starting with lights and shadows on the edge of erotic and martial lyricism – through those enthusiastic "Eaglets of the Legions" ready to fight, through farewell blessings and solemn advice – up to the "Song of the Legionnaires" already marching to the front line, their "bloody ploughing," toil and effort, "nights spent by the artillery," and ultimately… death on the battlefield. Occasional verses […] and emigration poems […] were added here as a kind of poetry that in tone and character belongs among the songs of the Legions; all of this culminates in a peaceful vision of the future (S. Lam, 1915, p. 5).

Nevertheless, the 'literary value' of the poetic chronicles of the first months of the war that S. Lam used as his source material proves problematic. Therefore he suggests "not placing great importance or having high critical expectations for them" (S. Lam, 1915, p. 5). He presents three reasons why the artistry of the "chronicles" is not their strong suit. The first one concerns the intensity of emotion: the war pieces are "all written in heart's blood, drawn under too strong an impression for the voice of the soul to be forged into a finished form" (S. Lam, 1915, p. 5). The second argument is the lack of detachment, "necessary perspective and passage of time, which would be able to transform the material of pulsating life into exclusively literary material" (S. Lam, 1915, p. 5). The third reason is the pressure of literary tradition which causes the poems from the First World War period to be "strikingly similar" to nineteenth-century independence poetry, particularly the poetry of the January Uprising: "[a] comparison will show that here and there are the same premises of reasoning, the same developmental stages: calls to action, battle songs, prayers for mercy, faith in a better future" (S. Lam, 1915, p. 6). The pressure of tradition is so great, and the language of independence literature so heavily mythologised since the Romantic era, that even mature creators who consciously sought new forms could not convey and reveal it in realistic images: "a notable fact, and one in stark contrast to reality, is the mood of the song and its relation to the realism of war. For while in the latter there is a complete absence of all romanticism, stripping away the halo of chivalry of the past era – poetry remains steadfast in its old position and has not budged an inch" (S. Lam, 1915, p. 6).

Not all of the material collected by S. Lam is lacklustre, because among those that picked up the pen during the war were those professional and mature creators who already operated with a recognizable lyrical idiom before 1914. Additionally, new talents emerged, provoked by History and shining against the backdrop of a multitude of second-rate occasional poets. Unfortunately, S. Lam also includes female poets in this latter group:

> Those and other bards represented here are accompanied by the voices of female poets that resound abundantly. Although unable to actively participate in the fight of the Legions, these women nonetheless contributed their greatest asset to the organisation: a compassionate heart. And it is within this attribute that one should find the key to the secret of these poems, which are mostly written with no pretence nor ambition. This gift, however, is just as precious and valuable as any other addition made to the national treasury today (S. Lam, 1915, pp. 5–6).

The above excerpt stands out among other 'introductions' and 'prefaces' to war poetry anthologies, and not only because it is the only fragment that refers to women poets. It also contains two important attitudes towards their works. On the one hand, the above fragment stigmatises women's war poetry as even more conventional than men's poetry discussed in this context. On the other hand, it recognises and appreciates such poetry as an expression of national unity during a politically, socially, and organizationally problematic struggle for independence. Thus, despite the initial, explicit dismissal of aesthetic criteria in the evaluation of the literary aftermath of the war, S. Lam still applies them covertly when examining women's creativity. Important in this context is the remark that women write "with no pretence nor ambition." Where does such certainty come from, and what function does it serve here? Does it not give a covert yet clearly audible message, directed not only at women: only during breakthrough events for the community, when declarations of national solidarity matter, can minor poets – to use Wilhelm Feldman's comparisons – find themselves, like lesser wildflowers, in the 'wreath' usually made of more noble varieties?

The editors of later anthologies follow S. Lam's line of argument, but they no longer separate women as a distinct creative group. This may be because S. Lam, a professional literary scholar, had the greatest appreciation for the novelty of women's poetry in Young Poland. Since he includes literature of the early years of the First World War in this period, he uses categories and tools developed

before 1914 to describe it. S. Lam's memory of the women poets of Young Poland – the voices of modernist rebels and priestesses of love – leads him to assign women writers to the private sphere and men writers to the public sphere, which traditionally includes war. From this assignment comes the observation that when women leave the private sphere and enter the public sphere, for instance, voicing opinions on the war, they write worse than men. This happens even when the lyrical 'I' in women's works takes on traditional roles assigned to the female gender, such as urging fathers, brothers, fiancés, husbands, and sons to fight, expressing longing for them, mourning their deaths, and honouring the memory of their fight for independence. Most of the women's texts included in S. Lam's anthology belong to this first trend, and if mourning poetry does appear, it is always with the conviction that sacrificing one's life on the altar of the Homeland is worthwhile.

S. Lam's successors were driven by the ambition to showcase works of 'all' kinds. This could be seen as a tendency towards propagandistic democratism, suggesting that during the time when efforts were being made to regain independent statehood, all Poles, regardless of gender, would have likely felt the same. It is worth asking whether further collectors of independence literature also categorised it into male and female trends, as S. Lam did, because they were already aware of the significant presence of women in the Legionary movement.[1] Women were active not only in the auxiliary services such as logistics, intelligence, and medical care, where they fulfilled their 'natural' predispositions to care for the weak, sick, and dying, but also in line units, where they arrived disguised as men and with the consent of their immediate superiors. One such woman was poet Zofia Zawiszanka (1928, 1935) (*primo voto* Gąsiorowska, *secundo voto* Kernowa), who wrote under the nickname Anna Wiśniowiecka. Even if a widespread conspiracy of silence was a condition for maintaining the situation depicted above, as it was contrary to the patriarchal gender contract (Wawrzykowska-Wierciochowa, 1988; Janion, 1996, pp. 78–101), it was no longer possible to compose an anthology of war lyrics solely with such female texts in which the lyrical 'I' assumed the mask of a defenceless and

1 For further reading, see: Fleszarowa, 1918; Walewska, 1926; Piłsudska, Rycherówna, Pełczyńska, Dąbrowska, 1927; T. Nałęcz, 1994; Jankowski, 2012.

weeping being. Therefore, if we optimistically assume the democratic goodwill of the anthologists, each of the general statement about the role of poetry in the pivotal moments of Polish history they provide offers specific conclusions regarding the status and function of women poets in the years 1914–1918.

Among these general statements is, first and foremost, a claim that everything that concerns and affects men also concerns and affects women. The First World War was, indeed, still primarily a positional war, allowing for the traditional division between military personnel and civilians to be maintained. Yet, the development of emancipation and pacifist movements during the *belle epoque* led to the widespread belief that war is a catastrophe for entire societies, not just isolated groups delegated to military operations. War poetry confirms that war is everyone's concern, as it is written about by both men and women. It is authored not only by professional poets, but by representatives from various classes and professions who would have never taken up the pen if not for the impulse of History. Although the voices of many amateur poets may not have been trained, and they may differ in scale and pitch, they unite to form a choir singing the same song of freedom. This is emphasised, among others, by Stanisław Łempicki and Adam Fischer:

> In the gallery of authors, there is a variety of names and individuals. Some were previously unknown before the war but have now gained poetic fame […]. Furthermore, there are numerous young talents, some in full bloom, but not yet fully aware of themselves. Others are perhaps accidental, fleeting, exploding at certain moments like shrapnel in a field, more products of the moment, of mood, than of lasting abilities. Lastly, there are those who have much to say but struggle with articulation and form… (Łempicki & Fischer, 1916, p. VII).

Secondly, the inclusion of female poets in anthologies and studies of First World War poetry suggests that, in the face of History, everyone is equal. This means that women, just like men, experience and express national fears and hopes. Ludwik Szczepański writes, "I wanted to present readers with *a full picture of the characteristic currents and emotional and intellectual vibrations* that ran through our society during the years of the global upheaval. […] I aimed to ensure that the book would not lack any characteristic note, even if it were the work of an untrained hand: the book is meant to be a *lyrical document of the moment*, resonating with all its chords" (Szczepański, 1916, pp. 5–6, emphasis in the original). Similarly, Łempicki and Fischer express hope that their anthology

"will serve both the Polish Cause and Polish Poetry, preserving things that are not inconsequential to the Polish heart and culture" (Łempicki & Fischer, 1916, p. VIII).

Moreover, through writing, women participate in actions and accomplishments that are analogous to the armed actions of men. They attest to the vitality of the nation, document the enduring aspirations of the Polish people for independence, and express their readiness to support the struggle and sacrifice of the nation through concrete social actions. Antoni Euzebiusz Balicki writes, "[l]et this volume, with a selected bouquet from the multitude of today's lyrics, be a testament that the nation has truly not perished, that even in its most tragic moments it does not lose hope, believes in the triumph of Truth, and awaits a well-deserved Resurrection through Deed and Work!" (Balicki, 1916, p. 15). Likewise, Łempicki and Fischer emphasise:

> After all, the material presented here […] is not intended for historical and literary analysis. Instead, it aims to evoke strong experiences and feelings, as well as to strengthen, educate, and inspire. Its purpose is to reinforce faith in the value of Polish arms and the indomitable Polish spirit, to teach a fervent love for the Homeland, and inspire action and work towards Poland's betterment… Finally, it is worth noting that part of the proceeds from this book has been allocated by the Publisher to the fund for widows and orphans of Legionnaires, as indicated by the red coupon attached to each copy (Łempicki & Fischer, 1916, pp. VII–VIII).

Finally, and stemming from the above, women's experiences are an inseparable part of the national tradition and its 'transmission belt': women connect the past with the present, passing on old ideas to new times and people through literature. This literature, as emphasised by anthologists of war poetry with the use of a romantic formula, is the Ark of the Covenant between the old and the new years.[2] Therefore, the strong conventionalization of this lyricism, consciously

2 This is a reference to a fragment of 'Song of the Wajdelote' in the narrative poem Konrad Wallenrod (1828) by Adam Mickiewicz, the leading representative of Polish Romanticism. The excerpt paraphrased here is as follows: "O native song! between the elder day, / Ark of the Covenant, and younger times, / Wherein their heroes' swords the people lay, / Their flowers of thought and web of native rhymes. […] O native song! thou art as guardian placed, / Defending memories of a nation's word" (ll. 835–838,

marginalised but noticed by its anthologisers, researchers, and publishers, and felt as shackles difficult to throw off even by professional poets, cannot disqualify the work of women, just as it does not disqualify the work of men.

The central issue here is not just the love for the Homeland and the response to the call of History, which would erase the sins of epigones and scribbles who heavily borrowed from the treasury of literary tradition. As Balicki emphasises, "this is the main, most important, and most beautiful quality, even though it comes in various forms in terms of emotion, thought, content, and execution!" (Balicki, 1916, p. 15). Similarly, Ludwik Szczepański remarks: "[t]he artistic value of the poems included in this collection is not uniform, but they all serve as significant lyrical records of the moment" (Balicki, 1916, p. 9). However, the primary importance of this poetry lies in its communication within the national community. This community seeks to rebuilt itself and can only do so through the petrified model of Tyrtaean poetry, the language of irredentist and independence poetry, which has been developed by successive generations, starting from the eighteenth-century confederations and insurrections, through the uprisings of the nineteenth century, to the revolutionary events of 1905–1907. This is the only language that can be understood in the Polish land, which had been divided among three different states for over a century.

In the Tyrtaean model, literary value is not essential; instead, the focus is on the extraliterary 'deed,' that is, fight for independence. This kind of poetry serves a persuasive function rather than having an autotelic quality. Its goal is to evoke national values, mobilise for struggle, call for revenge, and propose scenarios for action. It achieves this by utilising a range of genres, themes, and images from classical and classicist poetics, as well as from folk and religious traditions. Preferred genres in this model include hymns, elegies, epitaphs, carols, lullabies, laments, litanies, prayers, and prophecies. Common metaphors

841–842; see Mickiewicz, 1828/1882, pp. 41–42). Wajdelote Halban's words highlight the role played by oral tradition in the nation's memory of its past. In contrast to material culture, territories and state institutions, which may be destroyed or taken over by enemies and partitioners, oral tradition cannot be destroyed. Poetry as an oral form is compared here to the biblical Ark of the Covenant because it contains what is most precious for the nation: proof of its existence in history, and a testament to its original culture and its own language.

are, for instance, the rebirth of a seed and the resurrection of Christ. In the Tyrtaean model, where poetry is meant to be a companion and comforter of fighters and a chronicler of events and heroic deeds, song structures are particularly privileged. This is because they ensure a prompt response to external circumstances, comprehensibility, and acceptance of the message among readers with diverse educational, ideological, and political backgrounds. This genre also facilitates easy memorization, oral transmission, and reproduction due to its specific syntactic structures connected with melody and rhythm. The Tyrtaean model, considered the standard of honourable conduct for Polish men throughout the entire nineteenth century, was gradually embraced by female poets during the years 1914–1918. By cultivating it, women poets suggested that they too could embody national ideals in their own lives. Thus, the Tyrtaean model of the poet-soldier gained a gender complement and became the ideal of the potential poetess-soldier through women's active participation in this convention.

The voices of women poets included in the discussed anthologies are highly conventionalised and do not differ from the equally conventionalised voices of male poets. This is not only because women wish to speak as citizens, members, and representatives of the national community and want to be heard and understood by it, but also because the anthologists representing the political program of the Legionary movement and its related literary current are interested in incorporating women into their own propaganda efforts. The leaders, participants, and sympathisers of the Legions quickly acquired the bitter knowledge that their actions did not elicit widespread enthusiasm in Polish society. As a result, they sought to legitimise their actions and show them as heroic by appropriating the traditions of nineteenth-century insurrections and twentieth-century revolutions. All references and allusions to the heroes of the Kościuszko Insurrection and the years 1831 and 1864 in the introductions and forewords to the war poetry anthologies discussed in this work were meant to create the impression that only the Legionary soldiers, especially those serving under Józef Piłsudski's command, and those who supported and assisted them, were the rightful heirs of the knights of Grunwald, insurgents of Racławice, the January Uprising fighters of Grochowiska, and so on. Including women poets in anthologies that align with the Legionary literature is therefore also aimed at promoting the ideal of solidarity: here, too, Polish women fulfil their national duty and are with us!

What is missing from the First World War poetry anthologies, for these obvious psychological, political, and propaganda reasons, has been expressed – though incompletely due to official and unofficial censorship – in the poems published in individual collections of various authors. However, these poems did not have as strong an impact on readers as the collective volumes, due to their chronological, geographical, and class dispersion. Among the anthologists, only Balicki mentions a register that is absent in the collections of war poetry, namely, pacifism. He states that despite Poles' recognition of pacifist ideas and their longing for peaceful coexistence with all people, the historical moment diminishes our empathy for the suffering of other nationalities. Unfortunately, Polish war poetry is not a song about the "Citizen of the Whole World […] in the State of Humanity":

> We still cannot sing such a song… Firstly, we need to consider our own nation and our own foundations. We must first resurrect ourselves, secure human happiness and peace of mind for ourselves and among ourselves, before we can fraternise and unite the souls of the entire world—good souls, free from selfishness, purified of all that is worldly and base… (Balicki, 1916, p. 12).

Editors of anthologies published after 1916, including those that appeared after Poland had regained independence, no longer accompanied them with such extensive commentaries as the compilers of the previously discussed volumes; the Act of 5th November clearly weakens their persuasive energy. When Edward Słoński writes the foreword to his 1926 anthology, his attitude is already diametrically different from that of the anthologists active between 1914 and 1918. Although he considers war poetry a continuation and pinnacle achievement of the independence-focused lyricism of Young Poland, he is exclusively interested in documenting it as an aesthetic phenomenon, not a sociological one. The marginalisation of ideological and propagandistic criteria of assessment means that there is only room for a few women poets in the collection he edited; these are Maria Markowska, Janina Olszewska, and Anna Zahorska-Savitri. At the same time, Słoński omitted the entire host of occasional, second-rate female poets remembered by his predecessors. In his view, the trend for independence lyrics definitively exhausted itself: "today Young Poland already belongs to the past and constitutes a closed period that enriched Polish culture" (Słoński, 1926, p. 6). Accordingly, it deserves due homage, as "it has contributed more than we

suppose to the resurrection of Poland" (Słoński, 1926, p. 6), but its representatives should nevertheless be assigned new tasks:

> I believe that many of them, in a rejuvenated and liberated Poland, and having moved on from Romanticism, will establish a new approach, better suited to the demands of the new political environment, and will discover a fresh voice within themselves for a new song, which will no longer proclaim to the entire world: 'we live and we will live,' because our ministries and our bayonets already do that for us (Słoński, 1926, p. 5).

In a sense, Słoński's direct appeal to poets of the bygone era – including women writing war-themed poems – resembles an unspoken message directed in the 1920s by the leaders of the reborn state to war veterans who were a constant presence in the Polish public sphere: you have fulfilled your duty, and now you can either step aside or integrate into the new reality.

The reversion to caution when assessing the artistic merits of war poetry, as seen in Edward Słoński's introduction, is also apparent in the statements of its interwar collectors, researchers, and authors of modern literary history textbooks. Wilhelm Feldman treated such caution kindly at the dawn of independence in his *Współczesna literatura polska* [Polish contemporary literature] (1918, p. 62), and in the 1930s Ignacy Fik did so in his work *Dwadzieścia lat literatury polskiej* [Twenty years of Polish literature] (1939, pp. 72, 82–83). This is followed by other sympathetic researchers and editors such as Jan Lorentowicz (1917), Jan Zabiełło (1917), Tadeusz Czapczyński (1939), and Zygmunt Andrzejowski (1939, vol. 3). Criticism came from figures like Adolf Nowaczyński (1921, pp. 296–317) who spoke from a nationalist standpoint, and Wilam Horzyca (1930, p. 81) as a representative of the 'young' on the literary Parnassus.

The discussion of the poetic legacy of 1914–1918 was interrupted by the outbreak of the Second World War, and its revival was hindered by the ideological constrains of public discourse, including literary studies. Even in books dedicated to renowned poets, such as Ryszard Matuszewski's work on Władysław Broniewski (1955) or Kazimierz Wyka's monograph on Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński (1961), the wartime stages of their work were considered artistically unremarkable episodes, although reluctantly acknowledged as worthy of respect for their expression of patriotism. The relaxation of these constrains, which occurred only in the late 1960s, allowed for a return to research topics that had previously been suppressed and marginalised, such as

the Legionary movement, the Piłsudskiite trend in Polish literature, and the poetic legacy of the First World War. In a short time, works by Ireneusz Opacki (1966), Irena Maciejewska (1968), and Regina Lubas (1970) were published, marking the beginning of a new phase of research on this phenomenon[3] and setting directions for the following decades.[4] However, discussing war lyricism in 1973, Lew Kaltenbergh noted: "What has survived from this? To be honest, not much" (Kaltenbergh, 1973, p. 8).

The only researcher of the poetic legacy of the First World War who replicated Stanisław Lam's gesture from 1915 and distinguished the work of women as a separate subject of study is Andrzej Romanowski. He is the author of a text titled "Bojowniczki i pacyfistki. O nurcie kobiecym w poezji I wojny światowej" [Female fighters and pacifists. On female poetry of the First World War] (1986), and of a monograph *Przed złotym czasem. Szkice o poezji i pieśni patriotyczno-wojennej lat 1908–1918* [Before the Golden Age. Notes on patriotic and war poetry and song, 1908–1918] (1990a). He also compiled a two-volume anthology titled '*Rozkwitały pąki białych róż…' Wiersze i pieśni z lat 1908–1918 o Polsce, o wojnie i o żołnierzach* ['When white roses bloomed…' Poems and songs on Poland, war and soldiers, 1908–1918] (1990b).

These works, especially the first and last, illustrate the challenges associated with reflecting on women's war lyricism. They primarily reveal the inherent tension between the sociological approach to this phenomenon and its evaluation based on artistic criteria. While Romanowski's anthology is dominated by

3 Irena Maciejewska argues that studying poetry of the First World War is essential as a sociological phenomenon, "[t]herefore, an evaluative assessment will not and cannot be the primary task. The literary historian should be focused mainly on tracing specific historical literary patterns and conventions that determine the distinctive nature of this poetry and also form one of the stages in the development, or more precisely – the persistence of a certain model of Polish patriotic and soldierly lyricism. On the other hand, the scholar's attention should be directed towards the content of this poetry, its thematic ambitions, and its political and ideological orientation" (Maciejewska, 1969, p. 38).

4 Among the notable works on the subject, the following are worth mentioning: Burek, 1975, pp. 453–525; Przybylski, 1975, pp. 225–235; Wójcik, 1978; Podraza-Kwiatkowska, 1985, pp. 117–146; Kloch, 1986; Romanowski, 1990a; Łoch & Stępnik, 1999.

a sociological approach, and the editor verbalises his rules for poetry evaluation in the introduction, in his academic aesthetic evaluation prevails, even though it has not been consciously considered by Romanowski as a research stance. The author simply labels most of the discussed female writers as 'second-rate poets' or 'verse writers.'

In the article "Bojowniczki i pacyfistki," which remains a valuable source of biographical and bibliographical information about female poets addressing wartime themes, Romanowski categorises women's poetic works into three groups. The first group consists of "the works of poets active in central Poland, usually ideologically linked with the Legions" (Romanowski, 1986, p. 194). The second group includes "the works of poets residing (usually in wartime exile) in the former lands of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth, more often in the depths of Ukraine or Russia," mostly associated with "the National Democratic orientation" (Romanowski, 1986, p. 194). The third group is referred to as "the strictly female current," distinguished by the fact that "only in this group could the women poets maintain the distinctiveness of the female perspective and the uniqueness of feminine experiences" (Romanowski, 1986, p. 194). Thus, the proposed division is based on both ideological and gender criteria.

The first group includes Franciszka Arnsztajn (née Meyerson), Maria Cossa, Maria Czerkawska, Aleksandra Dziubówna, Zofia Fertner-Korczyńska, Jadwiga Łobzowska (née Zubrzycka, later Strokowa), Maria Leszczyńska, Zofia Krupska, Maria Kuźmińska (née Rundbaken), Maria Majchrowiczówna, Jadwiga Marcinowska, Rena Maryth, Melania Medlingerówna, Zofia Mrozowicka, Anna Neumanowa, Janina Olszewska, Zuzanna Rabska (née Kraushar), Anna Słomczyńska, Maria Szczepanik, Zofia Wojnarowska, Zofia Zawiszanka (pseud. Anna Wiśniowiecka), Helena Zbierzchowska, and Gabriela Żółtowska. This group's identification with Legionary poetry is also visible in their panegyric poetry that "expresses the ecstatic cult of Commander Piłsudski" (Romanowski, 1986, p. 202), created by Karolina Firlej-Bielańska, Sylwia Borkowska, Elżbieta Ciechanowska, Jadwiga Gulińska, Helena Stattlerówna, Maria Stattler-Jędrzejewiczowa, Zofia Kachelówna, and Stefania Tatarówna.

In the second group, the Russian one, characterised by "longing for the homeland" and "the tragic vision of a suffering Poland" (Romanowski, 1986, p. 202), Andrzej Romanowski distinguishes Anna Ludwika Czerny, Helena (née Szolc) Fochtowa, Janina Getko-Wydżanka, Wacława Grodzicka-Czechowska, Maria Grossek-Korycka, Zofia Jabłońska, Stefania Podhorska-Okołów, and

Zofia Rościszewska. Romanowski considers Bronisława Ostrowska and Kazimiera Iłłakowiczówna, the author of *Trzy struny* [Three strings] (1917), a poetry collection, as most outstanding representatives of this group.

In the third group of female poets, whose 'manifesto' was Kazimiera Iłłakowiczówna's poetry collection *Wici* [Coils] (1914), Romanowski included Maria Czeska (née Rybaczyńska, later Czeska–Mączyńska), Maria Czerkawska, Irena Ćwikłowska, Magdalena Gromek, Wanda Krzyżanowska, Maria Majchrowiczówna, Lila Małecka, Janina Olszewska, Maria Paruszewska (née Kramarkiewicz), Maria Przedborska, Maria Strońska, Maria Fredro Szembekowa, Janina Tomaszewska-Mylanowska, and Zofia Wojnarowska. As the researcher notes, "women's poetry in the strict sense was characterised, among other things, by standing outside (or above) orientations" (Romanowski, 1986, p. 206), as well as by "the privacy of the approach," and "fervent pacifism" (p. 209).

The true heroines of the discussed article are, firstly, the writers who challenged stereotypes and avoided clichés commonly found in war poetry, particularly Legionary poetry. Secondly, there are the authors of poetic collections, rather than occasional poets only included in anthologies. The researcher offers evaluative comments for almost every name mentioned. For example, in the first group of poets, Jadwiga Marcinowska's poems receive his praise: "The burning sense of patriotic pain, shame, and disgrace favourably distinguishes most of the *Pieśni gryzące* [Biting poems] from the agitational war poems of the time" (Romanowski, 1986, p. 209). The value of Zofia Wojnarowska's collection *Słowa o miłości i wojnie* [Words on love and war] (1917) is diminished in Romanowski's eyes by the presence of the "stereotype of the indomitable soldier" and the "immortal motif of farewell," but "these weak pieces that overuse the word 'Homeland', are nevertheless exceptions. This is because Wojnarowska was able to discover a deeper meaning in her dedication to Poland and, in addition to optimism, find tragedy" (Romanowski, 1986, p. 209). Romanowski's account typically combines words of recognition with words of reproach:

> The war poetry of Czerkawska and Wojnarowska was characterised by a departure from the conventions of Young Poland that they had previously recognised. They were also unable to find more modern methods of expression, which led to an ideological and artistic reliance on Romanticism, much like most poetry of that time (Romanowski, 1986, p. 209).

Only two poets win Romanowski's approval: Anna Ludwika Czerny and Kazimiera Iłłakowiczówna. Both women were professionally associated with literature, and had a strong educational background, having either studied at foreign universities or received scholarships. They honed their craft through engagement with not only Polish literary tradition but also European lyric poetry; for example, Czerny translated modern French poetry. It is worth noting that Czerny's geographical distance from Poland during the First World War, when she was in Paris immersed in French culture, played a significant role. She observed the events happening back home and captured the emotions of that time in her cycle "Pieśni tęsknoty" [Songs of longing], which was published only in the post–war volume *Uwrocie* [Headlands] (1929). Romanowski commends Czerny for her "artistic self-awareness" and "considerable modernity," enabling her to "break away from the Young Poland heritage" and avoid "dependence on Romanticism," thus mastering the features such as "the lack of exaltation and pathos," "continuously restrained and intellectually controlled emotionality," "very unconventional strophic structure, often falling into free verse," and "lengthening lines that sometimes turn into poetic prose" (Romanowski, 1986, pp. 205–206). According to Romanowski, the value of Czerny's poems lay in their formal independence from the tradition of Polish irredentist and independence poetry. On the other hand, Iłłakowiczówna's strength lies in her ability to "synthesise the main currents of contemporary poetry," that is, combining a feminine empathy, religious themes, the Tyrtaean model, and Legionary ideology. Romanowski concludes that "she could create a thoughtful, consistent, logical, and harmonious whole from opposing attitudes, contrasting worldviews, and hostile orientations" (Romanowski, 1986, p. 216).

Summarizing the above review of Romanowski's article, it needs to be highlighted that this researcher adopts an ahistorical stance in the description, analysis, and interpretation of the work of First World War women poets, thus acting contrary to the postulates of Irena Maciejewska. His line of argument provokes, for instance, the question of the basis of his critique of the artistry of 'secondary poets' and 'scribblers' in the situation when even the best poets, such as Leopold Staff, Jan Kasprowicz, Władysław Orkan, and Bronisława Ostrowska, were in the years 1914–1918 unable to shed the remains of Romanticism, break with the Young Poland style, and find new means of expression. All the greats were at a standstill at that time.

However, Romanowski possesses something that can be tentatively called a germ of gender awareness, still a rarity in Polish humanities of the 1980s. Specifically, when discussing the limited presence of pacifist content in Polish First World War poetry, Romanowski notes that it was only expressed by women. His research intuition suggests that what is traditionally associated with femininity understood as the biological endowment of the individual (sex), namely, women's sensitivity to suffering, concern for the weaker, the sick, and the dying, and protection and transmission of life in all its forms, belongs to the realm of femininity understood as cultural identity (gender). Thus, when writing: "[t]he protest against war and hatred between nations was to some extent a protest against the Polish people's aspirations for freedom" (Romanowski, 1986, p. 211), he touches on a conflict between the categories of nation and gender, which is crucial for any war, and not only for the years 1914–1918.

Developing Romanowski's intuition, one can argue that the conflict between nation and gender arises from the fact that during war, the critique of collective and individual killings, concerns for the survival of the community's biological and cultural aspects, helplessness in the face of soldiers' suffering across armies, and the vulnerability of civilians can only be expressed by women. This is because culture restricts the expression of such emotions to women exclusively. However, simultaneously, the national interest always seeks to silence this gendered voice, perceiving it as weakening, defeatist, and anti-freedom. Despite Polish women largely supporting the nation's cause during the years 1914–1918, pacifist elements in their work are exceptionally rare and often stem from Catholic principles. Female poets are aware of the tragedy of Polish soldiers fighting against each other in the three partitioning armies but tend to avoid discussing it. The absence of deeper political thought is compensated for by the same strong belief in the value of sacrificing lives for the Fatherland that characterises men's poetry. Consequently, the artistic and intellectual shortcomings of all First World War poetry result not only from the sociological reality of limited education, talent, and literary expertise among most occasional poets but also from the historical pattern wherein the artist-humanist-pacifist always emerges defeated when confronted with national interest.

The issues excluded in the aforementioned article were directly addressed by Romanowski in the preface to his anthology *'Rozkwitały pąki białych róż…'*, titled "Ogród nieplewiony jednego dziesięciolecia" [The unweeded garden of one decade] (1990b). This introduction also summarises arguments for

a sociological approach to the poetic output produced in 1914–1918, categorizing it chronologically under the label of Young Poland era, and explores thematic and ideological themes present in the works of anthologists from the wartime and interwar periods. Romanowski considers the poetry of the First World War as part of broader categories, such as "uprising poetry, initiated by the literature of the Bar Confederation," in which he includes both the "patriotic poetry" from 1908 onwards. He also sees the war poetry as the "culmination of the only period in our literary history with a joyful finale" (Romanowski, 1990b, p. 8). According to Romanowski, the historical and artistic boundaries for organizing the poetic material are the years 1908 and 1918. The former is characterised by the loosening of censorship after the events of 1905–1907; 1908 is also the year of publication of Maria Konopnicka's "Rota" [The Oath], and the creation of "the earliest poems by future Legion poets," e.g. Zofia Zawiszanka's "Przed burzą" [Before the storm] poetry cycle (Romanowski, 1990b, p. 11). On the other hand, 1918 is a fitting caesura due to Poland's regaining of its state sovereignty, and the appearance of the early works of the Skamander group.

Romanowski also acknowledges and reflects on the fact that most wartime works collected in anthologies and individual poetry volumes he presents in his collection belong to "secondary, derivative, or kitschy literature" (Romanowski, 1990b, p. 8). However, since his goal was to "depict Polish poetry in the nation's pivotal decade as fully as possible: to represent Polish fate, fundamental political orientations and ideals, social feelings and aspirations through a series of poems" (Romanowski, 1990b, p. 9), he selected works based not on artistic merit but on representativeness. As he himself states, "[t]he book is a collection of works representative of their time and milieu, even if they are graphomaniac" (Romanowski, 1990b, p. 10).

Utilizing the concept of Stanisław Lam from 1915 and referring to the results of his previous research, Romanowski identifies women as a distinct group of wartime lyricists. This approach introduces a previously indicated tension between the sociological perspective on wartime poetry and its artistic valuation. On the one hand, the approach in question enables the anthology editor to reveal the presence of women poets in all trends of wartime poetry: Legionary, National Democratic, socialist, Catholic, pacifist, anti-Russian, anti-German, Messianic, etc., thus supplementing the ideologised image conveyed by wartime anthologists. Moreover, it showcases women as participants, creators,

and witnesses of History, and female poets as legitimate heirs and continuators of Polish poetic tradition:

> Although there were not many outstanding poetic achievements at that time, the poems presented in the anthology comprehensively reflect the nation's significant historical experience, which is difficult to overestimate. They remain valuable testimonies of the dreams and longings, disappointments, and hopes of that era. Often, they are marked by imitation, but many of these poems also anticipate future developments. They draw extensively from folk, soldier, and noble song traditions, religious literature, cabaret songs, and revolutionary poetry, while simultaneously foreshadowing both the poetics of everyday life and the expressionist trend of the interwar period (Romanowski, 1990b, p. 42).

On the other hand, the sociological approach failed to shield female poets from harsh assessment of the artistic qualities of their work. When analysing the quantity and tone of comments used by Romanowski to discuss each poet he studied in his preface, it becomes apparent that female poets tend to be evaluated more on their artistry than male poets, and more frequently receive lower ratings. Let us consider two sentences as illustrations:

> The horrors of twentieth-century war were described by the Poznań poet Maria Paruszewska, although unfortunately she did that in a graphomaniac manner (Romanowski, 1990b, p. 39).
>
> The collection *Czerwony Krzyż* [The Red Cross] by Maria Przedborska is also noteworthy […]. The monotonous, gloomy days in the hospital, filled with the groans of wounded and dying soldiers, are expressed in this collection in a traditional way. Admittedly, these poems are flawed by the use of pathos and lack of moderation, but at times they are compelling due to their authenticity of experiences, the depth of pain, and feminine compassion (Romanowski, 1990b, p. 40).

This gives the erroneous impression that the majority of minor poets were women and that their work was even more stereotypical, pathetic, and emotional than that of men. This viewpoint is contradicted by both the table of contents and the bibliography of the anthology under discussion.

Women Poets of the Interwar Period. Anthology literature thrived in the interwar period, reaching its peak in the 1930s. The literary culture of the young state was eagerly catching up in this field after years of neglect. Poetry anthologies

were compiled in various communities and for a number of purposes; they were informative and popularizing, instructional and educational, ideological and propagandistic, communal, and documenting the literary field. Often, a single anthology served multiple purposes at once. The reception of individual works in the press demonstrates that the instructional and documenting collections generated the strongest emotions among poets and literary critics because they sought to shape the canon and establish a new understanding of poetry. Interestingly, neither the anthology editors nor the literary critics (except Ludwik Stolarzewicz) considered women poets as a separate group of creators. Therefore, they did not reflect on the specific characteristics of their works. Consequently, the pre-1918 common awareness that there are criteria other than artistic merit for evaluating poetic works became less significant than before. It seems that in 1918, when the First World War came to an end, critics and literary researchers were struck by amnesia. However, this does not mean that the discourse on 'women's literature' became outdated. It simply became more dispersed and varied, revealing itself in individual press statements, the critical language used by contemporary poetry commentators like Stefan Napierski, and the nature of review columns in daily newspapers, such as Zuzanna Rabska's literary chronicle in *Kurier Warszawski* [The Warsaw Courier].

In the early years after regaining independence, only a few anthologies were published by editors who reflected on contemporary lyrical poetry in comparison to past poetic achievements, or used tradition as a reference point to map out new developmental paths. Some of these volumes are: *Brzask epoki* [The dawn of an era] (1920), Życiu *i pięknu* [On life and beauty] (Smolarski, 1920), *Antologia współczesnej poezji polskiej* [A anthology of contemporary Polish poetry] (Słoński, 1926), as well as *Polska pieśń miłosna* [Polish love song] (Lorentowicz, Czernecki & Gutowski, 1923) and *Sonet Polski* [Polish sonnet] (Folkierski, 1925). Meanwhile, the anthology *Pisarze polscy kresom zachodnim* [Polish poets on the western frontier] (Krzywoszewski, 1925) was, in turn, intended to serve as anti-German propaganda. The small number of collections compiled in the 1920s was a result of various political, social, and cultural factors that influenced the dynamics of literary life. These factors include Poland's regaining of sovereignty and the resulting need to institutionally, culturally, and symbolically unite Poles from the three partitioned territories. They also include the need to reconcile and organise categories such as individual, nation, society, and state, and the effect of urbanization and migration on modernization and democratization

of public and private spheres. Other factors are constitutional enfranchisement and emancipation of women in terms of access to education and professions, as well as the academisation and professionalisation of the intelligentsia, the widening cultural gap between high and mass culture, and the development of the literary market, especially periodicals, among which socio-cultural weeklies would dominate.[5] The intensity and diversity of literary life and poetic production in the 1920s were only fully revealed by the anthologies edited in the following decade.

Brzask epoki is a collection poems from years 1917–1919 penned by expressionists from Poznań. It is a collection that includes works by only one female poet, Janina Przybylska, who contrary to the declarations made in the title of the collection, still wrote in the Young Poland style. The same situation applies to women's poems collected in the anthology Życiu *i pięknu*. Its editor, Mieczysław Smolarski, distanced himself from the Young Poland trend of 'art for art's sake' and opted for the trend of 'art for life,' or literature engaged in building a new reality: "Young poetry […] demands that, in this our life, nothing should be alien to it, starting from the flowers of love to the storm of battles" (Smolarski, 1920, pp. 7–8). Women poets included in Smolarski's collection are Halina Bronikowska-Smolarska, Maria Szpyrkówna, Zofia Wojnarowska, and Maria Znatowicz-Szczepańska. Interestingly, from the perspective of engaged literature, the poems in the aforementioned collection still have a Young Poland character. Furthermore, their female creators are traditionally presented as poets of love and nature. For example, Wojnarowska is seen as a poet of love lyricism, not revolution, whereas Szpyrkówna is associated with the Tatra themes. Edward Słoński (1926) edited the previously discussed *Antologia współczesnej poezji polskiej* as a volume summarizing the independence trend of Young Poland poetry and directing it towards literature engaged in creating a new reality. Among the sixty-two authors included by Słoński, there were only five women poets: Kazimiera Iłłakowiczówna, Maria Markowska, Janina Olszewska, Bronisława Ostrowska, and Helena Zaworska-Savitri.

5 For further reading, see Chmielewska, 2006; Cywiński, 1971; Kawalec, 2000; D. Nałęcz, 1994; Paczkowski, 1980; Zahorska, 1978, pp. 179–216; Żarnowski, 1964, 1973; Żółkiewski, 1973.

The anthology *Polska pieśń miłosna* was first edited by Jan Lorentowicz in 1912 and, after the First World War, supplemented with works by the youngest poets (Lorentowicz, 1912/1923). The volume *Sonet Polski* was compiled by Władysław Folkierski for the purposes of the "Biblioteka Narodowa" series and, as such, it contains the best Polish realizations of the lyrical form, among which there are poems by only two women: Maria Konopnicka and Kazimiera Zawistowska. Such a modest representation of female authors and the names he did select suggest that Folkierski might not have noticed other women practicing "this poetic form, the most precise of the precise, the most complete, the most exquisitely chiselled, and composed with the greatest care so as to eventually pose as profoundly beautiful" (Folkierski, 1925, pp. XXIX), considered the most difficult test of lyrical talent. It might also have been that Folkierski, knowing the rich sonnet work of the female poets active in Young Poland and the First World War, such as Wanda Melcer, Zuzanna Rabska, and Maria Szpyrkówna, believed that they had not passed the test satisfactorily. In the 1930s, Julian Tuwim added *Cztery wieki fraszki polskiej* [Four centuries of Polish epigrams] (1937) to the anthologies of erotic and sonnet poetry. It included the works by Kazimiera Iłłakowiczówna, Maria Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska, and Magdalena Samozwaniec, who were poets from the circles of Skamander and *Wiadomości Literackie* and sympathisers of the Piłsudski camp.

The only clearly propagandistic anthology of the 1920s is the collection *Pisarze polscy kresom zachodnim,* which includes poems by Róża Czekańska-Heymanowa, Kazimiera Iłłakowiczówna, Anna Słonczyńska, and Zuzanna Rabska. It was edited with the idea of countering German influences in Pomerania and Upper Silesia and supporting Polish culture in these areas. One motivation for this endeavour was the distrust of international agreements and fear of German nationalism. In 1925, the Polish Postal Office was opened in Gdańsk and, at the Locarno Conference, agreements were signed guaranteeing the inviolability of the French-German and the Belgian-German borders; Poland did not receive similar guarantees from Germany, though. In this tense political situation, Stefan Krzywoszewski saw only one 'defensive line' against the German element in the 'border districts': the creation of a "front of brave civic hearts" and cultural support for "our vanguard" (Krzywoszewski, 1925, p. 43), that is, the residents of Pomerania and Silesia. Poets joined this civic movement, dedicating their talent to its needs.

The transition from the 1920s to the 1930s saw a surge in anthologies, edited according to various criteria: ideology (e.g. anthologies of Catholic and revolutionary poetry), location (e.g. collections of poems by poets from Łódź, Lublin, and Podhale), theme (e.g. volumes of works about the sea), educational canon (e.g. collections of works for various school and state "holidays and ceremonies"), and genre (e.g. anthology of epigrams). Women poets were featured in each of these anthologies, with one exception being the volume edited by Czesław Miłosz and Zbigniew Folejewski.

Confiteor w ordynku Bożym [The Confiteor in God's order] (Jahorowski, 1930) inaugurates the second decade of Poland's independence. This anthology of works by Polish Catholic writers was intended as a response to the invitation of the Committee of the First National Eucharistic Congress in Poznań in 1930, calling for them to bear witness to the religious revival in Poland through their work. The introduction to this anthology describes it as "the spring of Catholicism" occurring amidst a time of political and economic crisis in Europe, stemming from the abandonment of "the words of Truth, enclosed in the testament of the Supreme Legislator" (Jahorowski, 1930, p. 7), which religious associations, Eucharistic congresses, and individuals of faith aim to counteract. Such counteraction encompasses, among other things, "the first collective publication of Polish Catholic writers" that brings together "those who are gathered around one fire," aligning them with "God's order", and demonstrating that "writers, participants in all other fields of life, stand at God's orders, and that there are many of these writers" (Jahorowski, 1930, p. 8). However, this "many" is a modest number, as evidenced by the editor's disappointment that "[t]he book contains works of only thirty Catholic writers, while at least ten times that number could be counted" (Jahorowski, 1930, p. 8). Among these thirty there were Janina Brzostowska, Anna Słonczyńska, Krystyna Saryusz-Zaleska, and Zofia Kułakowska.

Wanda Miłaszewska, Stanisław Miłaszewski and Jan Rembieliński, editors of another anthology of Catholic poetry entitled *Chór wieków* [A choir of centuries] (1936) composed in tune with the liturgical year, were guided by different goals. Instead of providing an "overview of the Catholic poets in Poland as a distinct group," the editors offered an "overview of Polish poetry as a whole, as the poetry of a Catholic nation" Miłaszewski, Miłaszewska, Rembieliński, 1936, p. 433). They indicate that in selecting poems for their volume, "they listened more to the creed of the works than to the authors" (Miłaszewski, Miłaszewska,

Rembieliński, 1936, p. 433). The editors' aim was to show "Catholic morality and Catholic thinking and feeling," both in the works by writers who were "completely orthodox towards the teachings of the Church" as well as those who "often, sometimes more ostensibly than in reality, departed from these teachings" (Miłaszewski, Miłaszewska, Rembieliński, 1936, p. 433). Female poets included in this collection were Maria Konopnicka, Beata Obertyńska, Maryla Wolska, Bronisława Ostrowska, Wanda Miłaszewska, and Anna Słonczyńska.

Among the thematic anthologies, edited not only for informational and documentary purposes but also for propaganda, there are two anthologies of poems about the sea. *Morze polskie i Pomorze w pieśni* [The Polish see and Pomerania in song] (1931) was compiled by Władysław Pniewski and included Kashubian songs. Several years later, another similar anthology was published; it was *Morze w poezji polskiej* [The sea in Polish poetry] edited by Zbigniew Jasiński (1937). However, the latter anthology lacks several important registers of Polish maritime-themed lyrical poetry, such as the works of the Romantics (e.g. Adam Mickiewicz and Juliusz Słowacki), many poets from the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, who were omitted due to copyright issues, and Kashubian songs already included in Pniewski's anthology. Nevertheless, the author of the selection does not hide the fact that the most definitive factor in this compilation was his own taste: "from the multitude of maritime works I have gathered over the years, I chose those that personally appealed to me the most" (Z. Jasiński, 1937, p. 12).

Z. Jasiński also gives three reasons for publishing the anthology: "1. To preserve for literature a number of valuable maritime works, scattered and disappearing, often lost in hundreds of magazines and books; 2. to demonstrate that, contrary to false opinions, Polish literature has a serious representation of maritime poetry, both in term of quality, quantity, and the names of its authors; 3. to make it easy for all those searching for a suitable piece for recitation, for example during the Sea Festival, to find a good selection" (Z. Jasiński, 1937, pp. 11–12). Among the representatives of the "poetry pulsating with the rhythm of waves and water routes; poetry of the seabed and, finally, of sailor's hearts" (Z. Jasiński, 1937, p. 12) there were also women: Janina Brzostowska, Maria Czerkawska, Wanda Karczewska, Jadwiga Korczakowska, Alina Kwiecińska, Bronisława Ostrowska, Zuzanna Rabska, Lesława Urbańska, and Janina Zabierzewska.

The emancipatory programme of expanding national culture to include local communities and languages and literary circles outside the mainstream is realised through the anthologies such as *Literatura* Łodzi *w ciągu jej istnienia* [Literature of Łódź throughout its existence] (Stolarzewicz, 1935), *Antologia współczesnych poetów lubelskich* [An anthology of contemporary poets of Lublin] (Zalewski, 1939), and *Poezja młodego Podhala* [Poetry of young Podhale] (Pigoń, 1937). Ludwik Stolarzewicz (1935), the editor of the first anthology, compiled not only works by poets associated with Łódź as their birthplace or place of residence, but also poems on the city itself. He included Zofia Konówna, Hanna Ożogowska, Maria Przedborska, and Halina Stawarska in the collection. The editor of the second anthology, Fr. Ludwik Zalewski, centred his collection around poets who "between 1922 and 1937 interacted with each other in Lublin, finding inspiration in their discussions on refining their poetic flights to Parnassus. […] This group planned publishing ventures, organised cultural events, and tried to engage society in literature, bringing light and beauty into their grey daily lives" (Zalewski, 1939, p. 5). The group included only one female poet, Franciszka Arnsztajnowa, the doyenne of the Lublin literary circles and the hostess of a well-known artistic salon. The silent undercurrent of this publication is an anti-Skamander approach, namely, an opposition to the dominant poetic model developed in the capital by the Big Five and their satellites.

Finally, Stanisław Pigoń, the editor of *Poezja młodego Podhala*, a book published with funds from the Polish Studies Research Group at Jagiellonian University, declared two goals for his anthology. The first goal is to present a new phenomenon in national culture, namely, the "awakening of self-awareness in rural areas" (Pigoń, 1937, p. 8). The second goal is to unite the general intellectual, urban, and cosmopolitan culture with the folk culture "at a time when foreign influences are raging over Polish culture, and disputes over empty formulas and soulless contents of aestheticism, formalism, avant-gardism, etc. are growing louder" (Pigoń, 1937, p. 5). The works of folk artists are intended to "curb this drive towards exoticism and non-nationality" and "infuse the nation's creativity with a primal friendship with the land and the ancient history of mankind on it" (Pigoń, 1937, pp. 5–6). The anthology includes the works of young female poets of Podhale, Hanka Nowobielska and Aniela Stapińska.

The collections that caused the greatest excitement among poets and literary critics of the 1930s were two compilations created for educational purposes by Ludwik Stolarzewicz (using the pseudonym Adam Galiński): *Poezja Polski*

Odrodzonej. 1918–1930 [Poetry of Reborn Poland, 1918–1930] (1931) and *Antologia 120 poetów. Wiersze na obchody i uroczystości* [An anthology of 130 poets. Poems for celebrations and feasts] (1938), as well as Adam Szczerbowski's *Współczesna poezja polska 1915–1935* [Polish contemporary poetry, 1915–1935] (1936).

Stolarzewicz was the only critic and researcher who identified women as a separate creative group in his anthology. He dedicated an entire subsection to this group, openly stating that Kazimiera Iłłakowiczówna is "the most outstanding poet, and one of the greatest poetic talents of the contemporary era" (Stolarzewicz, 1931, p. 366). In the closing remarks of the subsection, Stolarzewicz reveals: "[j]ust as Tuwim's influence weighed heavily on the Apollo tribe, so Iłłakowiczówna and Pawlikowska […] influenced our female poets" (Stolarzewicz, 1931, p. 374). The list of names included by Stolarzewicz is also the longest when compared to the material presented in other interwar anthologies. It includes: Kazimiera Alberti, Maryla Czerkawska, Aurelia Dickstein-Wieleżyńska, Zofia Łuniewska-Fonberg, Maria Grossek-Korycka, Zofia Jabłońska, Hanna Januszewska, Maria Kasterska, Halina Konopacka, Felicja Kruszewska, Maria Lewicka, Olimpia Ligocka, Henryka Łazowertówna, Wanda Miłaszewska, Hanna Mortkowiczówna, Beata Obertyńska, Józefina Rogosz-Walewska, Zofia Rościszewska, Zuzanna Rabska, Anna Słonczyńska, Halina Stawarska, Maria Szpyrkówna, Jadwiga Wokulska, Maryla Wolska, Anna Zahorska-Savitri, Halina Zawadzka, Maria Znatowicz-Szczepańska, and Ksenia Żytomierska. The editor summarises this list as follows: "[t]heir number is large, and constantly growing. […] The creativity of female poets is flourishing abundantly, greatly enriching Polish poetry, bringing femininity to literature in all of its manifestations!" (Stolarzewicz, 1931, p. 374).

A significant portion of the female poets featured in the above-mentioned collection appeared in the anthology prepared by Stolarzewicz "for all celebrations and ceremonies throughout the year," "primarily intended for schools, teachers, organizations, and associations" (Galiński [Stolarzewicz], 1938, p. 5). The anthology itself is quite impressive in terms of size, containing 321 poems by 120 authors from 1186 poetry collections. It includes works from both the youngest poets and those from earlier eras. The female poets included in the volume are: Klementyna Csàky, Maryla Czerkawska, Maryla Czechowska, Helena Duninówna, Jadwiga Gizowska, Joanna Gillowa, Felicja Kruszewska, Alina Kwiecińska, Maria Konopnicka, Stefania Kossuthówna, Lucyna Krzemieniecka, Maria Kuźmińska, Czesława Monikowska, Hanna

Mortkowiczówna, Wanda Miłaszewska, Beata Obertyńska, Bronisława Ostrowska, Janina Porazińska, Maria Czesława Przewóska, Marta Reszczyńska, Bronisława Sadowska, Halina Stawarska, Elżbieta Szemplińska, Anna Świrszczyńska, Maria Wielohorska, Irena Włodarczykówna, Zofia Wojnarowska, Halina Zawadzka, Janina Zabierzewska, Maryla Żarska, and Ewa Szelburg-Zarembina. The editor explains in the preface that "the selection criteria were the maturity of content and the artistic level of the poems." Yet, the poems were also varied in terms of "conceptual thought" and "artistry," as the anthology aims to cater to a diverse readership of "children, youth, and adults" (Galiński [Stolarzewicz], 1938, p. 5).

Thus, this collection includes both the "entirely easy and simple" poems as well as "works that require the reader to be mature and mentally prepared" (Galiński [Stolarzewicz], 1938, p. 5). A careful reading reveals that poems by women such as Beata Obertyńska, Bronisława Ostrowska, Anna Świrszczyńska, or Zofia Wojnarowska dominate in the group of works for children and youth, that is, the "easy and simple" ones; serious themes are addressed by men. Also noteworthy is the absence of lyrical poetry by Kazimiera Iłłakowiczówna and Maria Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska. The former was likely omitted due to her associations with Józef Piłsudski; a fact not well received among politicians, officials, and teachers identifying or sympathising with the National Democracy. From the point of view of Stolarzewicz, the love registers of Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska probably also seemed unsuitable for school education. Besides, the theme of love is almost non-existent in the discussed anthology.

Adam Szczerbowski's poetry anthology *Współczesna poezja polska 1915–1935* (1936) reveals not only the editor's artistic but also his political views. Moreover, it appears that Szczerbowski's ideological considerations dominate the text. This is evident in his inclusion of war poetry in the category of contemporary poetry, which is a rare classification in literary criticism and studies at that time. His aim is to align the development of poetry with the programmatic line of the Piłsudski supporters, starting from 1915 when the hope for independence began to materialise, up to 1935 when Piłsudski passed away. Consequently, along this line Szczerbowski presents, in turn, First World War works, folk-style poems by Bolesław Leśmian and Emil Zegadłowicz from the onset of Poland's independence, the joyful urban poetry of the Skamander poets of the 1920s, and the socially troubled works of Kwadryga poets from the following decade. This arrangement reflects the metamorphosis of the milieu that took

place over twenty interwar years: from the premonitions of freedom, through "the joy of a regained garbage dump" (Kaden-Bandrowski, 1923/2024, p. 33)[6] to the disappointment with the post-war order.

The publishing ventures of Stolarzewicz[7] and Szczerbowski[8] met with strong criticism from poetic groups and avant-garde movements who wrote for the socio-cultural and literary press and were excluded from their collections. The critics understood that anthologies are tools for constructing literary reality: "history is made of flexible facts" (Kołoniecki, 1931, p. 96). Therefore, the inclusion or omission of a name or work in an anthology, especially one intended for school use, is significant. The only positive opinion on Szczerbowski's volume came from a female teacher, a representative of his target audience. In *Polonista* [The Polish Teacher], Janina Garbaczowska wrote that the anthology is very useful for teaching the native language, "especially in the highest grades of the old [gymnasium] type" (Garbaczowska, 1937, p. 26), and the "unpretentious, clear, and extremely easy division used by the editor allows anyone to learn independently, without resorting to programmes and literary theories, and to study the development of the contemporary Polish poetry and outline its evolutionary line" (Garbaczowska, 1937, p. 26). Garbaczowska's sole negative comments pertained to Szczerbowski's flexibility in the selection of his material; she suggested that no more than four poems by one author should be included in the anthology, with an exception only of Julian Tuwim and Kazimierz Wierzyński. Garbaczowska also pointed out that it is necessary to adhere to the principles of the new spelling and citation style.

6 This is a quotation from the political novel *Generał Barcz* [General Barcz] (1923) by Juliusz Kaden-Badowski. These words were spoken by one of the protagonists, journalist Rasiński, to convey the bitter enthusiasm felt by the Polish people after regaining independence in 1918, following over 120 years of partitioning.

7 For a discussion and reception of Stolarzewicz's anthology, see: Broniewicz, 1932, pp. 27–29; Szczerbowski, 1932, pp. 22–26; Walert, 1931, p. 2; Kołoniecki, 1931, pp. 96–100; Galle, 1931, p. 158; Birkenmajer, 1931, p. 332.

8 For a discussion and reception of Szczerbowski's anthology, see: Kubiński, 1937, p. 190; Garbaczowska, 1937, pp. 25–26; R. [T. Sinko], 1936, p. XIII; Michalski, 1937a, p. 5; Michalski, 1937b, p. 8.

The critical voices against the anthologies edited by Stolarzewski and Szczerbowski came from representatives of avant-garde movements, poetry groups, and literary circles centred around literary journals that the editors have overlooked. The list of complaints is long. First off, the critics believed that Stolarzewicz's and Szczerbowski's perspectives were those taken from the outside, even though the latter editor was also a poet and critic writing for *Ruch Literacki* [Literary Movement] and *Marchołt* [Marcolf]. Yet, the critics claimed that this is the reason why the editors cannot discern the true, more diverse picture of contemporary Polish poetry. Secondly, the opponents of Stolarzewicz and Szczerbowski were of the opinion that the anthology editors favoured the Skamander poets and their followers, reflecting perhaps the state of affairs in the 1920s but not the reality of the 1930s when many poets overcame the Skamander poetics. There were parallel developments in avant-garde poetics, and programmes of new engaged literature in that period had emerged. Accordingly, Grzegorz Timofiejew in the Łódź Literary Club's journal *Prądy* [The Currents] wrote that Stolarzewicz "does not know, does not see, that a new social poetry is being born, the poetry of the fighting proletariat" (Timofiejew, 1931, p. 97). Thirdly, critics claimed that the anthology editors lacked an artistic ear and taste because, alongside the works of 'real' or 'reliable' poets, they included the works of lesser poets — and even graphomaniacs.

The very idea of tracking who considers whom a scribbler provides an interesting insight into the tensions that existed between various poetry groups and journal editorial teams. For example, Roman Kołoniecki in *Pamiętnik Warszawski* [The Warsaw Journal] lists Juliusz Feldhorn, Michał Rusinek, Tadeusz Wittlin, Witold Zechenter, and one woman, Maria Znatowicz–Szczepańska (Kołoniecki, 1931, p. 98), as those who deserve to appear in such anthologies but were overlooked. In journal *Kultura* [The Culture] from Poznań, Hieronim Michalski wonders why Szczerbowski includes poetry from minor poets such as Jan Brzechwa, Stanisław Ciesielczuk, Felicja Kruszewska, and Feliks Przysiecki, while excluding Jerzy Braun, Władysław Broniewski, Jan Brzękowski, Stanisław Czernik, Marian Czuchnowski, Tytus Czyżewski, Stefan Flukowski, Konstanty Ildefons Gałczyński, Józef Łobodowski, Kazimierz Andrzej Jaworski, Roman Kołoniecki, Feliks Konopka, Jalu Kurek, Marian Niżyński, Beata Obertyńska, Michał Pawlikowski, Tadeusz Peiper, Julian Przyboś, and Adam Ważyk. Furthermore, the editors' lack of expertise is evident in the fact that Stolarzewicz included a staggering 91 poets in his anthology (too many), while Szczerbowski

incorporated only 33 authors (too few). Meanwhile, Hieronim Michalski estimates that "despite our abundant poetic production, the group of real poets (from the most outstanding to the average) is not that numerous. The rounded number is fifty, at most" (Michalski, 1937a, p. 5).

What is more, critics pointed out the editors' lack of coherence in organizing the poetic material. Specifically, they argued that viewing the poetic movement through the lens of literary groups is unrealistic. This is because categorising poets into groups creates rigid and artificial divisions, which goes against the dynamic and flexible nature of this art. For example, labelling one poet as a futurist fails to recognise elements of futurist poetics in another poet's work.

Furthermore, even if the critics acknowledged the usefulness of thinking in terms of 'groups,' they criticised the editors' for their incompetence in identifying the true 'hierarchies' within individual groups. For instance, Kołoniecki questions why Stolarzewicz categorises poems by Nina Rydzewska within the Kwadryga oeuvre but omits those by Stefan Flukowski. In addition, critics also targeted the editors' 'faulty' or 'random' selection of individual poets' works, which did not consider their best achievements or works that represented their poetics.

Finally, the last point of attack against Stolarzewicz's and Szczerbowski's anthologies is the 'poor pragmatism' of both anthologies. The poets and reviewers failed to recognise the distinct educational goals that these anthologies meant to serve. They also overlook the fact that the material included in school anthologies should align with teaching programmes and the education and prior preparation of Polish literature teachers to analyse avant-garde works.

The discussion surrounding the aforementioned anthologies revealed that poets, critics, and literary scholars have different ideas about what an anthology should look like. There is a broad range of possibilities: for instance, informative and encyclopaedic French-style compilations that present authors in an alphabetical or chronological order, or a careful selection based on a poet's talent and artistry (Michalski, 1937b, p. 8). Others are proponents of practical collections tailored to the cognitive and educational needs of schools at various levels, or publications used to energise literary life and promote new poetry and its understanding, while also balancing existing lyrical production and constructing an image of contemporary poetry, mapping out its developmental paths (Fryde, 1966, pp. 351–357).

In the 1930s, representatives of the literary circles, groups, and movements overlooked by Stolarzewicz and Szczerbowski made their own attempts to describe and present Polish contemporary poetry. These attempts included *Antologia poezji społecznej 1924–1933* [An anthology of social poetry, 1924–1933] compiled by Czesław Miłosz and Zbigniew Folejewski (1933), and *Antologia współczesnej poezji polskiej 1918–1939* [An anthology of contemporary Polish poetry, 1918–1939], edited by Ludwik Fryde and Antoni Andrzejewski (1939). The forewords and structures of these anthologies reveal that they revolve around the conflict between avant-garde movements and the Skamander model of creativity. As a result, they highlight binary oppositions such as old versus young, traditionalists and passivists versus innovators and progressives, and city dwellers versus provincial residents. The Skamander poets are unsurprisingly aligned with the old, traditionalists, aesthetes, the bourgeois, and the 'Warsaw elite.'

Contrary to this, the anthology editors represent the young, avant-garde, socially engaged creators, who are also representatives of local literary circles and communities, such as Kwadryga in Warsaw, Zwrotnica and Linia in Kraków, Prądy in Łódź, Barykady in Lublin, and Żagary and Piony in Vilnus. These poetic movements had the courage and strength to oppose the poetic dominance of Skamander. By the early 1930s, it was no longer possible to speak of a unified Skamander poetry model as it had already fragmented into various parallel poetics, each with a different degree of affinity to avant-garde aspirations. Therefore, the poetic landscape presented in the anthologies edited by Miłosz and Folejewski and by Fryde and Andrzejewski can be seen more as wishful thinking than an accurate representation of poetic affairs. Similarly, poetics found in Stolarzewicz's and Szczerbowski's anthologies serve as a record of the literary consciousness during the interwar period rather than a practical tool for organizing it.

Despite numerous similarities between the consciousness of Miłosz and Fryde, there is a difference in their approach to women poets: the former simply does not include them, precisely because interwar women's poetry is generally perceived as a version of Skamander poetics. As Manfred Kridl writes in his preface to Miłosz and Folejewski's anthology, the lyrical model proposed by the circle of Vilnius students rejects "Skamander 'classicism'," "opposes the past," and gives "new poetic forms" to social reality: "[t]hey strive to empathise with the psyche of the dispossessed, and present their situation 'objectively,' without

sentimental lyricism, in a manly, strong, and vivid manner" (Kridl, 1933, p. 5). The lyricism of the younger poets is different from that of the Great Five to which readers had become accustomed: "it is an attempt not to pour out feelings, but to condense them within the object itself, to capture them within a rigid frame, in a controlled and concentrated expression," characterised by "a more radical break with the traditional rhythm, 'melodiousness' of verse, rhyme, and stanza" (Kridl, 1933, p. 6). Many young poets "consider regular rhythm, 'compatible' rhyme, and stanza arrangement to be 'unnatural'"; hence, "some works are not much different (or not different at all) from what we call prose, even unrhythmic prose. In others, a vaguely outlined stanza appears, and a latent rhythm can be felt, but it is uneven, broken, 'dynamic,' not always justified by the essential artistic reasons" (Kridl, 1933, p. 6). The young consider the "metaphor and ellipsis" (Kridl, 1933, p. 6) as basic poetic devices. While Kridl is critical of the young poets' "violations against certain aesthetic and poetic postulates, such as the organic unity of a work [and …] the selection of impressions, feelings, and thoughts that are to be honoured with poetic realization," he still appreciates "the sincere effort of the literary avant-garde to refresh poetic issues and techniques" (Kridl, 1933, p. 7). Since Miłosz and Folejewski did not include any women in their anthology, they most likely believed that no contemporary Polish women poets fulfilled the artistic program outlined above.

While Miłosz and Folejewski aimed to present the socially engaged work of young poets, Fryde and Andrzejewski's objective was to "offer a vision of contemporary Polish poetry, demonstrating how it has developed over the past twenty years" (Fryde & Andrzejewski, 1939, p. 5). Rather than relying on "some dogmatic aesthetics," they adopted the criterion of "importance for literary history, or an exemplary value" for poem selection (Fryde & Andrzejewski, 1939, p. 6). As a result, neither the number of poems by a given author, nor the omission of a name 'disqualifies' a poet. Yet, their anthology "primarily includes outstanding poets with only a few minor ones being featured" (Fryde & Andrzejewski, 1939, p. 5). The aim is to "show two types of poetry: naturalistic and spiritualistic" (Fryde & Andrzejewski, 1939, p. 5). The naturalistic type, prevalent during Poland's first decade of independence, was realised by the older generation of poets, known as the Skamander poets. It is characterised by a "carefree intoxication with life" and "precise naming of things in the world" (Fryde & Andrzejewski, 1939, p. 6). The spiritualistic type emerged in the 1930s and was brought to life by young innovators ranging from futurists to the

Krakow Avant-garde. Its defining qualities are "seriousness towards life tinged with pessimism," "a visionary quality," and opposition to "a material world with art as a spiritual creation" (Fryde & Andrzejewski, 1939, p. 6).

The works of women included in the discussed anthology are selected to both justify their affiliation with the Skamander movement, and position them within its most infantile, banal, commonplace form. For example, Kazimiera Iłłakowiczówna is known for writing 'trifles' about nostalgia, Irena Tuwim and Elżbieta Szemplińska are poets of love, Nina Rydzewska is a promoter of Gdynia, and Beata Obertyńska and Maria Czerkawska are nature poets. Maria Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska is notably absent from this anthology.

After the end of the Second World War, the fate of interwar women poets was closely tied to the overall culture of the period from 1918 to 1939. However, this culture, with the exception of the left-wing movements and class emancipation currents, was negatively assessed by the new government. The most significant official criticism of the era occurred between 1949, when the Szczecin Congress took place, and the so-called Khrushchev Thaw (see: Smulski, 2009). During this time, several collections of revolutionary poetry were published, serving propagandist purposes of the government. The new government emphasised traditional elements, particularly from the interwar period, as they heralded and legitimised its current actions. It selectively documented and promoted the literary achievements of the revolutionary movement, thereby creating its own canon of texts and songs, based on the principles of socialist realism. Examples of such publications include *Polskie pieśni rewolucyjne z lat 1918–1939* [Polish revolutionary songs, 1918–1939], collected by Felicja Kalicka (1950), and *Antologia poezji walczącej o postęp i wyzwolenie społeczne 1543–1953 – Wzięli diabli pana* [An anothology of progressive and emancipatory poetry, 1543–1952: Damn the master], compiled by Julian Przyboś and Stanisław Czernik (1955).

The latter anthology is particularly noteworthy owing to the editors' names and backgrounds. Both of them came from the peasant class and were interwar poetic innovators and creators of the Second Avant-garde and Czartak programmes. Social themes and leftist sensitivity were already present in their manifestos proclaiming new art and in their work before 1939. It was only after the Second World War that they openly supported the new regime and engaged in politically oriented cultural and literary life. The edition of an anthology of poetry that would be 'progressive' and focus on peasant rebellion, as the collection's title suggests, can be understood as both Przyboś and Czernik

fulfilling an order for literary propaganda of the worker-peasant state, and repaying a debt to their native social class. It is also a way of doing historical justice to the real wrongs suffered by their ancestors.

The anthologies that appeared in the subsequent decades were compiled by literary scholars, therefore they have a more informative and documentary character rather than propagandist. Still, the agitational element in them should not be overlooked. I am referring specifically to two volumes: *Polska poezja rewolucyjna 1878–1945* [Polish revolutionary poetry, 1878–1945], compiled by Stefan Klonowski (1996), and *Antologia polskiej poezji rewolucyjnej 1918–1939* [An anthology of Polish revolutionary poetry, 1918–1939], prepared by Marian Stępień (1982) for the "Biblioteka Narodowa" series. The editor of the first collection sets its time boundaries between the formation of the First Proletariat, and the end of the Second World War and the establishment of the new government. Structurally and in terms of the selection of works, the anthology presents itself as an ascending line. It begins with the hopes for social justice that arose in the last decades of the nineteenth century and progresses through the expressions of solidarity with Russian revolutionaries and Spanish partisans in the interwar period, culminating in 1945, the year that brought about revolution to Central and Eastern Europe as its official order.

Similarly to all editors of anthologies of works engaged in extra-literary life, Klonowski aimed to show the mass nature of the left-wing movement, which is why he employs the sociological criterion in evaluating the related artistic work. As a result, he is concerned not with 'artistry' but with 'representativeness': "The artistic level of this poetry varies greatly. […] This form was sometimes naive, even clumsy, with language and imagery often modelled on the established literary mannerisms. However, as the subject matter and circle of authors expanded, the literary rank of this poetry grew" (Klonowski, 1966, p. 6). The chapter "Lata wielkiego proletariatu" [The years of Great Proletariat] contains the names of Stefania Iwanowska (Kalina) and Zofia Wojnarowska (Jan Hutnik), while the chapter "Międzywojenne dwudziestolecie" [The interwar years] mentions Walentyna Najdus, Romana Granas, and Janina Bradowska, and the chapter "Na ziemi hiszpańskiej" [On the Spanish soil] features the poet Zofia Szleyen. The absence of works by Wanda Wasilewska, Nina Rydzewska, and Elżbieta Szemplińska is notable. Conversely, Stępień included Wanda Wasilewska, Elżbieta Szemplińska, and Nina Rydzewska in his collection but

omitted Zofia Wojnarowska. One could wonder whether the reason for that was the fact that Wojnarowska was a socialist, not a communist like Wasilewska.

The 1960s and the 1980s saw three additional anthologies of interwar poetry that were both informative and popularizing. Ryszard Matuszewski and Seweryn Pollak (1962/1966) compiled the popular anthology *Poezja polska 1914–1939* [Polish poetry 1914–1939] which envisioned the poetry of the First World War and the interwar period as a cohesive entity. Wacław Mrozowski (1965) published *Antologia lubelskich poetów dwudziestolecia międzywojennego* [An anthology of interwar poets in Lublin], while Andrzej Lam (1980) collected *Wiersze poetów Polski Odrodzonej – Ze struny na strunę,* [Poems of Reborn Poland – Chord by chord], which presents the interwar period as the first epochs in the history of Polish contemporary literature intertwined with the political history of the state. The 'Reborn Poland' in the anthology's title reflects the process of rebuilding state institutions after 1918, while downplaying Poland's dependence on the Soviet Union after 1945.

While compiling the anthology of interwar Lublin poets, Mrozowski was inspired by Zalewski and maintained the perspective of a participant in the literary life in 1939. Consequently, his work has a less informative and historical character and is more reminiscing in tone. However, unlike Zalewski's pre-war anthology, the collection edited by Mrozowski primarily includes the works of the 'youth' gathered at the time around ephemeral magazines such as *Lucifer* [The Lucifer], *Reflektor* [The Spotlight], *Nowe* Życie [The New Life], *Przegląd Lubelsko-Kresowy* [The Lublin and Borderlands Review], *Barykady* [The Barricades], *Dźwigary* [The Girders], as well as in the literary supplement to *Ziemia Lubuska* [The Lubusz Land] and the periodical *Kamena* [The Camena]. Since these were male groups, out of 24 poets only three women are listed, namely: Franciszka Arnsztajnowa, Helena Platta, and Wanda Śliwina (Jagienka from Lublin). The way Mrozowski shows the poetic career paths of the said 'young' poets is interesting, for he starts from presenting their debut collections published in the 1920s in Lublin or its area only to proceed to the mature collections published a decade later in Warsaw and Kraków. The editor treats this transformation as a sign of ennoblement, shifting the Lublin group from the geographical and artistic margins to the mainstream of Polish poetry. Such a career pattern does not fit the situation of female poets at all, as Arnsztajnowa, Platta, and Śliwina spent their entire lives in Lublin.

Matuszewski and Pollak made the most important interwar poetry anthologies, such as those by Ludwik Stolarzewicz and Ludwik Fryde, the reference point for their undertaking. Still, they maintain a critical distance from their predecessors. While Stolarzewicz and Fryde edited their collections with the participants of the 1930s literary culture in mind – which is why they were considered 'incomplete' and Stolarzewicz's work was additionally seen as 'deceptive' – Matuszewski and Pollak offer a "historical perspective" in their anthology. This selection explores the tension between the beauty and representativeness of the included works, providing a "comparative picture of poetic trends and tendencies" during the interwar period. The aim is to give readers "material for reflections on what poetry from that period endured, and what has been forgotten; what still evokes admiration, and what is met with only a smile and a shrug of the shoulders" (Matuszewski & Pollak, 1962/1966, p. 7). The editors' organizing principle, adopted from their predecessors, is the poetic group. As a result, members of literary groups are given preference in the authors' selection process:

> Although we made an effort in the anthology to include all the active groups of that time, not all of them are fully represented by names of all their members. There were poets whose work either lacked a sufficiently characteristic piece or one that could be seamlessly incorporated into the anthology (Matuszewski & Pollak, 1962/1966, p. 7).

Comparing the list of female poets included in the anthology, one can see that group affiliations and social connections played a role in the selection process. The female poets featured in the book are: Franciszka Arnsztajnowa, Janina Brzostowska, Maria Czerkawska, Olga Daukszta, Zuzanna Ginczanka, Maria Grossek-Korycka, Kazimiera Iłłakowiczówna, Alicja Iwańska, Hanna Januszewska, Felicja Kruszewska, Henryka Łazowertówna, Hanna Mortkowicz--Olczakowa, Nora Odlanicka-Szczepańska, Bronisława Ostrowska, Maria Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska, Nina Rydzewska, Elżbieta Szemplińska, Anna Świrszczyńska, Irena Tuwim, Zofia Wojnarowska, and Maryla Wolska. The following women poets, although initially considered for inclusion by the editors, were ultimately left out: Kazimiera Alberti, Halina Brodowska, Anna Ludwika Czerny, Julia Dickstein-Wieleżyńska, Jadwiga Gamska-Łempicka, Wacława Grodzicka-Czechowska, Halina Konopacka, Wanda Miłaszewska, Maria Morstin–Górska, Wanda Niedziałkowska-Dobaczewska, Helena Platta, Stefania

Podhorska-Okołów, Jadwiga Popowska, Anna Słonczyńska, Stanisława Sznaper-Zakrzewska, Janina Zabierzewska-Żelechowska, and Maria Zientara-Zaleska.

Andrzej Lam's anthology has a different purpose, which is not surprising given its time span. It is to "demonstrate how a few widely-read poets, to some extent representative of the whole, reacted to their own milieu" (A. Lam, 1980, p. 5). The editor adopted the criterion of "matters of existence: the collective versus the individual, and the individual versus the whole, that is, nature and the cosmos" (A. Lam, 1980, p. 6). A. Lam explained that this criterion was influenced by the significant historical events experienced by Polish people in the last fifty years, revealing the nation's "fragility of existence" (A. Lam, 1980, p. 7). According to A. Lam, the focus on history and politics after 1945 pushed privacy to the sidelines, a tendency reflected in the list of female poets included in the anthology. These include Kazimiera Iłłakowiczówna and Maria Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska from the interwar period, Wanda Zieleńczyk as the author of *Pieśni partyzantów* [Partisans' songs] (1942) and Krystyna Krahelska as the author of the song "Hej, chłopcy, bagnet na broń!.." [Hey, boys, fix your bayonets!] (1943). The period after the First World War was solely represented by Wisława Szymborska.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, two more anthologies of interwar poetry appeared, both aimed at professional readers,[9] specifically Polish literature

9 A separate group of texts consists of genre-profiled anthologies and scholarly studies. Similar rules apply to these texts as to the publications discussed in this section of the chapter. Let us consider two examples: the anthology *Ballada polska* [Polish ballad] (Zgorzelski & Opacki, 1962) and the comprehensive monograph *Oda w poezji polskiej. Dzieje gatunku* [Ode in Polish poetry: A history of the genre] by T. Kostkiewiczowa (1996). The first book contains one poem each by M. Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska and J. Gamska-Łempicka, and seven works by K. Iłłakowiczówna, all of which are considered continuations of the Young Poland tendencies. The earlier eras are represented by A. Mostowska, M. Konopnicka, M. Wolska, and B. Ostrowska, whose work was evaluated based on the criterion of "poetic value." On the other hand, the criterion of "representativeness in terms of literary history" proved useful in selecting male representatives of the genre, as the anthology's editor explains in the introduction (p. LXXVI). The second publication, in the chapters concerning Polish literature up to 1918, provides information on the works of K. Benisławska, M. Konopnicka, B. Ostrowska, and K. Iłłakowiczówna. Still, Chapter VIII titled "Oda w poezji

historians and philology students. These were *Antologia polskiego futuryzmu i Nowej Sztuki* [An anthology of Polish futurism and the New Art], edited by Helena Zaworska and Zbigniew Jarosiński (1978), which included only a few names of female poets, and *Poezja polska okresu międzywojennego* [Polish poetry of the interwar period], prepared for the "Biblioteka Narodowa" series by Michał Głowiński and Janusz Sławiński (1987). The latter included works by Maria Czerkawska, Zuzanna Ginczanka, Kazimiera Iłłakowiczówna, Felicja Kruszewska, Beata Obertyńska, Bronisława Ostrowska, Maria Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska, Anna Świrszczyńska, and Irena Tuwim (9 female versus 50 male names). The editors appear to be conscious of the fact that creating an anthology requires "a compromise between the preferences of the compilers and the demands of representativeness and socially entrenched perceptions of the field of writing that is the subject of selection" (Głowiński & Sławiński, 1987, p. CI). Therefore, they selected texts that were both "historically representative, testifying not only to the styles and poetics of individual authors," which also "provided an image of the transformations of interwar poetry" and the "diversity of poetic trends and solution" (Głowiński & Sławiński, 1987, p. CII). They also chose poems that were "good and interesting," and those that they said they liked (Głowiński & Sławiński, 1987, p. CII). On the other hand, all the editors excluded the works of artists "who in the interwar period only minimally revealed themselves as poets (either because they were occupied with other forms, or simply because they were too young)" as well as the poems "included in earlier anthologies" (Głowiński & Sławiński, 1987, p. CIII).

dwudziestolecia i podczas drugiej wojny" [Ode in the poetry of the interwar period and during the Second World War] does not discuss any works by female authors. The anthology of odes edited by Kostkiewiczowa (2009) contains only one interwar text by a woman, that is, K. Iłłakowiczówna's piece from the 1930 volume *Popiół i perły* [Ashes and pearls].

Poets in the Shadow of Young Poland, Skamander, and the Avant-garde

Labels. This book explores the purpose behind creating and using the category of 'women's poetry' and highlights the unique characteristics of texts classified within this category. Another definition of the term that I adopt in this book is that of poetic texts written by women. Both interpretations of the term add nuance and complexity to the observations made by Michał Głowiński and Janusz Sławiński in the introduction to their anthology *Poezja polska okresu międzywojennego*, published in the "Biblioteka Narodowa" series (1987, vol. 1, pp. III–CIX). By no means am I suggesting that the anthology they have compiled is androcentric, as it does include works by female poets, such as Maria Czerkawska, Bronisława Ostrowska, Kazimiera Iłłakowiczówna, Maria Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska, Irena Tuwim, Beata Obertyńska, Felicja Kruszewska, Anna Świrszczyńska, and Zuzanna Ginczanka. What I am stating, however, is that it were the participants in the interwar literary scene themselves who used androcentric criteria to organise the poetic production of that time. This approach may have prevented them from fully appreciating what the works of now-forgotten women writers, such as Kazimiera Alberti, Halina Brodowska, Maria Czeska-Mączyńska, Wanda Brzeska, Anda Ekier, Irma Kanfer, Nela Gajzlerówna, Jadwiga Gamska-Łempicka, Eugenia Kobylińska, Henryka Łazowertówna, Elżbieta Marwegowa, Zofia Reutt-Witkowska, Ksenia Żytomirska, and many others, had to say about Polish literature and culture at that time. In other words, the criteria inherited from the previous era led critics and researchers of interwar literature to understand women's texts as distinctly 'feminine', that is, focused on 'insignificant' details of everyday life that contain little 'idea' and occupy too much space both in the text and in the book.

It should be noted that critics have also made ironic commentaries on the insignificant size of women's poetry volumes. These attitudes reveal the critics' ignorance or deliberate disregard for the tradition of *album amicorum*, or the book of friendship, which was cultivated by women in Europe since the Renaissance, peaked in Romanticism, and faded out by the end of the nineteenth century (see Wasylewski, 1921; Biernacki, 1994). Let us consider two typical reviews of

standard women's collections, one by Krystyna Konarska and another by Lola Szereszewska, which were written by regular reviewers of *Nowa Książka* [The New Book]: Paweł Hulka-Laskowski and Zdzisław Kleszczyński:

> The author never exceeds certain average registers and stays within the realm of distinctly feminine lyricism. […] The poet has allowed herself to get carried away by the embellishment of her emotions. She enjoys the little elephants standing on the desk, the Persian carpet in the living room […], the fragrant sweet peas blooming along the street. However, apart from these adornments, there is nothing at all in these poems – and if there is anything, it is a feeling as significant as the elephant on the desk, those golden spots on the carpet, or the sweet pea flowers (Hulka-Laskowski, 1936, p. 341).

> I don't quite understand why so many lilliputian collections (39 pages, and Table of Contents on the 40th!) have been published lately and why there are so many lilliputian pages in these lilliputian collections with only one lilliputian stanza […]. What emerges are mediocre verses: neutral if they are supported by stronger ones on the sides, but embarrassingly poor when a whole page in the book is reserved for them and when, additionally, such a small poem bears the title "Reflections" […]. "Reflections," Madame (or Mademoiselle?), is a title that implies substance (Kleszczyński, 1937, p. 535).

However, if we take a closer look at what the critics' irony actually entails – namely, the external aspects of most interwar women's poetry collections – then we consider them as utilitarian objects with a specific purpose. Sometimes they can be seen as works of editorial art, as evidenced by in their small size, sophisticated graphic designs of texts, lettering, endpapers, ornaments, separators, covers made of materials other than cardboard, and illustrations.

A careful design of a poetry collection, ensuring that it fits the average female hand and is pleasant to handle and look at, turns out to be a conscious manifestation of women poets' desire to communicate with their readers not only verbally, on an intellectual plain, but also on a sensory level, appealing to the senses of touch and sight. Thus, women authors expanded their creative scope to include not only textual messages in the form of poems, but also the entire material space of the book. We can identify at least three exemplary implementations of this approach: Wanda Melcer's collection *Na pewno książka kobiety* [A woman's book for sure] (1920), Maria Pawlikowska's *Różowa magia* [Pink magic] (1924), and Alina Butrymowiczówna's *Serce słupów telegraficznych*

[The heart of telegraph poles] (1927)[1]. The first and third volumes showcase avant-garde editorial achievements that are primarily associated with Futurist poetry collections, while the second volume employs practices commonly found in Art Nouveau editions.

The labels assigned by male critics to interwar women's poetry books determined how these volumes were arranged on bookstore and library shelves, based on the degree of their 'graphomania.' The top shelf typically held poetry books representing "literary culture," "poetic culture," or "modest but undeniable talent." The bottom shelf contained volumes tagged as "conventionalism," "raw poetic material rather than actual poems," "awkward versecraft," "atmospheric sentimentality in the graphomaniac style of Young Poland," and "hopelessly sweet banality." In the middle shelves there were works described as "smooth and fairly intelligent mediocrity," characterised by "exceptional lifelessness and banality of expression, despite evident culture," and "correct in terms of their culture and versification, but not going beyond a certain template in imagery." These phrases were frequently used by Karol Wiktor Zawodziński and Władysław Sebyła in their reviews written for the *Rocznik Literacki* in the 1930s. Here are some examples of the men's 'critique' of women's poetry:

> Irena Konopacka's *Niezżęte kłosy* [Gleanings] […] presents smooth and fairly intelligent mediocrity of a provincial savant and may appeal to certain circles (Zawodziński, 1933, p. 29).
>
> Wanda Niedziałkowska-Dobaczewska's modest but undeniable talent also knows how to use the advantages of her theme, namely, a distinctive *couleur locale* of the Vilnius region […] so as to present itself in an exceptionally favourable light in her collection *Nasza dola* [Our lot] […]; yet, everything that extends beyond this theme in the same book exudes hopelessly sweet banality (Zawodziński, 1933, p. 31).
>
> H. Januszewska's poems, now collected under the title *Exodus* […], had previously adorned the pages of *Familienblatt* – quite literally, as everything in them is pure decoration. They are pretty and elegant almost to the point of snobbery […]. There is so much affectation there! There is splendour and spontaneity, and an ease of

1 All poetry collections mentioned in this chapter are listed in the annex at the end of this publication.

> poeticism that covers up all too easy poetic solutions. Such talent! The poetic Kleszczyński of our times! (Zawodziński, 1933, p. 32).
>
> Elżbieta Szemplińska's attitude towards the world, despite the numerous coquettish and affectatious expressions, previously unnoticed either by her or by her critics, inspires more trust than the banal, in their non-banality, confessional traditionalisms of the beautiful ladies who represent well-manicured literature.
> All the negative features of her predecessor – and few positive ones – are replicated by Ewa Kowalska in her *Wiersze nienawiści*. Here and there, amidst a flood of forced tropes, one stumbles upon beautiful metaphors; but it is raw poetic material rather than actual poems, because no genuine poems can be found in this shapeless form (Zawodziński, 1934, p. 33).
>
> In her proper poems, Jadwiga Hoesick-Hendrichowa (*Różowe migdały* [Pink almonds]) dreams of ancient Kraków, reflects on some Italian impressions, gallops on dream horses, ponders over poverty or muses in the church. This is truly feminine poetry, a lacework in a positive sense of the word, and has little to do with the era of I. Krzywicka (Zawodziński, 1935, p. 51).
>
> The poetry volume titled Madonna z Portofino [Madonna of Portofino] is work of debuting poetess Halina Brodowska, from the Poznań group Prom [The Ferry]. It is characterised by exceptional lifelessness and banality of expression, despite evident culture. The influence of 'avant-garde' in her metaphor is evident – unfortunately, this metaphor is oftentimes completely inflexible. […]
> Of the remaining women's books, Krystyna Konarska's collection *Oczy w słońcu* [Eyes in the sun] contains poems that are correct in terms of their culture and versification, but not going beyond a certain template in imagery […].
> Equally clichéd are the poems of Józefina Rogosz-Walewska from her collection *Radość samotna* [A lonely joy]. Judging solely from the list of her 'ready for print' works, Rogosz-Walewska seems to be one of those prolific authors.
>
> Eugenia Kobylińska is equally prolific. She gifted Polish poetry last year with her collection *Opowieści świerkowe* [Pine stories]. The quality of these poems is downright pathetic (Sebyła, 1936, pp. 23–24).

The relegation of interwar women writers to the ghetto of graphomaniacs and epigones hindered – as it does today – any (serious) discussion on their work. However, if we disregard the misleading labels that excluded interwar women poets from the field of literature and instead examine their work without the biases of high Modernism, many issues considered indisputable in the history of Polish literature will reveal their ambiguities.

Ambiguities. The first of such issues would be the actual history of women's poetry. The internal transformation of this field is visible precisely because there have always been fewer female poets than male poets in Polish literature. It has occurred through a dialogue with tradition, that is, models inherited from the previous era, and with contemporary times that create its own models (see Filipiak, 2005; Helbig-Mischewski, 2010; Magnone, 2011). This well-known pattern has become more complex in recent decades owing to the inclusion of gender issues in literary studies.[2] To demonstrate the implications of this transformation, it must be noted that until the end of the twentieth century, Polish literary scholarship applied androcentric criteria inherited from previous epochs to evaluate the achievements of women writers. This means that the allegedly universal aesthetic canon was, in fact, male-oriented, focused almost exclusively on the biographies and works of male writers. The history of literature adjusted the biographies and works of female writers so that they did not disturb the configuration of the existing culture. This occurred against the backdrop of conservative culture that saw women's aspirations to participate in its creation as a desire to assimilate or mature into the abovementioned 'universal' tradition and hence, to satisfy their need to enrich or renew it (Kłosińska, 1995, pp. 87–112).

One result of understanding the process of social and cultural emancipation of women as a process of assimilation or maturing was to view their previous modest artistic achievements as a sign of their 'universal self-culturation.' Consequently, this led to the denial of women's artistic achievements as culturally valuable because they rarely fit the 'canon.' The introduction of the category of gender into literary history allowed readers and researchers to realise that the elements of the past and present to which female authors are obliged to succumb were as much the rules of artistic creation developed by men and women alike as were the ways of 'being a poet' and 'being a poetess.' In this way, the so-called 'canon' gets broadened, enriched, reconfigured, and complicated. Only then can an attempt be made to view the history of women's poetry as a history of reading (and, by extension, of imitation, rejection, reformulation, or ignorance) of their

2 Such research includes, for instance: Wiśniewska, 1999; Zacharska & Kochanowski, 2002; Iwasiów & Czerska, 2005; Stępnik & Gabryś, 2006; Iwasiów, 2008; Galant & Iwasiów, 2008; Krukowska, 2010; Borkowska & Wiśniewska, 2010; Graczyk, 2011; Bednarczuk, 2012.

predecessors' works (both male and female poets), intertwined with the history of their biographical experiences and choices.[3]

One might, for example, consider whether Anna Memorata (1612/1615-c. 1645) was only an avid reader and follower of religious writings authored by men, published and circulated within the community of the Czech Brethren active in Leszno. Owing to her excellent education, including knowledge of foreign languages, she might have also read European literature written by women (see Memorata, 1998; Rott, 1997, pp. 23–35). We might also ask whether the religious lyrical poetry by Elżbieta Drużbacka (1698/1699–1765), Konstancja Benisławska (1747–1806), and Teofila Glińska (1762/1763–1799)[4] allow us to see that these poetesses (especially Drużbacka and Benisławska) were well-versed not only in biblical and mythological stories and the writings of Jan Kochanowski and Piotr Skarga, but also (particularly Benisławska) in the paradigm of Ignatian spirituality (see Wojtyska, 1981, pp. 61–70; Aumann, 1985/2001), popularised by Magdalena Mortęska (1554–1631).[5] Do the erotic allusions in the poems of Elżbieta Drużbacka or Antonina Niemiryczowa (c.a. 1700–1780)[6] correspond with the playful love poetry of the Enlightenment era, both in Polish and other languages, and also written by women? Other questions might concern whether the liberal and conservative reflection on the status of women in society connects the successive generations of Polish women poets, starting from the author of the verse autobiography Anna Stanisławska (c. 1652–1700/1701), through Elżbieta Drużbacka, Anna Libera (1805–1886), Narcyza Żmichowska (1819–1876), to Maria Ilnicka (1825–1897) and Jadwiga Łuszczewska (Deotyma;

3 See, for instance, Stanisławska, 1935, and commentaries to her autobiography: T. Targosz, 1997, pp. 280–281; Szczęsny, 1998, pp. 69–87; Popławska, 1998, pp. 89–111.

4 For a discussion on Drużbacka, see: Borowy, 1978, pp. 28–42; Wichary, 1992, pp. 118–142; Kryda, 1995, pp. 11–44. For further reading on Benisławska, see: Borowy, 1978, pp. 200–220; Chachulski, 1992, pp. 771–788; Czyż, 1988, pp. 117–129; Zgorzelski, 1993, pp. 29–36; Chachulski, 1995, pp. 77–92; Obremski, 1998, pp. 163–171. For an analysis of Glińska's works, see: Gomulicki, 1916, pp. 205–225; Mikulski, 1956, pp. 341–387.

5 For more information on Mortęska, see: Górski, 1971; M. Borkowska, 1980a, pp. 1564–1571; Czyż 1984, pp. 229–240. For a discussion of Niemryczowa, see: Gomulicki, 1912, pp. 289–382; Czyż, 1988, pp. 101–116.

6 For a discussion of Drużbacka's work, see Graciotti, 1991, vol. 2, pp. 7–26.

1834–1908).[7] Also, we might wonder whether these poetesses, when considering the condition of womanhood, heard the quiet, individual and marginalised voices of their predecessors and contemporaries who held views different from those uttered by the loud chorus of male voices. Do the poems by Teofila Glińska, Anna Libera, Julia Woykowska (1816–1851)[8], and Narcyza Żmichowska resonate with the same progressive, democratic and patriotic thought, despite the fact that they were divided by time, social origin, social and financial position? The questions go on.

I can envision multiple responses to these inquiries. The optimistic interpretation would reveal a genealogical story of a centuries-long creative understanding among women writers, who acknowledged the legacy of their predecessors and who, like male writers, inspired future generations of female authors (see e.g. Czarnecka, 2004). The pessimistic perspective, on the other hand, would be a narrative of discontinuity, turmoil, constant ruptures, and starting all over again.[9] The realistic version, considering the fact that no one is free from the constraints of their own era, would probably tell a story of a conscious, albeit hidden and ambivalent, relationships between literary grandmothers and mothers, and daughters and granddaughters. Reading the works of women not only in relation to the greatest artistic achievements of male poets from earlier periods and the present, but also against the backdrop of the work of their female counterparts, would expand the range of explanations why women writers have never been deemed 'good enough' for the general public or for the critics. The ineptitude, imitation, banality, and inconsistency of women's texts resulted as much from their authors' actual deficiencies in education and craftsmanship as from the use of accepted conventions for a different purpose than they were originally developed for. As a result, women

7 Anna Libera's writing is analysed, for instance, by Sudolski, 1975, pp. 837–849; and Bieńkowski, 1968. For a discussion on Żmichowska, see: Stępień, 1968; G. Borkowska, 1996; Phillips, 2009. Ilnicka is examined by Franke, 1999, and for more information on Deotyma, see: Bachórz, 1988, pp. 927–958; Maciejewski, 1971.

8 See, for instance: Frelkiewicz, 1938; Gospodarek, 1962.

9 See, for instance, Michel Foucault's essay "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" (Foucault, 1977/1996, pp. 139–164).

poets express female experience using tools primarily designed for male use. The outcome of a woman attempting to express herself in a man's language could be the distortion of both female experience and the male model.[10]

Secondly, there is the issue of the time frame. Historians of interwar literature are clear on the temporal boundaries of this period, which are defined by the restoration of Poland's independence in 1918 and the Nazi invasion in 1939. These events radically changed Poland's literary landscape, including women's poetry. However, as a result of these events, the succession of generations and the continuation of established genres became more complex for women writers compared to male poets.

At the onset of the First World War, the women poets born in the late nineteenth century and debuting in the Young Poland period (or slightly earlier) fell silent as abruptly and collectively as when they first appeared on the literary scene. By 1914, these women had already published works not only in daily newspapers, illustrated weeklies, or literary periodicals but also in individual poetry volumes. Some of these female writers, still active in the years 1914–1918, like Anna Neumanowa (1854–1918), Stanisława Szadurska (?–1919), Maria Iwanicka (Theresita; 1878–1923), and possibly Maria Komornicka (1876–1949) passed away during or shortly after the war. Others, such as Józefa Cybulska-Bąkowska (1861–1933), Anna Karwatowa (1854–1932), Teodora Kropidłowska (1879–1931), Jadwiga Marcinowska (1872–1943), and Hanna Krzemieniecka (1866–1930), consciously chose silence in the new times and faded away in the first decade of Poland's independence. Another group of female poets, for instance, Natalia Dzierżkówna (1861–1931), Ewa Łuskina (1879–1942), Helena Janina Pajzderska (Rogozińska; 1862–1927), Stefania Podhorska-Okołów (1884–1962), Jadwiga Marcinowska (1872–1943), Maria Markowska (1878–1939), Helena Wiktoria Sołtysowa (1860–1948), Maria Xenia Bechczyc-Rudnicka (1888–1982), and Anna Zahorska (Savitri; 1878/[1882]–1942), abandoned lyrical poetry to pursue other literary genres and/or socio-cultural journalism during the interwar period and

10 Krystyna Stasiewicz undertook a successful attempt to reevaluate the work of Elżbieta Drużbacka, one of the poetesses of Old Poland. Stasiewicz demonstrates that her poetry, deemed to be 'uneven' by several generations of scholars, when viewed through a different lens could be seen as eclectic, 'polyphonic,' and characteristic of transitional periods. See: Stasiewicz, 1992, 1996, pp. 261–269, 1998, pp. 113–128.

after 1945. Some, like Krystyna Zaleska (1874–1945), Flora (Liliana) Hufnagel (?–after 1930), Stanisława Kucharska (1890–1932), Zofia Lutosławska (1861–1958), Helena Romer-Ochenkowska (1875–1947), or Krystyna Zaleska Sariusz (1874–1945), continued to dabble in lyrical poetry, but did so infrequently and published exclusively in the press. Finally, poetesses such as Waleria Szalay-Groele (1873[79?]–1957) or Krystyna Grzybowska (1902–1963) practiced poetry as one of many forms of expression, but, unlike Jadwiga Hoesick-Hendrichowa (1905–?), they never published their works in a separate book, and are primarily known for their works for children and young adults.

The First World War thus became a significant caesura for the abovementioned female authors. The widespread recognition that the pre-war cultural models became obsolete during the years 1914–1918, and the noticeable rejection of the Young Poland poetics by the younger generation of writers caused educated women, who were shaped by that poetics, to withdraw from the field of lyrical creativity. Only a few of the most prominent representatives of Young Poland poetry, specifically Maria Grosse-Korycka (1864–1926), Bronisława Ostrowska (1881–1928), and Maryla Wolska (1873–1930), embraced new artistic tendencies and creatively incorporated them into their later collections published in the 1920s. Their premature passing meant that they did not leave a mark on the interwar lyrical poetry and were remembered as Modernist poets by both the readers and critics of their own time and by Polish literature scholars later on. This fate was avoided by their contemporaries: Franciszka Arnsztajnowa (1865–1944), Maria Czerkawska (1881–1973), Kazimiera Iłłakowiczówna (1892–1983), Zofia Wojnarowska (1881–1967), and Zuzanna Rabska (1888–1960), whose work spans three eras: Young Poland, the interwar period, and (except for Arnsztajnowa) the years after the Second World War. However, they were never part of the mainstream of poetry in any of these periods.

The generation of Young Poland women poets was quickly replaced by an almost equally numerous group of women born at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and debuting around the time of the First World War. Accordingly, some female poets became publicly known shortly before the outbreak of the Great War, like Wanda Melcer (1896–1972), Zofia Rościszewska (1891–1945), and Maria Helena Szpyrkówna (1893–1977), or they debuted during the war, like Zofia Jabłońska-Erdmanowa (1897–1998) and Morstin-Górska (1893–1972). In the first decade of Polish independence, the press and bookstores featured the poems and volumes by Kazimiera Alberti (1898–1962), Wanda

Borudzka (1897–1964), Janina Brzostowska (1907–1986), Róża Czekańska-Heymanowa (1887–1968), Maria Czeska-Mączyńska (1883–1944), Anna Ludwika Czerny (1891–1968), Julia Dickstein-Wyleżyńska (1880–1944), Wanda Dobaczewska-Niedziałkowska (1991–1968), Helena Maria Fikowa (Moskwianka, 1903–1943), Jadwiga Gamska-Łempicka (1903–1956), Hanna Januszewska (1905–1980), Melania Kierczyńska (1888–1962), Felicja Kruszewska (1897–1943), Maria Krzetuska (?–?), Krystyna Kuliczkowska (Jaroszyńska, 1912–1986), Herminia Naglerowa (1880–1957), Maria Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska (1894–1945), Zofia Reutt-Witkowska (1883–1938), Nina Rydzewska (1902–1938), Anna Słonczyńska (1902–1944), and Irena Tuwim (1900–1987). The birthdates of these women suggest that not all of these debutantes were in their schoolgirl or student years. Some of them published their first volumes as mature individuals, thus having been shaped by Young Poland and earlier poets, as evidenced in their juvenilia (if any survived). However, in general the authors of poems from the 1920s managed to liberate themselves from the burden of Modernism and adopted the Skamander model. If one were to identify a poet from the previous era whose influence is most evident in the work of these poetesses, it would be Leopold Staff, although he was quickly replaced by Julian Tuwim.

In the 1930s, a much smaller group of women poets debuted. These writers, e.g. Zuzanna Ginczanka (1917–1944), Eugenia Kobylińska-Masiejewska (1894–1974), Jadwiga Korczakowska (1906–1994), Wanda Kragen (1893–1982), Janina Siwkowska (1906–1981), Elżbieta Szemplińska-Sobolewska (1910–1991), and Anna Świrszczyńska (1909–1984), managed to publish their poetry books before 1939. There were more women who entered literary scene towards the end of the interwar period and their mature work (not always or not solely lyrical) only came to fruition only after the Second World War. They made their debut in daily and youth press, as well as in school newspapers. After the Second World War, they either remained faithful to *belles-lettres*, or chose journalism. Their literary background was the interwar poetry, against which they had to re/define themselves if they opted for lyrical poetry. These authors include Marta Aluchna-Emalianow (1906–1991), Zofia Bohdanowiczowa (1898–1965) (who published her poetry volume *Ziemia miłości* [The land of love] in 1954), Helena Bychowska-Iwanow (1909–1959) (the author of *Poezje* [Poetry], 1969), Izabela Czajka-Stachowicz (1897–1969), Irena Dowgielewicz (1920–1987), Wanda Dynowska (1888–1971), Małgorzata Hołyńska (Waśniewska, 1916–2006), Wanda Karczewska (1913–1995) (her poetry collection *Jeszcze jedna godzina* [Another

hour] appeared in 1985), Larysa Mitznerowa (1918–1987), Danuta Mostwin (1921–2010), Czesława Niemyska-Rączaszkowa (1903–1974), Józefa Radzymińska (1921–2002), Zofia Romanowiczowa (1922–2010), Maria Rosińska (1909–), Zofia Szleyen (1904–1994), Grażyna Terlikowska-Woysznis (1916–1989), and Joanna Żwirska (Helena Radzymińska-Mularczyk, 1917–1999).

One cannot avoid mentioning the post-1945 editions of women's interwar poetic works, which were ideologically influenced and therefore reliant on the shifting political, artistic, and ethical circumstances. For example, in the early decades after the Second World War, the politically correct alliance of workers and peasants and the concept of the primordial Polish identity of the territories annexed to Poland required literary justifications and manifestations. Thus, the poems of regional poets, previously only published in regional journals or niche anthologies during the interwar period, were finally released in their own separate collections. This was the case with the poems of the Warmian poet Maria Zientara-Malewska (1894–1984) (*Poezje Warmii i Mazur* [Poems of Warmia and Masuria], 1953) and the Podhale poets Hanka Nowobielska (1912–1982) (*Kukułecka* [The Cookoo], 1970, and *Ugwarzania z kotem* [Chatting to a cat], 1980), and Aniela Stapińska (1898–1954) (*Ku jasnym dniom* [Towards bright days], 1998), which became available to the 1940s and 1950s audiences. Other such instances include the works of the illiterate folk poet Katarzyna Zaborowska, known as Kaśka of Łysica (1879–1967), which were written down and published in the 1960s.[11] The extensive works of other women poets, such as the Kashubian Teodora Kropidłowska (1879–1931), remain scattered in periodicals, while commemorative poems of the Silesian author Maria Kawik (1900–1978), known as the Mother of Partisans, were lost; only about twenty of her poems from the years of the Second World War survived in the manuscript form (Heller, 1981, pp. 145–147). The songs and poems of Krystyna Krahelska (1914–1944), a soldier of the Home Army who died in the Warsaw Uprising, were published in 1978, while the avant-garde poems of the Jewish poetess Mila Elin (1907?–?), who also perished during the Second World War, were published in 1999.

11 See anthologies: R. Rosiak, 1966; Szczawiej, 1967; E. Rosiak & R. Rosiak, 1966.

As for the artistic consequences of regaining independence, the poems of women writers demonstrate that they engaged with events important to the Polish *raison d'état*, such as writing about the First World War, the Legions, Józef Piłsudski, or the Baltic Sea as the 'Polish sea.' However, there is no trace of the 1920s joyful "spring and wine" or "sparrows on the roof," to quote the titles of Kazimierz Wierzyński's poetry collections; neither is there a fascination with "the city, the mass, the machine," expressed in the title of Tadeusz Peiper's poetic manifesto.

Generally speaking, interwar women poets' creativity differed from that of male poets. Kazimierz Czachowski noted in his synthesis the "insignificant participation of women in the new avant-garde art" (Czachowski, 1934, p. 404). Indeed, there are no women among the Futurists, Formists, Expressionists, or Kraków Avant-gardists; in the remaining poetry groups, women were on the fringes, like Maria Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska (Skamander) (Stradecki, 1979, pp. 225–247), Nina Rydzewska and Lucyna Krzemieniecka (Kwadryga) (Szymański, 1979, pp. 308–319), Janina Brzostowska (Czartak) (Studencki, 1979, pp. 217–228), Halina Brodowska and Nora Odlanicka (Szczepańska) (Prom), Helena Fikowa (Litart) (Faron, 1979, pp. 296–298), and Franciszka Arnsztajnowa in the Lublin group. It is also important to consider the so-called existential problems as a unifying factor for male creative groups and their artistic programmes. Alina Kowalczykowa points out that "reading memoirs from those years, it is easy to notice that the young people got grouped together not so much for artistic reasons, but rather for existential ones" (Kowalczykowa, 1978, p. 265). Social conventions, which continued to limit the freedom of women in the interwar period, also marginalised their intellectual and artistic influence within male-dominated literary circles that used their 'common rooms.' This applies to both the strongly heteronormative 'shared room' of Kwadryga, as well as that of the Lublin poets, discreetly overseen by Józef Czechowicz.

Thus, in comparison to male poets, women who write poetry tend to 'run wild' more often, as they prefer to live away from the capital and opt for the provincial peace and rural landscape. This is illustrated by Sława Pruszyńska's doggerel "Niczyja jestem" [I belong to no one] from the collection *Tęcze pogody* [Weather's rainbows] (1922). The themes of loneliness and a lack of belonging, expressed through images of a bird and grass, are persistently present in poetry collections written by women during the interwar period. Unfortunately, these themes are also handled in such a primitive manner that it prompts consideration of

whether they should be seen as a statement of not only personal detachment but also of a lack of collective connections:

I belong to no one, no one at all…
Like a fleeting cloud in the sky,
Like a stream that passes flowers by,
Like a bird flying ahead, away…
[…] (Pruszyńska, 1922, p. 30).

Such a consideration seems justified when Pruszyńska's poem is juxtaposed with Julian Tuwim's "Niczyj" [Nobody's] from the collection *Siódma jesień* [The seventh autumn] published in the same year (1922). Tuwim's poem takes the shape of a lyrical diary expressing his love for his wife. Unlike Pruszyńska, the Skamander poet discusses the sense of belonging to both the world (represented by God in the poem) and to a person ('You'):

I am nobody's in the world,
Nobody's, like grass or a spring,
But I am Yours and God's,
I am Yours (Tuwim, 1922, p. 21).

From this perspective, it is interesting to trace the history of women's cooperation with poetic groups and their periodicals, particularly with those at university centres that sprang up in the early 1920s. Women poets who collaborated with literary groups during their university education vanished from the purview of contemporary literary historians once these groups gained autonomy, i.e. after their co-founders graduated and ventured into the broader literary scene. In such situation, female members of these groups either shifted away from poetry towards other areas of literature, abandoned artistic creation in favour of social activism, or found themselves marginalised in research processes that took male creativity as the 'norm.' This applies not only to the poetic circles that formed accidentally, such as e.g. the Polish Artistic Club, 'Gospoda Poetów' [The Poets' Inn] and 'Ponowa' [Fresh snow], where, as remembered by Edward Kozikowski, "there was no need for sworn allegiance to each other and no need to keep it" (Kozikowski, 1961, p. 200), and where Herminia Naglerowa and Róża Czekańska-Heymanowa held prominent positions. As Tymon Terlecki recalls (thus providing an excuse for researchers further on), Naglerowa later stated

that she "did not attach much importance" to her poems from the early 1920s (Terlecki, 1967, p. 10). This also applies to the literary groups bound by a more defined programme, such as the Poznań group Prom. Halina Brodowska, Wanda Karczewska, and Nora Odlanicka, whom Edward Pawlak describes as "a harbinger of poetic avant-gardism in Poznań" in the early 1930s, were associated with this group (Pawlak, 1971, p. 65).

Let us examine the poetic association 'Helion,' established in 1921 within the Polish Studies Association at the Jagiellonian University by inspiration of Tadeusz Bielecki, Józef Aleksander Gałuszka, and Jerzy Braun. As Regina Lubas writes, among groups that published short-lived literary journals in the 1920s, such as e.g. *Sympozjon* [The Symposium] (1920), *Hiperbola* [The Hyperbole] (1921), *Kongres* [The Congress] (1920), *Dionizy* [Dionysius] (1922), or *Koło Nowej Liryki* [The New Poetry Association], the "most enduring, broadest, strategic, and recognised literary activity in Kraków, or rather, in the conservative circles of the city, was carried out by the literary-artistic circle 'Helion.' This group was renamed 'Litart' in 1926, and when Litart was disbanded, it became the Academic Literary-Artistic Club 'Volty,' which continued its tradition" (Lubas, 1978, p. 13). Despite the different names and constitutions of these groups, the character of the poetry written in the literary-artistic circle affiliated with the Jagiellonian University remains consistent: "[i]nitially, these groups cultivated a post-Young Poland model of poetry, and later also an avant-garde one. Both models often intermingled in the works of some poets. As for ideological attitudes, in the 1920s the young members of the circle were usually influenced by National Democracy. In the 1930s, the leftist convictions, which were already manifesting in the circle in its first decade, became more pronounced" (Lubas, 1978, p. 6). Poets such as Jan Brzękowski, Jalu Kurek, and Julian Przyboś collaborated with these periodicals, although later on they became embarrassed by this fact (Kurek, 1963, p. 137; Brzękowski, 1968, pp. 26, 28).

In 1924, Helion began publishing its own magazine; only one issue of *Helion* appeared in 1924, followed later by the collective volume *Almanach Helionu* [Helion's Almanac] (Kraków, 1926). The first and only issue of the magazine mentioned that the 'Helion' group emerged in 1922 from the Polish Studies Association. In its team comprising eleven members, there were three women: Irena Drozdowiczówna, H. Stammowa, and S. Sirchawianka. In his footnote to the editorial team, Lubas notes that the "names of Stammowa and Sirchawianka do not appear in the memories of Kraków residents, making it difficult to

decipher the initials of their first names. They likely belonged to Helion only briefly and did not play a significant role in the group" (Lubas, 1978, pp. 167–168). However, *Almanach Helionu* includes works by Maria Krzetuska and Helena Moskwianka, who would later became Ignacy Fik's wife, therefore we have more information about her. The final stanza of Maria Krzetuska's "Modlitwa" [The Prayer] published in *Almanach Helionu* reads as follows:

> We ask You, God, once more for the Great Word,
> We pray to You, fulfil, oh Lord,
> Our request – and once again proclaim
> Over this world: "Let there be Light" (Krzetuska, 1926, p. 8).

"Modlitwa" has the same pathetic-mystical tone as the texts of the other group members. Yet, even after the dissolution of Helion, Gałuszka, Jerzy Braun, Witold Zechenter, Adam Polewka, and Jan Sztaudynger continued to write, striving to establish their own position in the literature of the 1930s, which they ultimately achieved. It is challenging, though, to identify any similar ambitions in Krzetuska's biography, although she did not give up her literary activity. One more crucial detail is worth noting: in 1932, Jerzy Braun founded the magazine *Zet* which further developed the mystical programme inspired by *Helion*. In *Zet*, Braun continued to use the same type of discourse as before, but now influenced by the philosophy of the Polish Romantic emigration (Speina, 1979, pp. 325–331). Krzetuska's "Modlitwa" would be a good fit for this new magazine, but the author's gender overshadowed her work, leading to being labelled as 'women's' rather than 'mystical' poetry. One might even speculate that the magazine's editor did not envision this gendered version of discourse, despite the long literary tradition of women's mysticism.

I have come across two of Krzetuska's poems – "Kiedyś…" [Once…] and "Czytam wiersz" [I read the poem] – published in the women's magazine *Wanda*, launched in Kraków just before the Second World War, which combines ideas of women's emancipation with national ideology (see Bednarczuk, 2012). Their style does not differ from Krzetuska's earlier works:

> **Once…**
>
> I remember
> A day conceived in happiness, never satiated with joy –
> I bless it – and curse it!

Only when it darkens
Into a black-and-white
negative

struck by opposing times,
Awakened by thunder
The wind will extinguish the bloody glow
and carelessly sift
The longed-for silence through its fingers (Krzetuska, 1939, p. 4).

I read the poem

At first
There was silence and words…
One after another in pursuit
Until suddenly shaken by a thunderbolt
That fell across the sky
Like a golden leaf
In an unrestrained rush
I persistently think
That you are all with me
And the ripe fruit
Fell into hands trembling with anticipation (Krzetuska, 1939, p. 4).

It is worth noting that the lexical, visual, and generic baggage of Young Poland, which was evident in the poetic output of most literary groups and magazines operating in the 1920s, was evaluated more critically when it pertained to women's work, and more leniently in the case of men. This conclusion can be drawn, for example, from reading the issues of *Helikon* [Helicon] (1924) which featured poems by Maria Grąbczewska, Maria Różycka, and Eleonora Laudańska, among others. Women were expected to master the technical rules, while men were expected to transcend them. At the same time, women were criticised for mastering these rules as it was assumed from the outset that they would not achieve higher literary quality, while for men, it was silently assumed that mastering the rules was merely a foundation from which they would launch into more lofty spheres, and that they would inevitably succeed.

From this perspective and considering the gender criterion, literary groups and magazines played a dual role in the early years of Poland's independence. In the 1920s, they 'educated' local creators, including even such mature poets as Franciszka Arnsztajnowa in Lublin who adapted her poetics according to the models promoted in the artistic journals of successive decades. In the 1930s, the same literary groups and magazines ushered local creators, primarily male writers like Józef Czechowicz, into the national space.[12] Krystyna Sierocka commented on the role of local literary magazines as follows:

> These magazines did not aspire to create new artistic directions. They were satisfied with embracing the established poetics and programs, implementing an eclectic approach to modernise them, and mainly focused on shaping the poets of their region or city while nurturing literary and creative interests among local readership circles. While not overstating their role, the importance of these transient groups and periodicals cannot be underestimated, as they played significant roles in literary promotion, popularisation, and education (Sierocka, 1975, p. 109).

In the 1930s, there was no improvement in the status of women poets within poetic groups. As Kazimierz Czachowski accurately observed, they were generally absent from the Avant-garde. This means that although they were, in fact, present, they operated according to their own rules and were usually on the fringes of the group's main activities. They were supported by some members but disregarded by the others. One such poet was Mila Elin, whom Agnieszka Dauksza aptly called "the enigma of the Avant-garde" (Dauksza, 2013). Dauksza's observations on Elin can be applied to many other women writing at that time: "[i]t should be noted from the get-go that virtually all knowledge about Mila Elinówna is based on conjecture, rough calculations, unclear reports, and brief textual mentions" (Dauksza, 2013, p. 15). According to the researcher's carefully collected references and excerpts from memoirs and correspondence of co-creators of the Kraków literary scene, as a collaborator of the Łódź poetic group 'Meteor' and a protégée of Tadeusz Peiper (Grądziel-Wójcik, 2010, p. 141),

12 See e.g. Madej, 1935, pp. 299–303; F. Araszkiewicz, 1937, p. 4; Życzyński, 1938, pp. 483–494; F. Araszkiewicz, 1939, pp. 179–197; Kłak, 1959; Dobosz, 1965, pp. 241–247; Szczawiej, 1965, pp. 5–22.

who introduced her to the pages of *Zwrotnica* and *Linia*, Elin was not well regarded by the other Avant-gardists.

On the one hand, Peiper wrote, "in her writing, Elin has come closer to me than anyone else, while maintaining all the interesting distinctiveness of her imagination" (Peiper, 1972, p. 317). In contrast, Julian Przyboś called Elin a "hag […] [who] spoils *Linia* with her colourless poems" (Przyboś, 1975, p. 109). Jan Brzękowski, too, considered Elin's poems "colourless, bloodless, genital-less" (Brzękowski, 1975, p. 64), and Jerzy Zagórski refused to accept her works for publication in *Piony* due to their "inappropriate themes" (Zagórski, 1975, p. 199). The editorial board of *Głos Literacki* insinuated that her "interest in literature was only limited […] to news from friends" ("Korespondencja," 1929, p. 4). It is no wonder, then, that the poetess complained to Jalu Kurek about her utter loneliness (Elin, 1975, p. 224). Dauksza, whose findings I am referencing in the above excerpt, summarises Mila Elin's situation as follows:

> On the one hand, Elin could rely on Peiper's support. As an influential mentor, he not only appreciated her literary attempts but also allowed her to collaborate with *Zwrotnica*, despite her being both the youngest and the only woman among the Avant-gardists. On the other hand, the same reasons exposed Elin to a barrage of criticism, both as Peiper's protégée and as a woman engaging in a male-dominated literary activity in the public sphere. One notable instance was Brzękowski's use of derogatory terms to describe Elin's poems. He referred to them as 'genital-less,' presumably to imply that they were non-male, neutral, feminine (Dauksza, 2013, pp. 16–17).

Yet another example of how women poets in the 1930s were treated in male-dominated poetic groups can be seen in the poetic *millieu* centred around the Vilnius-based Żagary. The significance of the work of women poets who were active in pre-war and interwar Vilnius was consistently marginalised there. Researcher Teresa Dalecka, who studied the poetic materials published in Vilnius literary magazines between 1922 and 1935, such as *Hipogryf* [The Hippogriff] (1920), *Tygodnik Wileński* [The Vilnus Weekly] (1925), *Alma Mater Vilniensis* (1922–1935), and *Źródła Mocy* [The Springs of Power] (1927–1930), notes that the "poetic profile of the magazines often reflected the tastes and preferences of the editorial teams. […] The titles in question did not aspire to achieve nationwide recognition, but they did pave the way, to some extent, for magazines such as *Żagary* or *Środy Literackie* [Literary Wednesdays]"

(Dalecka, 2003, p. 20). Dalecka lists the women who published their poems in these periodicals: Wanda Niedziałkowska-Dobaczewska, Matejkówna, Wanda Nowodworska, Helena Obiezierska, Halina Odyńcowa, Halina Packiewiczówna, Maria Salmonowiczówna, and Jadwiga Wokulska. The abovementioned periodicals featured not only younger and middle-aged women writers, but also poetesses from an older generation: Zofia Bohdanowiczowa, Eugenia Kobylińska-Masiejewska, Helena Łysakowska, Helena Obiezierska, and Wanda Stanisławska. Additionally, the list includes women poets and translators of Lithuanian literature who authored the first Polish anthologies that popularised the lyrical poetry of Poland's neighbouring nation; these poets-translators were Stefania Jabłońska (*Poezje odradzającej się Litwy* [Poems of reborn Lithuania], 1911) and Julia Wichert-Kajruksztisowa (*Antologia poezji litewskiej* [An anthology of Lithuanian poetry], 1939). Mieczysław Jackiewicz suggests that before the translations of "such talented, still very young poets as Czesław Miłosz, Teodor Bujnicki, Józef Maśliński, or Jerzy Zagórski" were published, "the promoters of Lithuanian poetry in Vilnius turned out to be marginal, little-known poets whose original works are now forgotten. […] [These are] poets, so to speak, skilled word artisans from the margins of great poetry" (Jackiewicz, 2003, pp. 321–322). This is also how they were perceived, discussed, and written about by the Żagary group.

In the early stages of the group's formation, its representatives and supporters still recognised the presence of women poets in the press reviews of their city's literary scene, as they had no choice but to acknowledge them. For example, Dalecka notes that Zygmunt Falkowski in *Alma Mater Vilniensis* "recognised several good or promising poets. He placed Walerian Charkiewicz, Seweryn Odyniec, and Jerzy Wyszomirski at the top of the poetic scene in Vilnius. But he also mentioned Helena Obiezierska, Wanda Nowodworska, and Stanisław Kunc" (Dalecka, 2009, p. 59). Nevertheless, by the late 1930s the male members of Żagary marginalised female poets and translators. In the influential magazine *Vilnianus žodis*, while discussing the unsatisfactory state of Polish literary scene in Vilnius, Teodor Bujnicki mentions only male participants of literary life, for instance academics: Karol Górski, Manfred Kridl, Stefan Srebrny, and Marian Zdziechowski. In the absence of serious literary journals, Bujnicki also emphasised the importance of the "Literary Column" edited by Józef Myśliński in *Kurier Wileński* and literary reviews by Walerian Charkiewicz and Jerzy Wyszomirski. He also appreciates the work of reporters Władysław

Chałubowicz and Józef Mackiewicz, and prose writers Teodor Parnicki and Tadeusz Łopalewski. Summarizing Bujnicki's views, Danuta Balašaitienė stresses that even though he considered lyrical poetry to be the most developed genre in Polish literature in Vilnius, he never acknowledged Helena Romer-Ochenkowska, Wanda Dobaczewska, and Eugenia Kobylińska (Balašaitiene, 2009, p. 176). They were pushed aside by Żagary, which became dominated by its leader, Czesław Miłosz, and by Jerzy Putrament, Aleksander Rymkiewicz, and Jerzy Zagórski.

The nature and extent of tensions between male and female poets can be seen in the memoirs of individual group members, such as the well-known excerpt from Putrament's notes revealing his disdain for female classmates in the Polish philology programme at the university. According to popular opinion, he said, female students enrolled either as "young ladies looking to get married, or as aspiring women poets. […] The former group was much, much larger" (Putrament, 1969, p. 145). Another piece of evidence of these tensions can be found in the documentation collected by cultural institutions in Vilnius. One example is the management of Środy Literackie [Literary Wednesdays], a group influenced by Helena Romer-Ochenkowska that had a distinct regionalist and elitist character. Therefore, "for the people from the Wanderers' Club […] Literary Wednesdays group was a half measure to be fought against" (Hernik Spalińska, 1998, p. 12). *Kalendarium Śród Literackich* [A timeline of Literary Wednesdays], meticulously compiled by Jagoda Hernik Spalińska, contains interesting excerpts from meeting minutes of the management staff that reveal internal differences of opinion on the nature of poetry and the role of the poet. These fragments also reflect the significant divide between the 'old' and 'young' generations, which had been relevant since the Romantic period. For example, the 128th Literary Wednesday (22nd April 1931) was devoted to a "discussion on trends in the latest Polish literature," and "the starting point for the discussion were issues raised in *Żagary*, the monthly periodical of 'Idące Wilno' [The Walking Vilnus]" (Hernik Spalińska, 1998, p. 146):

> Older poets observe certain new elements and slogans in the poetic movement of the younger generation, which is influencing present-day Polish literature. In Vilnius, the novelty of the 'young' lies, among other things, in their departure from regionalism (T. Łopalewski). These young poets have abandoned it not only in the content and form of their works, as noted by Ms. Dobaczewska, but also in their approach to the subject. During the meeting, there was particular emphasis on the

> diligent and meticulous crafting of poems, with attention paid to their modern structure – a characteristic of the Żagary group, although it is also common in almost all contemporary Polish poetry (J. Wyszomirski). However, it is important to highlight that these young poets, who have mastered the technique of verse and possess a high literary culture, are merely word hunters and poetry acrobats, lacking in greater substance. They are aware of this themselves and are seeking new paths, but they do not yet see them ahead.
>
> The discussion, initiated by the critical remarks of Mr. Wyszomirski and Ms. Dobaczewska, then shifted to the issue of the relationship between poetry and life in general, as well as contemporary Polish poetry.
>
> The individual poets who spoke (Messrs. Miłosz, Jędrychowski, Maśliński, Zagórski), frequently cited the views of contemporary Polish critics and poets (Irzykowski, Iwaszkiewicz, Laskowski, Czachowski, and others) to indicate their stance on the raised issues. Generally, they agreed with the opinions of one writer or another. The interest in the work of the 'young' is not high, judging by attendance, but a positive sign, especially when compared to the previous Wednesday meeting, is the presence of a larger group of academic youth (Hernik Spalińska, 1998, p. 146).

The third example of the discrepancy in the treatment of female and male poets is the existence of two perspectives in the literature of the period: that of the members in the literary circles and that of literary historians. The interwar period left behind not only a substantial collection of poetic texts but also a significant set of programmatic statements about poetry, its developmental tendencies, their mutual relationships and divisions. These statements were accompanied by the criticism that organised this part of the literary field. All of these activities were part of literary life and contributed to the image of interwar poetry as seen by those involved. Various interest groups, seeking to carve out a place for themselves on the literary Parnassus, created a simple opposition between the old and the young, tradition and modernity. The Skamander group viewed Young Poland as old-fashioned, while the Avant-garde saw the Skamanders as the successors of Young Poland. Interestingly, women did not actively participate in these literary debates and discussions. They were not recognized as poets or authors of literary manifestos; Iłłakowiczówna and Pawlikowska were not considered as such in the 1920s because they were seen as simply part of the Skamander circle. Nor were they recognized as critics – the voices of Anna Zahorska and Zuzanna Rabska were barely heard and were seen

as the voices of "the cultural aunts," to use Witold Gombrowicz's term.[13] The order in the poetic household of the 1920s was established without women poets, so all the interventions of writing women were based on categories that were established from a male-centric perspectives. Since women did not conform to the poetic 'norms' of that time, the category of 'women's poetry' was introduced; in fact, this category had already been created in the previous era and had been enthusiastically used by literary men, such as Wilhelm Feldman.

The female poets themselves were aware of the existence of the category of 'women's poetry,' which restricted their participation in cultural life. However, they saw this pigeonhole as not only tied to the 'established' themes and hierarchy of women's and men's creative work, but also, and perhaps most importantly, to their lack of connections within larger groups dominated by male colleagues and fellow writers. These male colleagues, who stormed the Polish literary Parnassus in the 1920s, by the next decade were dealing the cards in the literary game. Accordingly, they excluded women who dared to tackle 'male' subjects or were too overtly socially engaged. For example, as editors of periodicals, the male *literati* censored the works of their female peers far more harshly than those of their male counterparts or did not allow women to be published at all. To illustrate this, we can refer to two poems from the 1930s: "Garb" [Hump] by Elżbieta Szemplińska from her collection *Wiersze* [Poems] (1933) and "Rymujący kolega" [A rhyming colleague] by Halina Pilecka-Przybyszewska from the collection *Samotna niedziela* [A lonely Sunday] (1938).

In the first of these poems, the rejection of the female text stems as much from fear of censorship as from a dislike of ideological texts by women that threatened to disrupt the stereotypical image of the 'non-ideological' nature of women's creativity. The 'publisher' masks this aversion by a false concern for the authoress's safety and fear of censorship intervention. As a result, he downplays Szemplińska's genuine leftist engagement, reducing it to a feminine whim and unawareness of the political consequences of the printed word:

13 Gombrowicz uses this phrase in his *Ferdydurke* (1937–1938) to describe critics, especially female critics, who represent conservative concepts of art and attempt to impose those concepts on young representatives of avant-garde movements: "the cultural aunts, those female semi-writers and tacked-on semi-critics who make pronouncements in literary magazines" (Gombrowicz, 1937–1938/2000, p. 6).

Hump

Today,
instead of the expected proofs,
the publisher sent me a note;
in spite of the obligation, unfortunately,
namely,
the poem, printed in a certain magazine,
is too clearly programmatic,
and I – right? – after all –
even so – I cannot risk it.
For two hours, I cursed
the hump I've carried on my back for years,
the hump of ideals and views,
which not only hinders happiness
but even makes life impossible.
[…] (Szemplińska, 1933, p. 96).

The second poem, written in a rhyming verse, exposes the social foundations of the definition of a 'poet' as a man, free from family burdens, thus revealing the author's views on the nature of poetry as the 'rhyming art':

A rhyming colleague

Everyone knows about the colleague,
but not about me.
They publish for the colleague, when, where,
but not for me.
Something about this, about that,
begun, half-written:
maybe, what if,
perfect, sort of.
[…]
They call the colleague a 'poet,'
but me – a 'woman who writes.'
Obstacles: children, husband,
while the colleague keeps rhyming.
They publish for the colleague, when, where,
but not for me (Pilecka-Przybyszewska, 1938, p. 61).

In this context, it is worth briefly revisiting to the Vilnius Literary Wednesdays and the discussions that took place during these meetings, particularly those regarding women's creativity. In the report from the 82nd Wednesday (27 November 1929), during which Zofia Nałkowska delivered a lecture titled "On Writing Women," we can find the following passage:

> the welcoming space of the club could barely accommodate the large audience, which included Rector Zdziechowski and his wife, Curator Pogorzelski and his family, university professors, and likely all of Vilnius' *literati*. […] The female speaker provided a sophisticated and concise overview of female writers, offering fitting characterizations for each and spending more time on her personal favourites (Hernik Spalińska, 1998, p. 99).

In such esteemed company, the topic of challenging working conditions for women writers, which differ greatly from those of male writers, was brought up. However, only a small part of this discussion was documented. The voice of the local poet Kobylińska-Masiejewska was the only one recorded in the minutes, but the person responsible for the report (whom I suspect was a man) treated her with noticeable condescension. They summarised her contribution as follows: "[i]n the discussion, […] Ms. Masiejewska sweetly complained about the difficulties faced by a woman writer who has to juggle her husband's socks and preparing dinner, yet still manages to create" (Hernik Spalińska, 1998, p. 99).

As previously mentioned, it is interesting and important to thoroughly investigate the history of women's collaboration with poetic groups and their journals. Female poets who collaborated with literary groups during their studies were overlooked by contemporary literary historians once these groups gained independence. This occurred when the co-creators completed their university education and became part of the wider literary world. The same can be said for women writers who attempted to join established male poetic communities. Let us consider the case of poetess Mila Elin and the dynamics of the reception of her work, which serves as a prime example of the devaluation of women's creativity:

> Interestingly, Elin's role and position in the Avant-garde movement were marginalized, and this marginalization has also affected the reception of her poetry. Apart from a few brief discussions in the late 1970s and early 1980s, her work is practically absent from critical discourse. It is also notably missing from literary

historiography. Significantly, there is no mention of Mila Elin in Janusz Sławiński's canonical dissertation on the language of the Kraków Avant-garde (Dauksza, 2013, p. 17).

The literary historians who reorganised interwar poetry after 1945 adopted the triadic thinking suggested by the objects of their studies. However, they no longer used the categories of 'women's poetry' or 'women's literature,' suspecting that these terms were incompatible with their own postwar social and literary reality. Consequently, what prewar critics felt obliged to note and comment on, disappeared from the consciousness of postwar cultural participants. The problems with the concept of 'women's poetry' are illustrated by the anthology of Young Poland's female poets compiled by Jan Zygmunt Jakubowski in 1963. The author was aware that this was a distinct group but could no longer understand the thinking of critics from the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries who deemed it appropriate to include this group in their reviews, syntheses, and textbooks. There were, of course, publications of poem collections by such poets as Franciszka Arnsztajnowa (1969, 2005), Helena Bychowska (1972), Maria Czerkawska (1972), Zuzanna Ginczanka (1980, 1991), Maria Grossek-Korycka (2004, 2005), Zofia Jabłońska-Erdmanowa (1994), Wanda Karczewska (1985), Bronisława Ostrowska (1999), or Maryla Wolska (1965, 1970, 1974, 2002), whose entire work or part of it was produced in the interwar period. However, the authors of the commentaries to these editions always tried to fit the poets into a model created by and for male poets. It was only the feminist criticism that emerged in Polish literary studies after 1989 and firmly established itself in the first decade of the twenty-first century that provided researchers with tools to help them reinterpret these old texts.[14]

Another aspect of interwar literary life that sheds light on the differential treatment of female and male poets is the attitude of the interwar women's poetry towards the poetic models of Young Poland, Skamander, and the Avant-guard. An analysis of the poetic accomplishments of Polish women poets suggests that, until the mid-1920s, they generally adhered to the Young Poland model, whereas from the mid-1920s until the end of the era, they followed the Skamander model. However, there were no women poets among the representatives of the broadly

14 See e.g. Zacharska, 2000b; Hurnikowa, 1995; Legeżyńska, 2009; Nasiłowska, 2010.

understood avant-garde, although individual poetesses did make use of specific avant-garde techniques. For example, Wanda Melcer explored the possibilities of individual words, and Maria Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska experimented with metaphor. Nevertheless, a closer examination of specific poetry collections undermines these observations.

The imagination of the Young Poland movement was characterised by a set of mythical themes and motifs drawn from the history of Western literature and culture. Difficult forms such as the sonnet were privileged, and multiple meter systems were present. In this poetic space, women did not move freely, largely due to their lack of education. Therefore, while women certainly explored various currents and themes, the most characteristic feature of their works during the Young Poland era was a focus on mood and themes such as patriotism, religion, and eroticism. The mere presence of words like 'soul,' 'cemetery,' 'autumn rain,' and the sonnet form were enough for the interwar critics to classify a female text as a distant relative of Young Poland poetry. It is, however, striking that the interwar poetry by women lacks what Michał Głowiński and Janusz Sławiński call the 'mannerism' of Young Poland, except in collections published during or just after the First World War. This prompts the need to reassess whether after 1918, women poets, like their male counterparts, intentionally rejected the anachronistic term or if they simply never embraced Young Poland's 'mannerism' and therefore did not need to free themselves from it.

The interwar female poets of the time drew upon the second model of poetry, which was developed by the Skamander poetic group. According to existing literature on the subject, it is widely believed that the most prominent women poets of the interwar period, namely Maria Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska, Kazimiera Iłłakowiczówna, and Zuzanna Ginczanka, were influenced by the Skamander poets. The Skamander poets incorporated elements from both the Romantic and Modernist traditions, and featured playful tendencies, a joyful mood, the poetics of everyday life, and elements of colloquial language in their poetry. They advocated for the poet to engage in everyday life or observe events that they would later describe in their poems. The key elements of Skamander poetics included tonic verse, melodiousness, a preference for an anecdote, and a tendency to conclude poems with a tag line. These characteristics went against the avant-garde ideas of free verse, metaphor as the main poetic device, unfolding structures, and a reluctance to openly express emotions. However, the dependence of interwar female poets on the Skamander model is not as

straightforward as it may initially appear. Interwar critics were misled by the frequent use of syllabic-tonic meter, exact rhymes (which the Skamander poets themselves considered 'mechanical'), and sometimes clumsy tag lines. These features were enough for such 'constructed' poems to be classified as being in the 'spirit' of Skamander. It is worth considering whether female poets were not just connected to the Skamander poets through the same writing techniques that were considered essential to poetry until the early twentieth century: rhythm, rhyme, and regular versification systems, and which the Skamander poets had mastered and, at the same time, redefined.

In any case, women poets were more aligned with the Skamander model than the Avant-garde one. The Avant-garde not only demanded a high level of formal awareness, which was unachievable for most women writing during this period, but also assumed a detached, intellectual approach to language and reality. While there were female poets like Gustawa Jarecka, Lucyna Krzemieniecka, and Nina Rydzewska who emerged in the Kwadryga circle, and Janina Brzostowska, who was associated with the poetic group Czartak, the poetics of these groups essentially continued a modified Skamander model, enriched with elements of catastrophism and a leftist sensitivity to social injustice. The absence of women poets in avant-garde movements such as Expressionism, Futurism, and in the circles of Tadeusz Peiper, Julian Przyboś, and Józef Czechowicz is glaringly obvious. These currents typically rejected Skamander's 'mechanical' approach and instead employed the poetic heritage in a more sophisticated manner: highlighting tonic meter, using metaphors, disrupting rhythm, and forsaking strict rhyme in favour of assonance and free verse.

Poets needed to fully embrace the poetic legacy before its icons, Mickiewicz and Słowacki, could be figuratively 'carted away,' as intended by Bruno Jasieński. Women had not assimilated this legacy as thoroughly as men because they did not have access to regular institutional education. The inclusion of women in Galician universities in the late nineteenth century did not have as significant an impact on culture as their admission to the University of Warsaw in 1915. The first generation of truly well-educated female writers only entered literature in the 1930s, including Zuzanna Ginczanka and Anna Świrszczyńska. In truth, this generation entered literature even later, that is, after 1945.

Another significant difference between male and female poets relates to their understanding of poetry and the role of a poet. By closely examining the developmental trajectory of Polish poetry created by women, we can conclude

that it, on the one hand, confirms the male critics' assumption of women's poetic creativity as cultural graphomania. On the other hand, the development of Polish poetry by women reveals the existence of two distinct concepts of the poet and poetry within Polish culture. One concept is popularised and reinforced through educational institutions, while the other is formed by the poets themselves. The model of women's poetry is more likely to align with the first concept. This model was conceived at some point in the mid-nineteenth century, influenced by the works of Jadwiga Łuszczewska, Maria Ilnicka, Maria Bartusówna, and particularly Maria Konopnicka, although it seems to overlook the earlier achievements of Elżbieta Drużbacka. It drew from popular lexical, thematic, and generic patterns in domestic and school education. Consequently, during the period of Positivism, it became inclined towards patriotism and social themes. In the Young Poland period, however, the model expanded to include new erotic motifs, although it had no significant connection to the Young Poland's *-isms*. This can be seen in the works of important female poets from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, such as Maria Komornicka, Zofia Trzeszczkowska, and Kazimiera Zawistowska, with the exception of Bronisława Ostrowska.

The model of women's poetry up to 1918 and in the interwar period reflects the widely shared belief in Polish society that a poem is a skilfully rhymed and rhythmic text. It is therefore different from the three models discussed earlier. Certain interwar literary criticism systems confirmed and shaped these societal beliefs, as seen in the critical work of Karol Wiktor Zawodziński. Often referred to as the 'court' critic of the Skamander group, Zawodziński played a significant role in popularising and consolidating the poetic model of this group. His views on the 'nature' of poetry aligned with Skamander's approach. Jerzy Kwiatkowski describes Zawodziński as "a music teacher who was pained by any disharmony from his students" (Kwiatkowski, 2000, p. 467). Kwiatkowski also highlights Zawodziński's appreciation for "autotelism, melodiousness (including regular versification and the importance of musicality and songfulness of the verse), classicism […] in the sense of moderation in poetics, harmony of artistic techniques, balance between form and content, and clarity" (Kwiatkowski, 2000, p. 468; cf. Białek, 1969).

One example of the convergence of viewpoints between the general readers of literature and a prominent critic can be found in an extract from Zawodziński's review-lesson of *Szumy leśne* [Forest sounds] by Maria Różycka (1924):

> Ms. Maria Różycka is a skilled poet, particularly adept at mastering rhyme and rhythm. An example of her proficiency can be seen in her use of nine-syllable and eight-syllable masculine lines with iambic placement of accentual points. Similar to the four-foot iambs used in contemporary Russian poetry, her verse demonstrates a melodic quality, with accents strategically placed to enhance the meaning of the poem. It is unclear whether this is a result of conscious effort, but it is is evident in the creation of flawless stanzas, such as the one provided (with the exception of the weak last line):
>
> And only the clatter of horse hooves,
> And the dull clink of human footsteps,
> The rustling, flag-like flutter
> And the groan of a torn heart… (p. 46).
>
> But Ms. Różycka's skill in poetry writing is not revealed only in this. She possesses a rich and truly poetic ability to analogise reality, resulting in the creation of original images, although this occurs rarely. An example of this can be found in the concluding lines of a poem about a night of love:
>
> And the conspiring night on guard
> Kneels at the mad bed –
> Hour after hour weighs
> With a hand that fades more and more.
> (wouldn't it be better to change the sixth case in the last line to the first case to achieve a strict rhyme, necessary in the tagline?) […]
>
> Even when the imagery does not tantalise the reader with novelty (which is most often the case), its structure remains logical, definite, and clear. For instance:
>
> The night overflows with silver tears,
> Filled like a precious jug;
> The steppe emerges from this flood
> In the frame of distant horizons (Zawodziński, 1924, p. 203).

Jerzy Cieślikowski highlights the enduring nature of the perspective on the essence of poetry described above, which is rooted in classical and classicistic poetics, and associates with children's literature and commemorative lyrics, such as courtly, salon, or domestic poetry, depending on the specific era:

> We encounter the popular and widespread expression, 'this is a poem' since we are children. 'To speak in verse' or 'to speak to verse' means to speak 'in rhyme.' Speaking in rhyme means to speak with an ear for listening. Speaking in verse or poetising means extracting another way of speaking from ordinary speech, the

> kind we use in everyday communication, that gives words and sentences intrinsic value. Speaking in verse mostly means speaking 'nicely,' using words and phrases that are not commonly used in ordinary speech but are necessary in a poem to express peculiar, festive, or exalted and serious feelings, or even humorous or witty ones. This primary knowledge of poetry is well known to a child because the earliest literary work a child encounters, alongside a fairy tale, is a poem. […] The child encounters a poem in the first magazine edited for them, in the first book given to them. Literariness, in its most common understanding, is fulfilled in poetry, and poetry, in the common understanding, is speaking or writing 'in verse.' The role of the poet is the earliest and, even today in uneducated circles, the most natural literary role. In the naive belief, being able to speak in rhyme and to music meant being or promising to be a poet. […]
>
> Let us note that all wedding speeches or other occasional speeches were most beautifully and deftly delivered in verse for the sake of fun, to entertain others, and to impress with one's own concept. In folk consciousness, speaking beautifully means speaking in verse as well as speaking in a way that sticks in memory (Cieślikowski, 1991, pp. III–IV).

It is unsurprising that nearly half of the poetry written by women during the interwar years consists of commemorative pieces. These poems were often written to celebrate the birth of a child, to create lullabies, to express name day wishes for Józef Piłsudski, or to offer thanksgiving prayers to the Virgin Mary. However, texts written during wartime, as a response to the events of 1914–1918 and the Polish-Bolshevik conflict, are more prevalent. These poems both conform to the patterns of Tyrtaean poetry and attempt to subvert them. Some female poets exclusively wrote during the war. Although their work can be found in anthologies and magazines from that period, they never published individual collections. This suggests that circumstances, rather than talent, were the driving force behind these women's creativity. In collections mentioned in the previous chapter, such as *Poezje wybrane 1914–1916* edited by Antoni Euzebiusz Balicki (1916), *Rozdzielił nas mój bracie… Antologia poezyj współczesnych* (1916), *Polska pieśń wojenna. Antologia poezyji polskiej z rolu wielkiej wojny,* edited by Stanisław Łempicki and Adam Fischer (1916) or *Pieśń polska w latach wielkiej wojny 1914–1915,* edited by Ludwik Szczepański (1916), the reader can find not only the names of poets well-known to the general public before 1914, but also the names of 'occasional' poets, who were little-known or entirely unknown both before the First World War and after its end.

These war poetry anthologies include, among others, the names of the women poets: Maria Bażeńska, Maria Czerkawska, Maria Czerska, Aleksandra Dzióbówna, Kazimiera Greczynówna, Kazimiera Iłłakowiczówna, Jadwiga from Łobzów, Zofia Krupska, Wanda Krzyżanowska, F.C. Kuczyńska, Kazimiera Lityńska, Maria Majchrowiczówna, Lila Małecka, Jadwiga Marcinkowska, Maria Markowska, Maria Marossanyi, Rena Maryth, Melania Medlingerówna, Zofia Mrozowicka, Anna Neumanowa, Janina Olszewska, Bronisława Ostrowska, Zuzanna Rabska, Anna Sokołowska, Maria Strońska, Maria Szczepanik, Maria Szembekowa, Anna Wiśniowiecka, Maryla Wolska, Helena Zbierzchowska, and Gabriela Żółtowska.

The claim that there was a clear division between rhyming for therapeutic, social, and ennobling purposes, composing texts 'for listening,' and creating commemorative texts, equated by many women poets in the interwar period with 'poetry,' and a practice of poetry as an art form, supposedly exclusive to men, can be supported by two examples: Irena Słomińska and Zofia Górska.

Irena Słomińska (1905–1978) came from a noble-bourgeois background, from a family related to the Grohmans of Łódź. Before 1939, she was part of the financial and social elite. Like other young ladies of her social class, she received a comprehensive education but did not complete her studies. Her time and energy were mainly focused on her family (she had four children), social obligations, two marriages, and numerous love affairs. Her poetic legacy consists of poems in six languages and two published collections: *Myśli, nastroje, pocałunki* [Thoughts, Moods, Kisses] (1933) and *Chwile* [Moments] (1938), recently compiled by her eldest son, Paweł Słomiński (Słomińska, 2000). Słomińska's works were reintroduced into culture as songs with music by Ryszard Sielicki, while Wiesława Grochola reconstructed her biography. Słomińska's verses are not poems in the strict sense of the word; they were budding verses that required further refinement. Unfortunately, the author herself never showed interest in this laborious process. The harmonious combination of rhymed form with emotional content places these verses within the genre of sentimental songs from the interwar period, which is an example of light verse rather than poetry in the strictest sense. As her biographer writes, this approach to poems sprung from her hunger for life and people, as well as her understanding of the existential function of her work:

> Irena used her poems as a form of therapy. They helped her release the torment of life, transform everyday experiences into noble poetic expressions, and sublimate heavy feelings. […] Her poems were not a substitute for life or a means of escape. Instead, they were spontaneous notes written on the margins of a very active, busy, but also lonely and difficult life. They were both a byproduct of everyday life and a specific remedy that helped her endure the challenges of her daily existence. Irena would write whenever she had a free moment, felt a surge of sadness, or experienced a moment of solitude (Grochola, 2005, pp. 6–7).

Even more conscious poetesses had a similar approach to verse. In her "Odpowiedź" [Response] to the frequently asked question whether a woman writer treats her own experiences merely as creative material (published in *Wiersze* [Poems], 1933), Elżbieta Szemplińska writes:

> Not only for this purpose
> do I experience life –
> to later describe it.
> But when everything ends, you, my friend,
> are left with nothing
> but longing;
> while I
> take a fact
> wrestled away from transience
> and seal it in an air-tight poem
> like a passionate naturalist
> seals a frog in a jar (Szemplińska, 1933, p. 82).

As for Zofia Górska (formerly known as Lipkowska before the war), a letter has been preserved that she sent to Lucyna Kotarbińska, the editor of *Tygodnik Mód i Powieści* [The Fashion and Novel Weekly] and author of works on theatre. Importantly, in the context of reflecting on how literary historians view the rhyming activities of women and their reception, this letter is found 'loose' within a copy of Zofia Lipkowska's *Z podlaskich nastrojów* [From Podlasie Moods] (Lwów, 1926), currently held in the collections of the National Library in Warsaw. This suggests that, for a long time, neither readers nor librarians responsible for cataloguing explored this collection. Lipkowska's correspondence clearly demonstrates the previously mentioned division between rhymed works and poetry, as well as her own fluctuation between the desire to be recognised

as a poet and her lack of self-awareness as an author. Furthermore, the letter provides insight into the familial, social, and geographical circumstances in which women's creativity emerged and functioned in the past. In this 1933 correspondence, Górska included the aforementioned collection of poems, seeking Lucyna Kotarbińska's evaluation:

> Dear Madam,
> Although there is limited space on this card, I have few words that I need to write. I am sending my poems, hoping that someone knowledgeable in literature will offer their assessment. I would much prefer to receive this feedback today rather than after my demise. For many years, there has been nothing but silence, which has not been encouraging for my writing.
> I am reaching out to you because I am familiar with your name through Mrs. Lamber's tales from my childhood. She lived near Horsztyła [the surname is illegible].
> With utmost respect,
> P.S. The poems were published as a surprise, hence the lack of corrections.
> 22/6 1933.

The social situation of women, therefore, determines their position in literature and the extent of their artistic 'visibility.' The poets who achieved a place on the interwar Polish Parnassus, and whose texts were reissued after 1945 in new selections with new commentaries, were predominantly those who had received an excellent education at home, in prestigious high schools, and at higher education institutions. These women resided in large cities, took their intellectual development seriously, and pursued professions associated with intellectual activity. It is worth noting that they either came from families with artistic or scholarly backgrounds (like Wanda Melcer, Bronisława Ostrowska, Maria Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska, and Irena Tuwim), or from families that supported artistic ambitions as a means to social emancipation, as seen in the Jewish families of Anda Eker, Mela Elin, and Zuzanna Ginczanka. The poets considered the best of the interwar period, Iłłakowiczówna and Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska, embody the finest qualities of a combination of institutional and private schooling, along with a conscious cultivation of the mind even after formal education had ended. This kind of training acquainted them with the canon of national literature and imparted complex technical knowledge about 'how to make a poem' (versification, genre studies, stylistics). These poets

assimilated and simultaneously innovatively transformed elements of the poetic heritage, while also maintaining an 'organic' connection with the city, making them truly 'visible.' This means that they were understood by contemporary critics and, later, literary historians; they thrived like the aforementioned "tall trees." On the other hand, those who were less educated, struggled with literary conventions, lived in rural areas, and pursued professions unrelated to intellectual activities, remained in the shadows. In their case, the issue of derivative work and excessive writing is further complicated, as they drew inspiration more often from the work of female poets of their time rather than their male counterparts.

It is worth quoting here a poem by Elżbieta Szemplińska, "Z głowy Jowisza" [From the Head of Jupiter], from the collection *Wiersze* [Poems] (1933). In this poem, she highlights a crucial aspect of female literary activity – the connection between the genre and subject matter of a woman's work and the conditions in which the literary text is created.

From the Head of Jupiter

Social existence determines consciousness.
The spiritual superstructure stands on a material foundation.
The fact that I started writing poems, instead of novels reaching the ceiling,
was due to local conditions.
A novel requires space for the elbows,
paper, room for the pen's sweep, reflection.
While poems,
like Athena, naked from the head of Jupiter,
spring from me, instead of a curse
or a sigh (Szemplińska, 1933, p. 85).

In the literature on the subject, it is widely accepted that the most significant internal caesura of the interwar period is the transition between the 1920s and 1930s. During this time, there were radical shifts in literary life and values, attitudes towards tradition and modernity, and in thinking about themes, genres, and poetic language. These shifts were linked to the coming-of-age of a new generation and their reaction to political events in Poland and Europe. However, these changes in women's poetry are difficult to observe. In the 1920s, female poets did not participate in the phenomenon of expressing their creative aspirations as a group; they always entered the literary scene individually,

speaking solely in their own names. They did not form alliances or oppositions, nor did they create programs, either as projections or as extensions of their own poetic practice, or as independent activities separate from that practice. If they did express their views on literature, it was in the form of a request to critics to be lenient towards the creations of the 'female' pen, as they were aware that these were still far from perfect. Yet, far more often they expressed their own attitudes towards the prevailing literary 'fashion' and 'expectations' of readers and critics, often leaning more towards rebellion than affirmation. Against the backdrop of the vigorous activity of male groups, united by both a common will to act and a coherent concept of the role of poetry and the poet in society (as well as the specificity of poetic language and recognizable creative style), women poets were like solitary islands drifting far from other women or male writers (with the aforementioned exceptions). The emphasis that participants in the interwar literary life placed on programmatic statements led to the perception that literary work without a theoretical foundation was incomplete. In this sense, women poets faced a fate similar to that of the Skamandrites, accused by Karol Irzykowski of "programophobia" (Irzykowski, 1920, pp. 123–126).

Thus, at the beginning of the 1920s, when the Skamandrites announced their departure from the Young Poland heritage and immersion in the mundane details of everyday life, and the Futurists declared their break from the entire preceding tradition, Zofia Wojnarowska, in her poem "Pacta poetica" (1921), simultaneously severed connections with both poetic and social conventions, foreseeing by a decade the poetic declarations of social, labour, and peasant involvement:

II.

I will harness you to a wheelbarrow –
crush stones on the highway
and wash your white, smooth feet
in the cool dew.

There is no time for trills
in moonlit midnights –
you must rise at dawn
to mow and thresh.

Poverty roams the world
Emaciated, grey with hunger –

So even from white bread
you must keep away (Wojnarowska, 1921, p. 9).

[…]
Oh beautiful labourer,
in the early morning's glow,
seriously listening
to the whistle of the future's siren!
(Wojnarowska, 1921, p. 11).

Yet another poet from the early years of Poland's independence, Maria Morstin-Górska, advocated for a new poetry that would adapt to the new reality in "Pieśń dnia dzisiejszego" [The Song of Today] from her collection, *Błyski latarni* [The Lantern's Glimmer] (1922). For her, this primarily meant renewing, refreshing, and enriching the vocabulary used to express both the trauma of war and the experience of post-war chaos. However, this had little to do with the specific literary program of the Skamander group, who aimed to "cast off Konrad's cloak," to quote Słonimski's "Czarna wiosna" [Black spring]. Instead, Morstin-Górska's appeal was aligned with the widespread joy of regaining democracy, which Kaden-Bandrowski aptly described as "the joy of a regained garbage dump" (Kaden-Bandrowski, 1923/2024, p. 33).

The Song of Today

Do not be surprised, weavers of past dreams,
that our song has become a cry –
an unlearned, hastened cry of a man
who is accustomed to fighting,
because life escapes him,
and he wants to live more fully than he has lived –
because the road ahead is long,
and he must muster the strength…
Do not be surprised, weavers of past dreams,
that our verse retreats from nothing,
that we do not seek resonant words,
but with hard, unyielding force
we create a simple song –
for every stanza can be beautiful,
if only it has a beating heart

and if only it pulses with blood!
[…]
We – who had to shout at each other
to be heard over the roar of cannons –
and today we live as if a current swept us away
toward worlds emerging from the mist,
from an abyss still silent –
we
can no longer
have any song but a cry –
an unlearned, hastened
cry of a man
accustomed to gazing
at things and works immense –
who fought in fire and smoke
and faced the storms head-on –
so everything around him
seems sacred and new
and his and no one's –
a cry from the depths of a swelling chest
of a man who is drunk
with the simple miracle of being alive! (Morstin-Górska, 1922, pp. 3–4).

Hanna Januszewska's "Uczta" [The Feast] from her collection *Poezje* [Poetry] (1924) features Futurists as the protagonists and portrays them as a vibrant group of young people causing social scandals; as a result, they are treated flippantly by both the public and the lyrical 'I'. The Futurists in this poem are not portrayed as representatives of a poetic programme or a broader anthropological thought:

The Feast

Once, for the Futurists' feast,
The great Lord God himself came down from the heavens.

At the grand table, the brethren sat,
They began to sing and play the jaw harp.

"Stars! The golden dust of jazz bands,
The world has hidden the fervour of chalices from us.

Long live the song and frenzy of life!
Stars! The golden dust of jazz bands!"

…….
At the table, the old God sat,
He looked at the glimmers, the noise, and the uproar.
God took the golden starry dust,
And poured it by the handful into the guests' chalices.
Drunk on the stars, with the clouds' cries,
They sang a strange chorus as they went.
From the drunken tavern, they went out into the world,
Shouting to everyone: "Hello, brother!
Greetings to all from the bustling cities,
We've come from far away, hey, from the stars!
Drunk on the stars of golden mist,
And on first name terms with the Lord God
(Januszewska, 1924, p. 31).

Just as it is difficult to speak of any tendency towards group activity or manifesto creation in women's poetry, it is equally challenging to identify the third significant dominant in interwar poetry: anti-traditionalism. Women writers did not reject tradition or patriotic-national duties, as it was through embracing these that they fought for emancipation. The war forced many women into the public sphere, becoming an impetus for their literary equality as well. This is evidenced by women's poetic output on wartime and Legionnaire themes – never before or since have there been so many women in Poland taking up the pen. For women writers, literary tradition was not something to be rejected or negated, as they had not been subjects of history until 1918; nor had they participated in its creation. However, during this time, they wished to join the tradition, continue it, and use it to communicate with others. Male attacks on the past rather confused women writers, especially since these were coupled with accusations against women writers of traditionalism, or as it was called at the time, 'passéism.' From the perspective of male critics, the 'female element' entered literature as already old, derivative, and anachronistic.

Another notable trend in interwar poetry, which poses challenges for women's literary work as well, is the reduction of the poetic tone. This is a reaction against the grandiose style of Romanticism and Modernism. Instead of the pathos, complexity of language, and rigid vocabulary and phrases, poets began to focus on the everyday. They stepped down from their pedestals and

became interested in the lives of ordinary people, often those from the working class or living in suburbs. They also explored ordinary objects and situations that were familiar from the streets, cafes, and dance halls, and embraced colloquial speech. This in turn created new possibilities for blending different genres, speech registers, and aesthetic categories, as well as new opportunities for playing and engaging with the past. However, for women writers, everyday life had become their poetic 'daily bread' at least since the mid-nineteenth century. They had long been accused of being 'weavers of banal reality,' of merely describing children, lace, flowers, or puppies. Thus, once again, they had little chance of being noticed and appreciated by literary critics. Even though they offered readers something new, in line with the spirit of the times, women writers were only presenting what they had long had at hand. Moreover, everyday life also proved to be a convention, primarily perpetuated by the Skamander poets. Everyday life was seen, once again, as a masculine experience: an open space to be strolled through, observing the crowd and listening to car horns; everyday life was inherently urban.

Women also had their own everyday lives, although they followed patterns long codified as distinctly 'feminine' whims and fripperies. Let us consider, as an example, two poems from Wanda Melcer's early collection *Na pewno książka kobiety* (1920), namely, "U fryzjera" [At the Hairdresser's] and "Wiosenny kapelusz" [A Spring Hat]. The first of these touches on the problem of language used to potentially speak about everyday reality, describing the common experience of women who, *en masse*, began cutting their hair short after 1918. The second, on the other hand, is a record of a the female way of experiencing the city that does not rely on observing the crowd, like the lyrical subject of Julian Tuwim's dithyramb "Spring" does. Instead, the women's lyrical subject pays attention to her footwear while simultaneously browsing shop windows.

At the Hairdresser's

Two lamps reflected in the mirror
And the hairdresser's white back.
Harmony vainly seeks a rhyme
For the dark head, cut above a basin of polished metal
And two hands bent over it.
The fleeting scents
Of hair warmed by an iron
And floral soap.

A row of solemn ladies by the wall; a second row of ladies
Triumphant in the halo of hairstyles
Before the series of mirrors;
A third row
Of nimble demons in smocks with bright sideburns
Standing,
Surrounded by the rustle of hands armed with combs:
A delightful place of grace, where femininity primps
Before the smiling mirrors, while masculinity, greedy
In the prose's frenzy, secretly takes a drag from a cigarette,
Cautiously hidden in the electric dryer

(Melcer, 1920, p. 14).

A Spring Hat

Bright clouds in the sky
Arranged in pleasant rows,
Strung on the needle of the wind.
Warm, splashing mud,
Foreign to feet in shoes.
Behind the glass of the display window,
On stiff, wire poles
Wrapped in white veils,
Spring hats.
Oh, how pleasant it is to think
Of all the young women
Who will wear them!

(Melcer, 1920, p. 25).

A similar double standard in interwar poetry arises when considering the fascination with urban civilization and travel. For women poets, the city is not a space filled with inspiring events and images, nor does it provide material and language for literary creation. Apart from Butrymowicz and Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska, few women are captivated by the trappings of modernity – telephone, radio, cinema, or tramway. The city does not appear to them as a better space simply because it is contemporary and modern, built in clear opposition to the past, the wartime, and pre-war era; it is quite the opposite. If we do find descriptions of the city in women's poetry, such as the works

of Zofia Wojnarowska, Nina Rydzewska, Elżbieta Szemplińska, or Henryka Łazowertówna, they are more likely to be claustrophobic visions of dark alleys, cramped apartments or shops where maids, laundresses, malnourished teachers or shop girls are less often longing to escape into the wide world than for an excursion into nature.

The city begins to prominently appear in women's poetry in the 1930s, but only within the revolutionary literature movement related to social rebellion. Unlike 'male' poetic realizations, this movement more often reflects on the sights of poverty rather than heralding the arrival of a new order. Both of these aspects can be seen in the poetry of Elżbieta Szemplińska. In her poems "Ja was napoję" [I Will Quench Your Thirst] and "Prawo dżungli" [The Law of the Jungle] from the collection *Wiersze* [Poems] (1933), she portrays the city through the eyes of the poor and those excluded from the community of users of civilization's inventions. This challenges the perspective of the voyeur that had already been established in poetry by the Skamander poets.

I Will Quench Your Thirst

The city looks strange to hungry eyes:
It swarms, spins, whirls with a multitude of streets.
It surprises with squares, like an open maw,
Beating with lampposts, rubber batons striking the head.

The city looks strange to homeless feet,
The pavement sucks them in like sand, clings like mud,
It places an uneven, cracked sidewalk underfoot,
Hurls stones behind the heel, pulls them down into a pit.

You look up at the sky: as if you had wings,
Something lifts you… Swarms of soot in your head…
It's no wonder the inscription under the church painting reads:
"Come to me, you who thirst, I will quench your thirst"
(Szemplińska, 1933, p. 20).

The Law of the Jungle

Man – in the enormous city jungle –
Amid the vines of signals, the roar of scents –
Amid the concrete tentacles of streets –
Alone – in the jungle – without claws – man.

Cars have claws, trams snap their jaws,
Squares yawn with dread, churches tense their tails,
Tenement buildings crash down on your head with the weight of all their floors –
In the orgy of iron and tar – man is lost.
They slip through the ravines, defenceless, weak, hunched over,
They sell lemons, and meat, and planks, and yellow baskets,
Bright yellow wicker baskets, woven in dark autumn,
By dark hands, dazzled by fiery must.
Man placed one hand on his heart, blinked his eyelids,
With the other hand, he grabbed a wall –
The slippery wall slipped away, the city is collapsing, collapsing,
Through black, whistling spaces, onto the head, onto the pavement.
Man in the enormous jungle – fell –
They gathered. He lies there. A woman with a doughy face
Bent over the green forehead of the corpse.
She looked attentively.

Cars have claws, trams snap their jaws,
Squares yawn with dread, churches tense their tails,
Tenement buildings crash down on your head with the weight of all their floors –
The man, hungry – a green mollusk – lies there –

(Szemplińska, 1933, p. 21).

While the male poetry of this period is urban and cosmopolitan, women's poetry tends to cultivate a sense of locality, familiarity, and the countryside. Consequently, once again, unlike male writers, women often favour landscape lyricism. However, the rural everyday life depicted in women's poetry differs from that portrayed in men's versions. It is certainly not the everyday life of labour, of transforming nature for human benefit, of making the earth subservient to man. Instead, it is an everyday life in which nature is contemplated. For instance, while the lyrical 'I' in Leopold Staff's well-known sonnet gazes at manure, the lyrical 'I' in the vast majority of women's poems gazes at flowers growing in a home garden, or trees standing in the forest or by the roadside. Maria Czerkawska's poetry is a particularly notable example in this regard.

Women's poetic work presents similar challenges when one tries to apply literary observations related to the lyricism of the 1930s to this work. Women's poetry does not consciously engage with the accomplishments of the previous decade. If it does, it draws inspiration from Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska, shows

indifference towards new concepts of tradition and innovation, and fails to notice classicism, except for perhaps Zuzanna Rabska. Additionally, it does not venture into experimenting with free verse.

Women Poets in Poetic Groups – Skamander

In most reminiscences of the Skamander group – also known as the 'Great Five,' namely, Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz, Jan Lechoń, Antoni Słonimski, Julian Tuwim, and Kazimierz Wierzyński – there are frequent mentions of the 'beautiful' women they married. Consequently, Mieczysław Grydzewski, the editor of the monthly *Skamander* and the weekly *Wiadomości Literackie*, felt a certain obligation to have them under his charge as well (A. Iwaszkiewicz, 2000, p. 70). To provide an example, Wacław Alfred Zbyszewski mentions in his book on Grydzewski (which was published in exile) the "muses of the Skamandrites," Janina Konarska and the "stunning Stefania Tuwimowa" (Zbyszewski, 1971, p. 351). In her book *Wyznania gorszycielki* [Confessions of a scandalist] (1992), Irena Krzywicka writes about the famous Skamandrites' table on the mezzanine of the *Ziemiańska* café and highlights the gender-based double standard criteria used by Jan Lechoń, who regularly 'presided' there:

> People without talent were not allowed at the table. Women rarely appeared there, but they were tolerated if they were beautiful. And indeed, the wives of the poets *were* beautiful: Iwaszkiewiczowa, Konarska (later Słonimska), Wierzyńska, Tuwimowa. These ladies came rarely, usually uninterested in intellectual conversations, wordplay, or political wit (Krzywicka, 1992/2013, p. 198).

This group of male poets, like other poetic groups during the interwar period, essentially did without women as literary colleagues. This was not just because there were very few notable female poets in Polish literature at that time, with the exception of Maria Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska, who began her career in the 1920s, and Zuzanna Ginczanka, who debuted a decade later. It was also due to the prevailing gender polarisation in the culture of that era, despite public proclamations to reassess values in all aspects of life.

First of all, long-standing beliefs inherited from previous eras about the lack of creativity in the female mind continued to marginalise women, especially when combined with racial stereotypes. This is most apparent in Jan Lechoń's attitude towards Hanna Mortkowicz-Olczakowa, one of the few female writers

who in her memoirs provided a powerful testament to the disregard for female creativity during the early interwar years. For Mortkowicz-Olczakowa, the poetry of the Skamandrites was a revelation and served as inspiration for her own work. Despite her interest, she was excluded from the literary conversations that took place in her father's (Jakub Mortkowicz's) bookstore. She recalls, "I eavesdropped on them, but I had no right to belong to them, and was therefore generally ignored, unnoticed, or dismissed with a humorous comment" (Mortkowicz-Olczakowa, 2006, p. 138).

She believed that she had the closest bond with Lechoń, whose "Karmazynowy poemat" [The crimson lyric] was published in 1920 by Mortkowicz. However, when she confessed to him that she was writing poetry, he "did not like it at all" (Mortkowicz-Olczakowa, 2006, p. 140) and offered her the 'friendly advice': "One should only write when one must, not when one wants to" (Mortkowicz-Olczakowa, 2006, p. 142). After Mortkowicz published Lechoń's poetic collection *Srebrne i czarne* [Silver and black] in 1924, which solidified his position on the poetic Parnassus, his distrustful attitude towards Mortkowicz-Olczakowa's juvenilia became, according to the future writer, "malicious" (Mortkowicz-Olczakowa, 2006, p. 143), resulting in a strained relationship between them:

> I lost the old, somewhat naive self-confidence I had with Leszek. I began to seriously consider the matter of my own creativity. He dismissed or treated my plans and doubts maliciously. Once he even said directly: 'You'd better focus on publishing. Leave the writing to us.' This advice was all the more characteristic and expressive because, by then, he had already – precisely – not been writing (Mortkowicz-Olczakowa, 2006, p. 144).

To clarify Lechoń's unfriendly attitude towards women's writing, let us compare the testimonies of Mortkowicz-Olczakowa, the daughter of bookseller and publisher Jakub Mortkowicz, with that of Halina Ostrowska-Grabska, the daughter of poet Bronisława Ostrowska. Both Mortkowicz-Olczakowa and Ostrowska-Grabska published with Mortkowicz, just like Lechoń and other Skamandrites. When the young poet met Ostrowska, he asked to read some of her latest poems. Upon hearing "Biała godzina" [The White hour], he was enraptured. This came as a great surprise to the author, as she felt 'old-fashioned' in comparison to the Skamandrites (Ostrowska-Grabska, 2006, p. 136). Lechoń then suggested publishing her poems in *Wiadomości Literackie*, a proposal that was only accepted in 1926, after Ostrowska had already become ill, two years

prior to her death. The poem in question, "Koło święconej kredy" [Holy chalk circle], was written in 1923, carried a sombre tone, and explored the concept of the finite nature of human existence, which was contrary to the Dionysian and vitalistic themes prevalent in early Skamander poetry.

From the comparison of Lechoń's attitude towards these two female poets, it appears that his 'distrust' of the younger colleague, nearly his peer, may have stemmed not only from stereotypes about female creativity, the low artistic level of her early poetic attempts, or the belief in the subservience of Mortkowicz's 'Jewish' publishing house to the needs of 'Polish' poets. One reason for this may have also been his rivalry and a sense of threat posed by the debuting poet. It is important to remember that in 1922, Maria Pawlikowska's debut work *Niebieskie migdały* [Blue almonds] was published, followed in 1924 by another volume, *Różowa magia* [Pink magic]. Despite Ostap Ortwin's bizarre attack on these publications, they were received with enthusiasm by the Skamander community. Following Pawlikowska's debut, any subsequent female poet's launch could be seen as the emergence of a new talent that threatened the poetic hierarchy, in which men, led by Lechoń, held the highest positions. Yet, Ostrowska did not pose a competitive threat to Lechoń, as she belonged to the modernist movement, towards which the Skamandrites maintained an ambivalent position. On the one hand, the Skamandrites distanced themselves from the lyrical 'mannerism' of Young Poland, but on the other hand, they saw the best representatives of that era as their mentors. From this perspective, Ostrowska did not compete with the poetic youth. In 1932, Lechoń wrote the introduction to the posthumous four-volume edition of Ostrowska's "Pisma poetyckie," [Poetic writings], while discouraging Mortkowicz-Olczakowa from pursuing poetic creation.

Secondly, the 'bachelor' lifestyle adopted by the young Skamandrites was inaccessible to women due to prevailing social norms, despite the rapid pace of liberalisation. This lifestyle consisted of frequent changes in love interests, spending the entire day 'downtown', enjoying extravagant meals in various establishments, accompanied by copious amounts of alcohol. The evenings were spent at theatres, often causing scandals that involved the police, and concluded with long walks at night and hours devoted to reciting poetry. If a woman were to lead a similar life, she would simply be labelled as 'fallen' or, at best, viewed as 'suspicious', drawing the attention of the police.

As Kazimierz Wierzyński recalls, "The Skamander nights were generally meant for confessions and long walks home. It wasn't about getting there, but

about walking – and escorting each other" (Wierzyński, 2006, p. 47). This situation only changed with family life, as noted by Antoni Słonimski:

> It was a strange lifestyle. The Picadors, the Skamander group and, later, *Wiadomości Literackie* – we met almost daily at *Mała Ziemiańska*. Tuwim, Wierzyński, Iwaszkiewicz, and Boy returned to their wives, to their homes. In this fraternity, only Lechoń and I were bachelors at the time, and after *Ziemiańska*, after dinner at Simon's or Langer's, after various visits, cinemas, and theatres, we wandered all night until two or three in the morning (Słonimski, 1989, p. 116).

Another Skamandrite, Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz, writes that when Julian Tuwim hosted his wedding dinner at a venue aptly called *Mordownia* [Dive Bar], his colleagues were as intimidated by the presence of their mentor, Leopold Staff, as they were by Stefania Tuwim: "Tuwim did not hesitate to introduce his young wife who, in the full bloom of her extraordinary beauty, truly looked like a bride. We were probably even more intimidated than she was, and we silently, briskly ate the Nelson-style beef rolls in a rich cream sauce" (J. Iwaszkiewicz, 1984, p. 21). The cartoonist and caricaturist associated with the Skamandrites, Zdzisław Czermański, particularly remembers the wild excesses caused by the group members in public places and cultural establishments. The most amusing incident, which did not end, like several others, at the police station but was empathetically embraced by its participants, occurred in one of Kraków's theatres where Lechoń's 'crowing' and 'hiccupping' amused both the audience and the actors:

> His giggles made the actors of *Bagatela* [Theatre] laugh so much that they stopped performing and helplessly stood on the stage, howling with laughter. And Leszek, as if not understanding what he had done, after the first act recruited two more excellent jokers, Karol Stryjeński and Teofil Trzciński, to accompany him. One of them droned with his lips as if playing a trumpet, and the other emitted short, staccato sounds, something like 'pru-pru-pru.' The third act was no longer performed because not only the actors but also the audience couldn't recover from what Leszek depicted as 'rolling with laughter,' accompanied by the droning, pru--pru-pru, and hiccupping of the three merry fellows (Czermański, 2006, p. 110).

Whether one interprets the scenes and events mentioned above as colourful episodes or permanent aspects of the Skamandrites' youth, it is impossible to imagine any of these scenes with female poets in the leading role, as long

as they wanted to be considered 'well-behaved' ladies. During the interwar period, women who walked freely at night were more likely to be perceived as prostitutes waiting for clients, rather than as poets escorting each other home. This demonstrates that the city's space was not as welcoming to women as it was to men, and public opinion did not grant women the same freedom to express their way of life. Additionally, women themselves lacked the tradition of collective action in urban spaces and cultural life which they could draw upon and continue. Furthermore, they internalised societal restrictions and rules pertaining to their bodies, such as refraining from laughter.

Skamander's 'Only Child,' or Maria Morska. The history of literature, however, connects the names of several women to the Skamander group in various ways related to poetry. The first of these women was Maria Morska (c. 1895–1946), who joined Skamander when the group was forming, around 1918–1919, which coincides with the establishment of the literary café *Pod Picadorem*. Morska, the granddaughter of Rabbi Samuel of Sochaczew and daughter of Doctor Józef Frenkel from Kalisz, completed her high school education in England but did not pursue further studies. Instead, she returned to Poland and, from 1913, attempted to establish herself on the stage, taking on minor roles in the theatres of Kraków, Lublin, and Warsaw ("Maria Morska," 1994, pp. 7–8). She married Bronisław Knaster (1893–1980), the son of a well-known Warsaw doctor, Ludwik Knaster. Before the First World War, Maria Morska's husband completed medical studies in Paris and then studied mathematics in Warsaw. From 1924, he worked as an associate professor at the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences at the University of Warsaw, quickly gaining international recognition in the scientific world (R. Duda, 1983, pp. 101–102; Mitzner, 1988, pp. 5–7). This period of the young couple's life, overlapping with the war years and the early years of Poland's independence, was an amorphous one. While Morska pursued her happiness on the stage without formal training in this field, although she gained extensive knowledge of contemporary culture through self-directed reading, her husband shifted his scientific interests from medicine to build a career in mathematics. It was during this period that Morska, described as a "beautiful, delicate, wonderful woman with sea-coloured eyes" (Krzywicka, 1992/2013, p. 104), met the young Skamandrites and became a reciter at the literary café *Pod Picadorem*, and, for an entire decade, Antoni Słonimski's muse (Kuciel-Frydryszak, 2012, pp. 43–47). This connection was so significant that

the other Skamandrites "never once, either in word or by allusion, touched upon the matter of his feelings" (J. Iwaszkiewicz, 1984, p. 79). Morska was also briefly the object of fascination for Anna Iwaszkiewiczowa (Romaniuk, 2005, pp. 120–124). In the 1930s, she demonstrated her talent for journalism, writing under the pseudonym of Mariusz Dawn and contributing foreign reports to *Wiadomości Literackie*.

In a monograph titled *Opium życia* [The opium of life] (2008), Hanna Faryna-Paszkiewicz explores the life and work of Maria Morska in more detail. Using the sparse documentation on the "Skamander's only daughter," Faryna-Paszkiewicz constructs an interesting and multi-layered story about an extraordinary woman against the backdrop of the fascinating cultural and social life of the interwar period. I therefore feel relieved of the need to repeat this material. Instead, I will focus on the aspect that interests me: the relationship between Maria Morska and the Skamander group.

As Hanna Faryna-Paszkiewicz notes, critics of interwar poetry often referred to women associated with particular groups or circles as the 'only daughter' (Faryna-Paszkiewicz, 2008, p. 8). For example, Nina Rydzewska was frequently called the 'only daughter' of Kwadryga. This comparison raises questions about the conditions under which a woman could join a male poetic group and gain recognition within it, and whether she held an equal position to the other participants. 'Only child' is, after all, a term used in reference to the family system. Therefore, in the case of Maria Morska, her status as an 'only daughter' suggests a reflection on the role of a 'sister' among 'brothers'.

According to all the existing references to Morska's relationships with the Skamandrites, the key to understanding her phenomenon lies in grasping the context and manner of her recitation. In her performances, Morska combined a genuine and profound respect for poetry as the highest expression of the human spirit and a manifestation of national culture. She combined a sense of being a guardian and transmitter of the aesthetic tradition ingrained in her memory with the erotic allure of a modernist *femme fatale*. Initially, Morska honed her recitation skills at the literary café *Pod Picadorem* during Poland's early days of independence. Later in the 1920s, she performed at various poetry evenings held in different cultural venues. Even Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz, the only Skamandrite who was critical of Morska, confessed, "The highlight of the evening was undoubtedly the recitation by Maria Morska" (J. Iwaszkiewicz, 1994, p. 185).

Another important context is the milieu which constituted Morska's audience. One needs to consider the canon of recited poetry, the model of recitation, and the expectations of the audience who, in the early years of Poland's independence, tended to pay cash for the privilege of listening to live recitations of poetry. I believe that if it was only a matter of the public act of recitation or the intellectual strength of Antoni Słonimski's muse, she would not have been so well remembered by the members and sympathisers of the group. Other actresses, like Irena Solska, also recited at Skamandrite evenings, but they did not leave a lasting impression on the artists closely associated with the group. Similarly, it was widely known in interwar Warsaw that Słonimski had other fascinations with equally exceptional women, such as Helena Bołoz-Antoniewiczowa, a translator of Bertrand Russell and a promoter of Eastern culture who left for India, or Irena Baruch, a painter who married an American diplomat and moved overseas. However, these relationships did not have as deep an impact on the aesthetic views of the group.

Janusz Stradecki, a monographer of the Skamander group, writes that the literary café *Pod Picadorem*, which operated for only a few months at the turn of 1918 and 1919, was a space purposefully created for the meeting of tradition and modernity. According to Stradecki, it "constituted […] an important stage in the crystallisation of collective aspirations":

> Firstly, the cafe served as an institution that promoted the group's work and advanced new literary attitudes and values. Secondly, it provided a new means of literary communication, connecting poets with a broad audience. This was a significant factor in the widening of the audience after the First World War. Thirdly, *Pod Picadorem* was a tool in the group's fight for the professional interests of writers amidst the ongoing processes of institutionalisation and professionalisation of literary work. Finally, the café played a role in setting new, anti-Young Poland artistic standards and connecting with the innovative trends of Expressionism and Futurism (Stradecki, 1977, pp. 55–56).

The immense popularity of individual and group poetry evenings in the early 1920s suggests that public reading and listening to poetry were highly valued and played a special role in culture after the First World War. In the phrasing from Adam Mickiewicz's *Konrad Wallenrod*, it was the role akin to "the Ark of the Covenant" between old and new generations (Mickiewicz, 1828/1882, p. 42). The Picadorians of that time, who would later become the Skamandrites, were

the first to fully embrace the cultural and self-promotional opportunities that came with this form of artistic interaction with the public. Maria Morska, as a declaimer, significantly contributed to their artistic and social success. The act of declamation differs fundamentally from silent individual reading as it involves public performance. The declaimer is not just a medium but an integral part of the performance and reception. It is the declaimer who establishes and reinforces the communicative community by reciting in a specific place and time, for a specific audience, with a specific goal in mind.

The few surviving testimonies of the reception of Maria Morska's declamations did not prompt Hanna Faryna-Paszkiewicz, the author of a book on Morska, to delve deeper into a reflection on the recitation style employed by the protagonist of her book. Based on the available source material, the researcher reaches the following conclusion: "It appears that Morska's art of declamation added resonance to the poems, causing the content to affect the listener. The audience was eager to hear her interpretations" (Faryna-Paszkiewicz, 2008, p. 25). It is worth reformulating this observation into a question that approaches the topic from a different angle than that offered by Faryna-Paszkiewicz: Why did the audience have such a strong desire to hear her interpretations?

The way Maria Morska recited poetry had a surprising effect that played a crucial role in her success. Specifically, Morska's beauty, attire, demeanour, gestures, and tone of voice were all subordinate to 'artificiality.' Irena Krzywicka describes her as an "intriguing orator who, in a smoky café, would recite – in a very artificial but unique manner – the poems of young poets who were making their mark on Warsaw and Poland" (Krzywicka, 1960, p. 140). "She recited in a somewhat affectatious manner, but with a distinct style that was all her own, enunciating her words with a saccharine-sweet voice" (Krzywicka, 1992/2013, p. 104). Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz also recalled that "Morska developed an unpleasant mannerism, making a whole series of errors, such as using gestures to illustrate the poem she was reciting," but "[i]n *Picador*, Morska's enthusiasm, combined with the affection that surrounded her everywhere, elevated her interpretation," to the point that even he had to admit: "The poems she recited are deeply ingrained in my memory, and from then on, I can only hear the poetry she once spoke with her accent, her intonation, and her voice" (J. Iwaszkiewicz, 1994, p. 185).

Artificiality and mannerism deviated from the standard of 'natural' recitation that was prevalent and expected at the time. According to this

standard, the declaimer is transparent, merely serving as a medium, while the true protagonist is the poetry in general, and the author of the text in particular. Maria Morska introduced elements of gender into declamation that were perceived as disrupting the purity or neutrality of the message. Audiences recognised these gender elements as belonging to the aesthetic and erotic discourse of the previous era. The eroticisation of high poetry, especially one with patriotic overtones, verged on perversion, for Romantic and neo-Romantic ideas seduced listeners just as a woman seduces a man, appealing to emotions and disregarding rational arguments. Many years after the Second World War, Tadeusz Stefańczyk wrote about the "spirit of Maria Morska symbolising the mystery of untamed and incomprehensible eroticism," which hung over the tumultuous 1920s: "The erotic Carmagnole raged 'on the ruins of convention,' with men hastily 'discarding Konrad's cloak' and women adopting the poses of vamps and *femmes fatales*, similar to Maria Morska, by shedding corsets, long hair, and virtue" (Stefańczyk, 2006, p. 70). However, the mannerism that initially brought Morska popularity during the early years of independence quickly fizzled out. As Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz notes, "it did not enjoy popularity in later times" (J. Iwaszkiewicz, 1994, p. 185).

From this perspective, two testimonies regarding the reception of Morska's declamation are particularly interesting: one from the early years of Poland's independence, and another from the mid-1920s. The former testimony comes from Tadeusz Żeleński-Boy, whose "lofty and stormy" youth coincided with the decline of Young Poland:

> [Morska's] original appearance is captivating from the very beginning, and her voice reinforces this interest. It is truly strange, high-pitched, metallic, and almost deliberately artificial. I would be a clumsy flatterer if I praised Ms. Morska for simplicity, as she intentionally avoids it. On the contrary, I have the impression that she aims to evoke a feeling of unease. She vigorously stimulates the listeners' sensitivity with a constant fortissimo accent and gesture, not allowing them to doze off, even for a moment, on the cushion of easy declamation. This approach produces a brilliant effect in some works, such as "Podróż" [Journey] by Słonimski, "Garbus" [The Hunchback] by Tuwim, or the charming pieces by Maria Pawlikowska. However, in others, like the poem "Bez tytułu" [No title] by Lechoń, this bold instrumentation clashes with a text that yearns for simplicity. Nevertheless, I eagerly anticipate hearing Ms. Morska again and listening to that abrasive voice. After all, it was no coincidence that I was once a decadent (Żeleński-Boy, 1964, pp. 586–587).

Another such testimony is provided by an advertisement from *Wiadomości Literackie*. It promotes the Great Recitation Evening held in March 1926 at the Pompeian Hall of Hotel Europejski. The event featured performances by Stefan Jaracz and Maria Morska. Alongside the self-promotion of the Skamander group and the ideological programme of the liberal Warsaw intelligentsia's weekly, the advertisement also highlights the exceptional qualities that set Morska's recitational style apart in this circle:

> The excellent reciter, Ms. Maria Morska, who has recently returned from abroad, will perform at the poetry evening on 21 March. Maria Morska, known as the original reciter of Picador and a member of the esteemed Skamander group, possesses an impressive range of emotions, remarkable creativity, and a profound understanding of poetry. Her deep connection with each poem drives her to approach every author with a meticulously thought-out concept. This is perhaps why her interpretations of poems exude a fresh sense of inspiration, without losing any of their intimacy. Enriched with the artist's tenderness and strength, they never fail to evoke enthusiasm from the audience ("Z estrady," 1926, p. 4).

Of course, Morska was also listened to by people who were insensitive to the 'decadent' allure of her recitation, particularly those from the generation younger than the Skamandrites and their sympathisers. This is how Jerzy Libert reported the poetry evening to Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz in a letter dated 27 March 1926: "I didn't like Morska, what can I do. She's a hysteric. She used to declaim better in the past" (Liebert, 1976, vol. 2, p. 399). On the same day, he also wrote to Anna Iwaszkiewicz, mentioning that "Morska apparently declaimed well, but I didn't like her. I think she did it better before. I met her. She is terribly exalted and has a lot of affectation. She is like a sleepwalker whom you feel like tapping on the shoulder and asking: why are you here? Besides that, she is very dear […]. But she needs to be awakened from some strange dream" (Liebert, 1976, p. 400).

The comments above, regarding 'tenderness,' 'exaltation,' 'affectation,' 'hysteria,' or 'sleepwalking,' not only allude to aspects of the modernist discourse on gender and the body, but also refer to the racial categories associated with gender and creativity. They explore the interplay between femininity, Jewishness, and poetry in a symbolic form, as in the character of Rachela in Stanisław Wyspiański's *The Wedding* (1901). Much like Rachela, Maria Morska appears in Warsaw and in the café *Pod Picadorem* as though she is from outside, "from beyond the situation" (Umińska, 2001, p. 151). Despite lacking a formal university

education, according to contemporary accounts, she possessed an interesting intellect, impressive erudition from extensive reading, and knowledge of British culture. Therefore, I tentatively assume that she could, like Rachela, freely admit "I've read an awful lot of verse" (Wyspiański, 1901/1998, p. 65), but:

> […] I nurse
> a grudge against this modern curse
> of writing. It distresses me
> when, everywhere I look, I see
> the spell on living poetry cast
> by poets dead, whose time is past.
> From reading, pleasure I derive:
> for me, the dead are still alive (Wyspiański, 1901/1998, p. 65).

Therefore, Morska exerted a significant intellectual influence not only on Antoni Słonimski but also, through him, on the other members of the group and the editorial staff of *Wiadomości Literackie*. Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz recalled that Słonimski was for many years "immersed in the light of this woman, revolving around her like an orbit, echoing her sentences, tastes, sayings, and convictions," while she "nurtured the noble aspects of his character" (J. Iwaszkiewicz, 1984, p. 78). She "coloured […] his entire youth; I would even say, our entire youth, because so often, everything that was discussed, all the interests, and all the literary trends, stemmed from 'Ms. Maria'" (J. Iwaszkiewicz, 1984, p. 79). Irena Krzywicka noticed another distinctive feature of Morska: "[she] had this rare habit, uncommon among women, of not engaging in trivial conversations. She either had something important to say, which was usually the case, or she could gracefully remain silent" (Krzywicka, 1992/2013, p. 229). All the accounts from people who directly interacted with her suggest that Maria Morska had a unique way of communicating with the world and people. It was as if she was 'beyond' or 'above' the mundane concerns of everyday life. Her means of communication were her body, voice, and attire, which were always subordinate to art, regardless of the circumstances. Morska's contemporaries either admired her communication style, like Anna Iwaszkiewicz or Irena Krzywicka, or were averse to them, as seen with Jerzy Libert.

The art, literature, and poetry in which Maria Morska emerged herself can be seen as a domain that is both democratic and elitist, as well as egalitarian. In this world, there is no room for distinctions based on gender, race, class, nationality,

religion, sexual identity, or age, because the genius of the creator surpasses and negates these limitations. Similarly, an admirer of art, literature, and poetry – such as a declaimer – can participate in the cosmopolitan realm of art, free from historical entanglements. Yet, there is a problem: Maria Morska does not create her own poetry; she only declaims it. And the poetry she declaims is primarily nationalistic, specifically Polish poetry. As a result, the escape from local limitations has proven to be an illusion, as Maria Morska confirms the common beliefs about the lack of independence and originality in female and Jewish intellect, while reinforcing the autonomy and uniqueness of male and Polish intellect. According to Janusz Stradecki, the monographer of the Skamander group,

> Her repertoire, which changed on a weekly basis, included poems by Picador poets as well as classical poetry. She focused primarily on reciting Romantic poetry, works by Mickiewicz and Norwid, as well as pieces by Wyspiański and translations. Among the translations, the most popular ones were "The wonderful clown" by Bainville (translated by Miriam), "The drunken boat" by Rimbaud (translated by Tuwim), works by Moréas (translated by Iwaszkiewicz), and pieces by Edgar [Allan] Poe (Stradecki, 1977, p. 49).

The stir caused by the Picadorians in the early 1920s, and later by the Skamandrites, was connected to the vitality of aesthetic and patriotic issues in the recent past, in particular the significance of the role of literature and the status of the artist in the national community. To illustrate this, we can look at the discussions surrounding "Herostrates" [Herostratus] by Jan Lechoń, "Czarna wiosna" [The black spring] by Antoni Słonimski, or "Wiosna" [Spring] by Julian Tuwim. These poets approached the literature of Young Poland with ambivalence, reflecting the interest of participants in the culture of that time to answer the question of the artist's status in the emerging independent, democratic, and capitalist state. As a poetry declaimer, Maria Morska embodies and expresses these interests, anxieties, and contradictions. Unlike the Skamandrites, who only performed their own texts, Maria is the only person in this circle who recites the works of other poets. Her recitation repertoire consists of highly artistic, Romantic, and neo-Romantic pieces, spanning from Adam Mickiewicz to Cyprian Norwid, Stanisław Wyspiański, Bolesław Leśmian, and even Arthur Rimbaud, who is considered the lawgiver of modern lyricism. It is no coincidence that this canon does not include Juliusz Słowacki, who was critical of Polishness mysteries, and

to whom the Skamandrites did not show much reverence at all. As Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz wrote on 1st September 1923 in a letter to his wife: "We sat down at night in *Ziemiańska* and recited poems: Leszek, Tuwim, and I. They have such a wonderful memory, reciting excellently from various fields, including Pushkin, Mickiewicz, and contemporary poets. It's just strange that they don't like Słowacki; I don't understand it at all" (A. Iwaszkiewicz & J. Iwaszkiewicz, 1998, p. 97). The link that brings together the poetic and national tradition in Maria Morska's recitational concept is specifically the Skamandrites. Interestingly, she did not extend this favour to anyone else.

The significance of such a gesture in terms of culture, identity, and the promotion of the poetic group is clear: Morska reconstructs a canon in which the young poets of Picador carry on the spiritual strength of the nation. They have moved beyond the kind of interpretation of old poetry that is suffused with martyrdom and suffering, particularly Romantic poetry, yet they preserved its greatness. In doing so, these poets offer their audience new forms of spiritual emotion. The intellectual core of this newly envisioned canon is the modernised myth of the Romantic and Modernist Polish poet as an exceptional individual endowed with extraordinary talent. They fulfil the role of the nation's guide, revealing higher truths that ordinary mortals, who may respect the artist, do not comprehend. This was the myth of exceptional sensitivity, not just versification; a myth of the genius and seer, always fulfilled in the male body. By grouping the Skamandrites with Polish Romantics and Modernists, Maria Morska elevated them. On one hand, she pointed out to the audience a new spiritual elite of the nation; on the other, she reminded the Picadorians of the responsibilities of the artist connected with civic ideals. For herself, she reserved an equally honourable place as the Muse who does not create herself, yet inspires, leads, and protects creativity. As Krzywicka suggests, "she was a type of Egeria, a woman who spiritually and intellectually fertilised. She enjoyed acting literarily by proxy" (Krzywicka, 1992/2013, p. 202). Taking this perspective into account, we can better understand the aversion of other poets to Maria Morska and the Skamandrites, as it gains an intellectual and emotional depth. Let us once again consider Jerzy Libert as an example. In his resentful words about the Great Evening of Poetry in March 1926, he expresses, "There were a lot of people, the whole hall was packed. […] Morska read poorly, at least I didn't like her. She read only the poems of Lechoń, Słonimski, Tuwim, and Pawlikowska" (Liebert, 2002, p. 382).

One good example of the Skamandrites' double consciousness, torn between the desire for a radical departure from the past and the need for continuity with tradition, was the work of Jan Lechoń. Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz wrote about him, "We all, following Antoni Słonimski's lead, deluded ourselves into thinking that we had shed 'Konrad's cloak.' Lechoń […], on the other hand, seemed to drape it even more beautifully on his shoulders. His poetics did not align with the milieu in which we lived from 1918 to 1921" (J. Iwaszkiewicz, 2006, p. 54). The mention of Lechoń here is not accidental because, symbolically, he shares the most similarities with Maria Morska as a connoisseur, admirer, and reciter of Polish poetry. Kazimierz Wierzyński writes that Jan Lechoń "constantly perused the vast anthology of Polish poetry in his remarkable memory. He recited everything, from the seventeenth-century poets to Mickiewicz, and to Gomulicki, Or-Ot, Staff, Tuwim, Słonimski, and Przysiecki" (Wierzyński, 2006, p. 47). Despite his strong dislike for Jan Lechoń and intense rivalry, Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz forgave him all his flaws and transgressions the instant he began to recite:

> Lechoń never read from a book. His memory was astonishing, phenomenal. Therefore, my most profound poetic experiences will always be associated with the moments when 'Leszek spoke poems.' […] These recitations would last for hours, sometimes even throughout the entire night. […] In those moments, I would have followed him anywhere, even into hell. When he finished reciting one poem, we would eagerly request, 'More, Leszek, more!' And he would begin another, delving into a completely different realm of poetry. From Norwid to Staff, from Wyspiański to Słonimski, he knew them all by heart. He knew all of his own poems by heart, and most of ours. It was during these recitations that he transformed into another person, a genuine individual. It was only in such moments that one could truly grasp the essence of his character and the depth of his 'being' (J. Iwaszkiewicz, 2006, pp. 59–60).

As admirers and reciters of poems, Maria Morska and Jan Lechoń became reservoirs, carriers, tools, and guardians of poetry; one could say that they became poetry itself. In the nineteenth century, as a nation deprived of autonomous state institutions, the Polish saw literature, especially poetry, as the primary language of self-expression, and this approach continued into the early 1920s. The works, themes, motifs, and problems explored by Morska and Lechoń intersected, as they both applied similar principles when selecting texts.

In particular, they both preferred texts that reflected on the relationship between human beings and the fundamental issue of existence: the tension between the public sphere, which encompasses individuals' rights and obligations towards themselves and the national community, and the private sphere, which is founded on the dangerous connections between Eros and Thanatos.

Their private canon of poetry reveals three key issues for the young Skamandrites. The first and most important of these concerns was the internal conflict faced by the Polish individuals at that time. They questioned whether freeing themselves from the mindset of 'suffering' when reflecting on the past, and instead embracing the spontaneity of everyday thoughts, words, and emotions, would amount to turning their backs on the heroic myth and betraying their homeland. Poetry did not offer any unambiguous solutions to these dilemmas. The second issue pertained to the belief that poetry is a unique form of understanding the world, which does not categorise political, philosophical, religious, existential, or intellectual matters as 'either-or', but rather, more frequently as 'and-and'. Consequently, it affirms the profound intuition of any contemplative individual that life is brief and arduous, concluding in death without any assurance of salvation. Hence, poetry does not provide simplistic solaces or remedies to the sense of the unpredictability of human existence and the dread of eternal damnation. The third issue revolved around the understanding that poetry serves as a means of communicating complex ideas about individuals, communities, as well as love and death. This form of communication relies on the distinct expertise of poets, who are no longer seen as prophets, educators, or leaders of the nation. Instead, they are thinkers who chart the paths of human thought in the thicket of metaphors and quotations, references and denials that have been accumulating over centuries. The recitation canon of Morska and Lechoń also showcased the 'poetic workshop'. These experiments in versification and imagery were a revolution when first realised, and later became common practice for subsequent generations of creators. As such, the declamatory methods and canons of these two were subordinated to Poetry spelled with capital P, which was understood as a non-discursive existential philosophy with its own history, theory, and methodology. They presented the public with another, darker face of the Skamandrites.

In concluding my reflections on Maria Morska as Skamander's 'only daughter' and her recitation as a form of 'busying about' the canon of Polish poetry, let me turn my attention to Morska's effort to introduce the only woman, Maria

Pawlikowska, into this canon. Jerzy Libert mentions the authoress of *Różowa magia* in the context of the Skamandrites for the first time in his letter to Anna Iwaszkiewicz, mentioned above: "Morska read poorly, at least I didn't like her. She only read the poems of Lechoń, Słonimski, Tuwim, and Pawlikowska" (Liebert, 2002, p. 382). Morska's gesture of inclusion did not stem solely from the friendship between the two women; a friendship that Anna Iwaszkiewicz jealously mentioned in her diary entry from 8th January 1927 (A. Iwaszkiewicz, 2000, p. 173) and which, years later, Irena Krzywicka confirmed (Krzywicka, 1992/2013, p. 202). Neither was it a reflection of the Skamandrites' appreciation of Pawlikowska's poetic craftsmanship, as they respected the efforts and skills of many contemporary poets. Rather, it was Pawlikowska's similar sensitivity to the dark side of existence, filtered through the lens of gender, specifically the female experience of the terror of the world, life, and the body. This sensitivity was a defining characteristic of all creative women closely associated with the *Wiadomości Literackie*'s literary circle. It only became evident in the early 1930s when Mieczysław Grydzewski decided to create a special supplement in the weekly *Życie Świadome* [Conscious living]. Women writers and social activists such as Halina Krahelska, Irena Krzywicka, Wanda Melcer, Maria Milkiewiczowa, Maria Morska, Zofia Nałkowska, Maria Pawlikowska, and Justyna Budzińska-Tylicka expressed their viewpoints in this supplement.

The model of 'conscious living' promoted in *Wiadomości Literackie* was aimed at reinterpreting and restructuring both written and unwritten codes that regulate the strategic domains of collective and individual life. This was done to adapt these codes to the changed conditions of independence and modernity, allowing the citizens of the young state to achieve happiness through individual choices. Since the liberals associated with *Wiadomości Literackie* adhered to the traditional division between the female sphere (home, marriage, family) and the male sphere (public life), the concept of 'conscious living' placed the duty on women to reconsider interpersonal relationships, sexuality, and motherhood, while men were tasked with reevaluating matters of war and peace. A prominent aspect of these gender-related discussions, especially those on the conditions and circumstances of giving and taking life, was the highly publicised social campaign associated with Tadeusz Żeleński-Boy, which promoted the concept of 'conscious motherhood' rather than, notably, 'conscious parenthood.' This shift of responsibility for the biological reproduction of the so-called 'living tissue of the nation' solely onto women, occurring at a time when the memory of the

1914–1918 war had not yet faded and preparations for the next one were already underway, resulted in a rise in childlessness among the liberal intelligentsia of the interwar period.

The issues of contraception, the dramas of unwanted pregnancy and abortion and their unforeseen consequences, the hardships of childbirth and the postpartum period, and, finally, the effort of raising and educating offspring without any guarantee of a good and happy life (see Sierakowska, 2003) were a physical, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual experience for women, which prompted many women to renounce motherhood. This was true, for example, of women in the Skamander literary group. In contrast to the optimistic reformers associated with *Życie Świadome*, such as Irena Krzywicka, Maria Morska and Maria Pawlikowska represented existential pessimism. This perspective can be summed up with the question: why bear the burden of motherhood when life ultimately ends in death and society impedes individuals from fully realising their humanity? Maria Pawlikowska expressed her refusal to fulfil the role of a mother as a rebellion against the natural violence imposed on all females and the societal violence imposed on all human females (Zawiszewska, 2011, pp. 297–318). This viewpoint was initially articulated by Maria Pawlikowska in the early 1930s in her article "Okrucieństwo matron" [The Cruelty of Matrons] (Pawlikowska, 1932, p. 7), but it had been present in her work since the 1920s.[1] This is evidenced, among other things, by Irena Krzywicka's mention of the profound impression that Pawlikowska's poem "Topielice" [The Drowned] from her 1928 collection *Paryż* [Paris] made on Maria Morska. The collection was dedicated "To Maria Morska, the charming interpreter of my poems, as a heartfelt gift" (Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska, 1929, p. 5):

1 This fact, therefore, does not undermine Jerzy Kwiatkowski's conclusions about the radical shift in the dominant themes of Maria Pawlikowska's work, but rather adds nuance. In the 1920s, the poetess was believed to equate Love with Nature and view God as a 'flirtation partner' who could be seduced. However, in the following decade, Love and Nature started to be portrayed separately, the benevolent male God was replaced by an indifferent-hostile female deity, and the 'poetics of charm' gave way to a serious tone. The earlier form of the lyrical subject – the Coquette – stepped aside in favour of the Rebel against nature. This is why the poet "is eager to demonstrate the monstrosity, ugliness, and repulsiveness" of the Rebel (Kwiatkowski, 1998, pp. LXIX–LXX).

Once, on the stairs leading to someone's apartment, I encountered Maria Morska. She appeared to descend gracefully from above, pausing halfway to meet my gaze with her mesmerising sea-like eyes. It was as though she had sought me out, anticipating my presence, and asked, 'Have you read Lilka's latest poem?' Morska had this rare habit, uncommon among women, of not engaging in trivial conversations. She either had something important to say, which was usually the case, or she could gracefully remain silent. Now, without unnecessary words, she began reciting softly:

On a red night, under the bridge, in the Seine
floats a female cat, soaked and pale.
Under the next bridge, suddenly,
a girl joined it.

Port lamps splash over her,
gloomy waves enclose them,
and they have a conversation,
without breathing at all.

'Children from the bridge threw me into the water.
And you?' – 'Me too. Know this…
Though so close, so far, powerless,
a child threw me into the cold wave.

Now it floats away in me like in a boat,
away from the shores, sinking in the misty crepe…
It will never see the world.' – 'It doesn't matter…'.
'It won't grow into a human being…' – 'That's better…']

We were gripped by the overwhelming beauty of this poem and its terrifying content. Standing on the staircase, we remained silent for quite some time. Eventually, Morska said, 'She is the greatest Polish poetess and one of the most notable poets, although the masculine form doesn't suit her at all. She embodies the very essence of femininity' (Krzywicka, 1992/2013, pp. 228–229).

Maria Pawlikowska's first poetry collection, titled *Niebieskie migdały* (1922), was initially met with condescension from critics. It is now recognised that Ostap Ortwin's review of her work exemplifies the double standards prevalent in evaluating the work of women and men during the interwar period. Therefore, Maria Morska's decision to include Pawlikowska's poems in her recitation repertoire, and consequently in the canon of Polish poetry, should be viewed as more than just a reflection of her literary preferences. It also demonstrates

her awareness of social and gender issues and her commitment to a carefully considered cultural agenda. It aimed to expand the scope of Polish culture to include the previously silenced female experience, which revolves around gender relations and reproduction and have long been relegated to the 'private' sphere and subordinated during the years of partition to the 'political' sphere. However, expanding culture does not simply involve adding previously absent reflections on human existence. On the contrary, it always leads to the reconfiguration of existing culture. In this case, it breaks the categories of nation, war, or art by introducing the category of gender. According to Maria Morska, Maria Pawlikowska's work complements, deepens, and adds nuances to the vision of the world and humanity proposed by men: Poles, Citizens, Artists.

The Case of Anna I. Unlike the Muse, the Artist's Wife usually has no right to participate in her husband's inner world; instead, she takes on the ungrateful duties of organising his external world: marital life, family relations, and social interactions. The biographies of the wives of the Skamander poets confirm and reinforce this pattern, even though three of them expressed themselves creatively, albeit to varying degrees.

Janina Konarska undoubtedly achieved the greatest artistic success. She was a well-known, respected, and awarded artist, painter, and sculptor of the interwar period, a student of Władysław Skoczylas. However, after her marriage to Antoni Słonimski in 1934, she gradually but steadily withdrew from creative life to assume the role of a full-time Poet's Wife. Kazimierz Wierzyński's first wife, Bronisława Kojałłowicz, whom the poet married in 1923, was an actress; his second wife, Halina Pfeffer, whom Wierzyński wedded in 1938, fulfilled the role of a domestic caretaker. Anna Lilpop, who became Iwaszkiewicz's wife in 1922, had various artistic pursuits. She wrote literary sketches, translated French literature, and kept a diary. On the other hand, Stefania Marchew, whom Julian Tuwim married in 1919, had no artistic ambitions and showed no interest in her husband's work while he was alive. As Irena Krzywicka recalls, Stefania Tuwim would proudly declare, "I don't read Juliek's poems" (Krzywicka, 1992/2013, p. 201). Among these four couples, only the Iwaszkiewiczs decided to have children. They had two daughters, Maria, born in 1924, and Teresa in 1928. Jan

Lechoń, despite witnessing their apparently successful relationship, remained unmarried.[2]

Among the wives of the Skamander group, only Anna Iwaszkiewicz (1897–1979) stood out as an intellectual in the modern sense. Despite having received only home education and not pursuing formal education, she consistently expanded her knowledge of literature, music, philosophy, and religion. Additionally, she led a profound spiritual life, sought guidance from a confessor, and was part of a circle centred around Father Władysław Korniłowicz. From a young age, Anna maintained a diary which she treated as both an intellectual and spiritual practice. Furthermore, she translated works by renowned authors such as Marcel Proust, André Maurois, Jules Verne, Michel Butor, Virginia Woolf, and Alain-Fournier. In 1978, she authored the book *Nasze zwierzęta* [Our animals], and she worked on a collection of essays tentatively titled *Moje Fontainebleau* [My Fontainebleau].

She was born into a wealthy industrialist family, and her parents were Stanisław and Jadwiga Lilpop, but their family quickly fell apart. Two years after Anna's birth, Jadwiga left her husband and daughter for pianist Józef Śliwiński. Stanisław never remarried, and his sister, Aniela Lilpop Pilawitzowa, who consistently refused the "disgraceful" mother's requests to see her child, took over the care of Anna and the household (M. Iwaszkiewicz, 2005, p. 15). When free from running the Myśliwska Company, Anna's father hunted, travelled, and had an interest in photography, unlike other members of his social circle who accumulated wealth just for the sake of possessing it. Until his death by suicide in 1930, he pampered Anna and supported her, even after her marriage.

During the First World War, the Lilpop family relocated to Russia. However, the revolution did not alter their bourgeois lifestyle, despite the "very difficult material conditions under Bolshevism" (A. Iwaszkiewicz, 2000, p. 40). Anna regarded her time in Moscow as the "most wonderful and happiest period of life […], a time of deeper and truer understanding of art. The gates of beauty opened, revealing the essence and the nature of art. It is God" (A. Iwaszkiewicz,

2 Jan Lechoń, who was emotionally involved with Wanda Serkowska, wrote to Anna Iwaszkiewicz on 24 February 1923: "From a logical standpoint, the situation should not be more complex than that between Jarosław and you – but I sincerely doubt that I can change for the better" (A. Iwaszkiewicz, 2000, p. 62).

2000, p. 11). This period involved her engagement with Futurism, Symbolism, Acmeism, frequenting modern literary cafes and cabarets, listening to avant-garde music, and visiting revolutionary theatres and art galleries. For her, the pinnacle of Art (with a capital A) was the symphonic *The Poem of Ecstasy* (1908) by Mikołaj Skriabin, which she heard in the spring of 1917, along with the mystical works of Juliusz Słowacki.

In this atmosphere of the twilight of the old and the birth of the new worlds, Anna developed feelings for Prince Krzysztof Radziwiłł, the son of Maciej Radziwiłł and Róża Potocka. Krzysztof, a student at a prestigious high school, was an accomplished poet, with a collection of his work published by his father, and a future heir to the family estate and head of the Radziwiłł clan. The love of an aristocrat for the exalted daughter of an industrialist, whose mother was a heroine of a social scandal, was not approved of in his world, but the perseverance of the young couple overcame all obstacles, and their wedding was to take place in 1922. However, that year brought about radical changes, provoked by Anna. In her diary, under the date 11th June 1923, she summarised her long and tumultuous romance, saying, "Then I met Jarosław and joined the whole Skamander pack, something I had always wanted" (A. Iwaszkiewicz, 2000, p. 45). Specifically, on 1st February 1922, 24-year-old Anna met 28-year-old Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz. In the spring, she broke off her engagement to Krzysztof Radziwiłł, who had abandoned poetry for a military uniform during the 1920 war. Then, in September 1922, she married Iwaszkiewicz. Roman Jasiński, who later became a historian of the interwar musical life and brought Jarosław to Anna's home at her own request, wrote about Anna from those years:

> Besides her dowry as the only daughter of a wealthy father, she was, by virtue of her own qualities, one of the most interesting and beautiful young women in Warsaw at that time. What impressed me most was the spontaneity and passion with which she approached art. […] She was the daughter of a capitalist, yet I knew few young women who so completely ignored the world of money and wealth as Hania Lilpopówna did (R. Jasiński & Jarocki, 1985, p. 7).

The sudden affection that developed between the "wealthy and beautiful Anna and the impoverished Jarosław," leading to their plans of marriage, came as a surprise to Jasiński. Upon hearing the news from Jan Lechoń on Krakowskie Przedmieście, he was so shocked that he simply sat down on the pavement (R. Jasiński, 2006, p. 206).

Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz had moved from Ukraine to Warsaw with his mother and four siblings. At the time, he was part of the capital's 'poor literati', living in shabby rented rooms and making ends meet through tutoring, journalism, translations, and clerical work. Additionally, his preference for 'male friendships' was well known in Warsaw. He had joined the Skamander group, as it reflected the social and political variety of the young independent state. However, he never felt entirely comfortable within it. He envied his colleagues' early fame, social standing, and financial status, while simultaneously despising their limited intellectual horizons. Anna, however, specifically requested to meet this Skamander poet in her own home in 1922. Her husband later recalled, "She was a dazzling beauty, outwardly banal but with vibrant inner life, a sparkle in her small dark eyes, and with light ash-blonde hair. Her beauty became so intertwined with my life that I no longer noticed it" (J. Iwaszkiewicz, 2011, p. 616).

Radosław Romaniuk, in his essay on Anna Iwaszkiewicz, writes that "it was probably what is called love at first sight, the rarest and, contrary to appearances, the most complicated type of love" (Romaniuk, 2005, p. 84). It is worth trying to unlock the narrative of 'love at first sight' with a psychological key and asking whether we are not simply dealing with projections prompted by historical circumstances, social situations, and pre-existing biographical knowledge about the individuals involved.

It is likely that Jarosław saw in Anna the ideal candidate for the role of the Artist's Wife, satisfying both his male vanity and his need for a comfortable daily life. He described her as "a smart, beautiful, apparently wealthy, and pious young woman" (Burek, 1998, p. 8). Anna was engaged to a prince, flirted with her suitors, and was free of bourgeois pretensions. She also had a deep respect for Art and Artists. However, Jarosław did not anticipate the depth of her spirituality and the influence her relatives had on her life. As he wrote years later, he always saw marriage as some sort of arrangement for life with a person who was a loyal and supportive friend for himself and his family (J. Iwaszkiewicz, 1994, p. 351). Anna, on the other hand, saw in Jarosław an opportunity to escape both the bourgeois influences of her own family and the aristocratic influences of Krzysztof Radziwiłł's family. She wanted to build a marital life – much like her mother before her – on the foundation of an intellectual and existential understanding with an Artist. Erotic matters also played a role, as both were psychologically ill-suited to fulfil the obligations inherent in the traditional heteronormative gender contract: "Hania certainly knew (and not from gossip,

but from my own mouth) whom she was marrying" (J. Iwaszkiewicz, 2012, p. 209).

Jarosław's homosexuality meant that his erotic fulfilment was realised in relationships with men; as he wrote, desire for him was always "in the realm of men" (J. Iwaszkiewicz, 2012, p. 209). This freed Anna from the burdensome aspects of heterosexual masculinity, as she explicitly wrote to her husband in a letter from February 1928: "You know well how I can't stand 'males'" (A. Iwaszkiewicz & J. Iwaszkiewicz, 2012, p. 218). They both dealt with their situation with humour, as shown by Anna's diary entry from 15th March 1924 about the change in her appearance after the birth of their first child: "Indeed, I have never been so thin. Jarosław says that now I have the figure of a young boy. Naturally, we joke about it a lot" (A. Iwaszkiewicz, 2000, p. 69). In their everyday life, they valued intellectual understanding over the erotic aspect of gender, as Jarosław explicitly states in a letter dated 16th September 1931: "Even with the most intelligent woman, you can't delve deep into the core of certain matters. I don't consider you a woman because, for you, gender is not the primary thing, it is not that most important thing that every woman flaunts like relics, parading them around the world" (A. Iwaszkiewicz & J. Iwaszkiewicz, 2012, p. 525). For Anna, marginalisation of the issues of sex did not entail, as it did for her husband, actively redirecting sexual desires towards others and fulfilling them outside of marriage, but rather an aversion to the biological aspects of femininity and the repression of her own sexuality.

Paradoxically, all of this contributed to a successful start to their marriage, which the poet remembered with nostalgia and fondness. However, this seemingly peaceful haven where he had anchored his existence and talent was undermined from the start by Anna's creative yearnings, which she consistently but unsuccessfully tried to suppress. Anna's immense emotional sensitivity would oscillate between mystical admiration for the material and spiritual achievements of humanity, and depression, which in the 1930s led to her complete withdrawal from family life. It can be understood as a lack of psychological strength needed to integrate the conflicting demands placed on women at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries by bourgeois society. Anna struggled to find the means of expressing her own creative needs in a situation of intellectual subordination to a man.

According to modernist gender discourse, which is rooted in a misogynistic religious, legal, and medical tradition (see Bogucka, 2005) that was prevalent

during the interwar period, women were defined by their sexual, reproductive, and maternal functions. However, the physiology of these states was considered a disease. Furthermore, women were considered mentally weaker than men, with this weakness being seen as a trait determined by their biological destiny. Bearing in mind this historical context, we should recognise the efforts made by women at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to fulfil their own creative needs as heroic. This entire complex of beliefs and their embodiments became the axis of the discourse on hysteria, and later the psychoanalytic discourse which fed on the individual biographies of non/creative (through no fault of their own) women, such as the famous biography of Anna O., or Bertha Pappenheim (see Appignanesi & Forrester, 1992). Unlike Bertha Pappenheim, who became an important figure in the suffragist movement after unsuccessful psychotherapy, Anna Iwaszkiewicz never consciously tried to overcome the limitations of the worldview that hindered her creative impulses. Piotr Mitzner describes Anna as a "non-creative woman" who was constantly burdened by "the sadness of things undone" and "unease" throughout her life. However, Mitzner does not connect this with her obligations to marriage and family: "She lived a relatively comfortable life, surrounded by interesting people and travelled the world, although not as extensively as Jarosław" (Mitzner, 2000, p. 43).

In my view, Anna Iwaszkiewicz was a victim of the modernist model of gender socialisation. She had artistic ambitions but was internally enslaved by a misogynistic system of beliefs, which prevented her from realising them. I am therefore giving in to what Radosław Romaniuk dismissed as the "temptation of convenient and amateurish psychoanalysis" which allows one to see the writer's wife, "a woman who was equal to him in exceptional intellect and aesthetic intuition, but also consumed by a passion for self-development and spiritual improvement which he himself was foreign to," as a "person whose creative need was suppressed" (Romaniuk, 2005, p. 107). Contrary to what Romaniuk writes, Anna's correspondence and diary suggest that her need for "spiritual development or capturing the impressions drawn from communing with works of art or simply with the world" did not replace "the longing […] to write poetry or prose" (Romaniuk, 2005, p. 107), but coexisted alongside it. Additionally, her "Christian humility of an 'average woman'" and "consistent self-criticism, which seems to be one of the most essential traits of her character" (Romaniuk, 2005, p. 108), were not derived from the writings of Nikolai Berdyaev but used *ex post* as a philosophical justification for a pre-existing conviction, instilled

by upbringing, about the non-creativity of the female intellect. A lengthy diary entry dated 16th July 1927 testifies to how deeply Anna internalised the prevailing belief that a woman cannot create true Art, and, if she does create, it is at the expense of her mental health:

> However, a woman, even one like [George] Sand, undoubtedly very talented, cannot be considered a creator in the fullest and truly great sense of the word. She is unable to achieve the level of creative vision and otherworldly imagination that gives birth to works like *Król Duch* [The Spirit King] or *Dziady* [Forefather's Eve]. While a woman can intuitively connect with this realm through deep religiosity and internalise its essence, she lacks the ability to give these experiences concrete form.
>
> In women's creativity, we do not find any reflection of the universe or the exploration of the most fundamental issues. The only 'eternal' feeling they can recreate is love, but even that will not be the cosmic expression of love, as seen in *Tristan and Isolde*. Feminism has always seemed ridiculous to me and weakens a woman's situation rather than strengthens it, revealing a lack of critical thinking. This is evidenced by defending a thesis that is undeniably false. When it is claimed that a woman has never created anything truly great, the response is that her upbringing is to blame. I also consider this claim to be nonsense because if women were inherently different, equal to men in intelligence, imagination, and external strength, they would not have succumbed to such 'upbringing.' Of course, the foolishness of men, combined with the innate arrogance that is rarer in women, is sometimes more unbearable than the foolishness of women. However, it is important to acknowledge that there are truly wise women and that throughout history, there have always been women of great talent. But what does this mean when compared to the male geniuses whose mere mention makes it apparent that women will never attain certain heights? The physical experiences of a woman can have a detrimental effect on her moral well-being. There is no need to elaborate on it; this sad truth, particularly for us women, should be accepted. Understanding it may even provide solace, alleviating the eternal and senseless jealousy towards men. A woman's body, with its organic life that strongly influences her entire nervous system and therefore her overall outlook on life and the world, already presents a significant obstacle. Not to mention the greatest manifestation of women's creativity – motherhood!
>
> […] the only woman whose talent, in my opinion, lacks feminine characteristics, is completely masculine in its strength, range, and absence of sentimentality, is Stryjeńska. […] It is precisely Stryjeńska, the absurd, hysterical, petite woman, who is such an extraordinary contradiction to my entire theory. But then, how has this creativity 'blew her apart.' In fact, she is a half-normal woman; supposedly, she has

> already spent some time in a hospital for the mentally ill, but this is not talked about (A. Iwaszkiewicz, 2000, pp. 203–205).

The early correspondence between Anna Iwaszkiewicz and her husband as well as her intimate notes from the interwar years reveal a conflict between the awareness of a Woman's destiny and the duties of the Artist's Wife, and the unfulfilled need for her own creativity, unsuccessfully channelled into motherhood. Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz outlined the specific list of her organisational and emotional responsibilities in his first engagement letter, dated 4th May 1922. In this letter, he expressed the prevalent beliefs about the role of the official life partner of a poet. He also revealed the needs of a man with an aristocratic and patriarchal mindset who, until then, had been surrounded by the care of his mother and three sisters, who subordinated their lives to fulfilling his whims:

> So much really depends on you, not only in relation to me but also to my whole family, to everyone I love and whom I would so much like you to love. […] You will remind me of everything, drive me to work, drag me out of *Ziemiańska*, which certainly absorbs just as much of my money as my mother needs.
>
> I consider you, after all, to be the guardian angel of mine and my entire family. Think about how much warmth those homeless (sisters) need, how much kindness, which you will learn yourself and teach me. Won't you? And also to them, and Mietek, […] and all my friends. I believe that we will be able to create such a centre for them, won't we, my Dear?
>
> And so many times I thought about you and how good I will feel with you (A. Iwaszkiewicz & J. Iwaszkiewicz, 1998, p. 24).

A similar sentence follows in a letter dated 11th May 1922, in which Jarosław confesses and demands: "I am an insufferable person; you must get used to it" (A. Iwaszkiewicz & J. Iwaszkiewicz, 1998, p. 35) The catalogue of expectations is indeed impressive and – importantly – does not consider Anna's own hopes and needs, as if it were obvious that her satisfaction with the marriage would come solely from fulfilling the duties she voluntarily took on. She initially thought so, too, for she responded eagerly to these calls for love, care, and organisation in a postscript to the letter dated 7th May 1922, stating, "Never think of sacrificing your own passions for me; I would find that very unpleasant!" (A. Iwaszkiewicz & J. Iwaszkiewicz, 1998, p. 33). A few days later, in a letter dated 12th May, Anna writes, "I would like to be something soothing for you, bringing peace and joy.

It seems to me that this lies, or rather will lie, within my power" (A. Iwaszkiewicz & J. Iwaszkiewicz, 1998, p. 40).

Anna was always conscious of the intricate social, emotional, and erotic circumstances surrounding the Artist's Wife during the 1920s. This awareness grew as she delved into the biographies of other women who found themselves in similar marriages. One notable instance was on 29th April 1923, when she documented a conversation with Jadwiga Unrug, who would later become Witkacy's wife.

> She honestly admitted that she did not love him. However, she believed that he needed her and that, despite his peculiarities, he had a kind heart. As I listened to her and observed her unwavering faith in his feelings, I couldn't help but recall the troubling words of Tymon N., who suggested that Witkacy was entering into this marriage for the thrill of it. According to Tymon, confession, wedding, and marriage would all be entirely new and extraordinary experiences for Witkacy. Personally, I don't think I would take such a risk without love, if I were in her position. On the other hand, I understand that she no longer wanted to spend the rest of her life alone. She was somewhat flattered by the proposal from a well-known and exceptional man like him. She considered being with him less of a burden than being with anyone else (A. Iwaszkiewicz, 2000, p. 32).

Another time, on 6th September 1927, Anna contemplated the potential marriage between Irena Malinowska (later Łempicka) and Karol Szymanowski:

> Karol made a foolish decision by not taking advantage of this opportunity. He could have nurtured the spark of Irenka's affection, which, considering her first, almost childlike but genuinely passionate love for him during the war years, might have blossomed into genuine feelings. He would have gained what he desperately needs: a caring partner who would ensure his well-being, make sure he doesn't drink so much, provide for him financially, and even afford him a luxurious lifestyle. Additionally, she would have been a beautiful and highly presentable companion, perfect for accompanying him on trips abroad and public events. However, I must admit that even though I suggested it, I knew Karol wouldn't be able to sustain such a connection. Personally, I disapprove of marriages where one person is completely deceived. Irenka is a simple, highly feminine and affectionate woman, and for her to be happy, she would have to be deceived (A. Iwaszkiewicz, 2000, p. 212).

The early years of marriage, until 1928 when the Iwaszkiewiczes finally moved to Stawisko, were marked by frequent separations. Tomasz Burek suggests that "through being separated from each other and experiencing repeated separations," they have both "'tried' the world in various ways," and "have each learned, albeit in slightly different areas of life and social relations, what it truly means to feel lonely among people" and "how to control the unbearable feeling of longing for each other" and their daughter (Burek, 1998, p. 15). However, it is important to note that this interpretation may be overly optimistic, as the situation appears to be far more complicated. The letters from both spouses in the early 1920s indicate that they were both feeling exhausted by their relationship and searching for ways to escape from it. Jarosław escaped to people, Anna – from people. He would often leave for creative scholarships or business trips, frequently travelling to Paris, which was seen as the cultural capital of Europe between the two World Wars. There, he enjoyed a vibrant social life, immersed himself in the art displayed in museums and galleries, and was often too occupied with concerts and formal dinners to write lengthy letters. However, he did manage to find time to write new chapters for his books. His sudden and hurried departures would often cause hurt to Anna. Jarosław would apologise for this, but also look for justifications, as he did in a letter dated 25th February 1926:

> And since in escaping my predicament, I somewhat hurt you, my dearest, most important, kindest *Kotunia*; you must forgive me once again from your whole loving heart.
>
> My Dear, surely no one knows and feels my thoughts towards you better than you, but this is how it must be in this world that two people living together bring both joy and torment. I would only like you to at least suspect that there are equivalent 'burdens' for me on your part, and that marriage for me is also not an easy task, but I undertake it out of love for you, for Marysia, and partly for myself. Sometimes I lack the virtue of patience; I really apologise to you for that and kiss you a thousand, thousand times (A. Iwaszkiewicz & J. Iwaszkiewicz, 1998, p. 458).

Anna usually travels for therapeutic treatments to strengthen her lungs or nerves, to resorts that, apart from Zakopane, are not really centres of cultural life, and she pays for her stays out of her own pocket. She does not lead a rich social life there, often feeling lonely and bored, despite reading a lot and praying, and sometimes translating a passage or text commissioned by a magazine or

publishing house. In her letters, she repeatedly says that she has nothing to write about because little is happening. She handles separation from her family, especially the children, worse than he does, but she considers caring for her own health her duty and prioritises it over being with the loved ones. Anna's weak 'nerves,' her tendency to fall into altered states of consciousness and mystical moods, could have been the result not only of hereditary burdens in her family but also of the boredom of daily life and the lack of intellectual stimuli to satisfy her ambitions. She is aware of this fact when, on 30th July 1923, she records her fears about living at Stawisko, as life in the countryside "dulls spiritual life," is "tedious," "boring," and "shallow," and the "details of material life" make it difficult to "maintain a certain spiritual level, and that's still not enough; stagnation and lack of progress constitute a decline in itself" (A. Iwaszkiewicz, 2000, p. 54). A few months later, on 29th November 1923, when she is expecting her first child, she writes in a similar vein:

> I am currently leading a very non-intellectual life. I have very little time to read as I am occupied with various activities. I am required to walk a lot and I also have a lot of sewing to do for the baby. Additionally, my afternoons are taken up by lessons. In the evenings, if I don't have any visitors, I prefer to stay in rather than go out. We usually spend our time playing the piano, either four-hand or on two pianos (A. Iwaszkiewicz, 2000, p. 66).

Anna's trips bear the hallmarks of an escape from the monotony of family life. For instance, just six months after Maria was born, she departed for a three--month treatment in Zakopane, where she remained alone from the beginning of August until the end of October 1924. In the following years, the situation remained unchanged, even after the birth of their second child. It is worth noting that Anna's escapes are unfortunate because she flees from the intellectual tedium of family life to the intellectual tedium of sanatorium life, never to the fullness of life. She constantly complains about lacking time, despite actually having plenty of it. The shortage of time, after all, either means empty time or time filled with uninteresting activities, which is why it feels like time wasted. Therefore, it is not surprising that the book that became pivotal to her spiritual life was Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time* (1913–1927). The creativity that she could not channel into literary work manifested in symptoms of illness, such as unpredictable and capricious fluctuations in weight, temperature, and moods, reminiscent of the cunning symptoms of hysteria. This nineteenth-century

disease, common among women of privileged classes, is interpreted by feminist scholars as a specific spiritual, bodily, and social space of freedom from the imposed roles of wife, mother, housewife, and as a feminine form of rebellion (S. Duda, 1999, p. 80). What is also notable is the fact that the architectural organisation of Stawisko also marginalised Anna's needs: she shard the study with her husband whose desk, as a symbol of his artistic creativity, occupied much more space. Radosław Romaniuk noted that:

> Compared to her husband's monumental desk and the aesthetic clutter reigning on it, Anna's desk, inherited from her father, is old-fashioned and stylish. It features a green velvet-covered top, writing tools in hunting-style frames, a powerful bronze setter lying on it, and a series of photographs of Stanisław Wilhelm […]. [Her desk] seems more like a corner of her father's memory than a place of daily work (Romaniuk, 2005, p. 107).

Episodes of nervous breakdowns became more frequent in the 1930s when Jarosław established himself in the literary and social spheres. The most serious breakdown occurred in 1935 when the Iwaszkiewiczs were stationed in Copenhagen for a diplomatic assignment, followed by a later assignment in Belgium. For Anna, this meant being separated from her home and her aunts, who served as both strict guardians of her freedom and caregivers to support her in fulfilling her parental and domestic duties. It was in Copenhagen that she faced, for the first and only time in her life, the multifaceted role of a woman, wife, and salon hostess, all while adhering to the demands of diplomatic protocol – and unfortunately, she was not successful.

The drama of creative unfulfillment, experienced as the inability to express accumulated inner content due to a lack of language and tools, is a constant theme in Anna's diary from the interwar period. This is particularly evident in the notes from the 1920s. On 13th April 1923, there is a comment on the state of mind of her friend, Irena Malinowska (later Łempicka), who "is going through the same phases, […] but earlier": first experiencing the "problem of the uselessness of one's life, the necessity of finally releasing everything that had been accumulated within as material," the "need for creativity that cannot be satisfied," and then the realisation that "there is no other way (for us not artificial): if there is no creativity – then a child" (A. Iwaszkiewicz, 2000, p. 27). Anna's pain also stems from the belief that the ability to be creatively fulfilled is a "divine gift," given without merit to a person and not requiring any special

effort. She also observes that creative people often "do not appreciate their happiness, the greatest happiness in the world: that the most important a need of their life, a necessity and a pleasure, is at the same time the most wonderful gift they can give to humanity, that which it lives on for centuries, that which forms its spirit" (A. Iwaszkiewicz, 2000, p. 27). Since creativity is a 'gift,' she herself could not 'force' herself into it. A few days later, on 30th May 1923, thinking about Scriabin and Słowacki, she asks herself again: "Why am I denied the gift of creativity, why can't I express this in my own words?" (A. Iwaszkiewicz, 2000, p. 40).

Stanisław Brzozowski's diary prompts Anna, who is expecting her first child, to reflect in an entry dated 24th October 1923, that "all profound minds have experienced the same tragedy of the mismatch between plans and desires and the ability to execute them," given that "such an average woman like me lives with this torment perpetually." She thus knows that she "could be something more, develop spiritually, improve," but she does not know how to bring her projects to life. She laments, "[u]ltimately, I have given nothing of myself; all my hope lies in the child" (A. Iwaszkiewicz, 2000, p. 63). Unfortunately, the birth of Maria and the joys of motherhood did not satisfy Anna's longing for artistic creativity which she felt with even greater intensity. While undergoing treatment in Zakopane six months after giving birth, she wrote on 7th October 1924: "Let the cry finally emerge, the one I long for, the one I wait for. I feel, I feel that a golden stream, a ray of creativity, is flowing from my brain through my arms to my hands, my hands must create!!! But tears, tears are all that is flowing…" (A. Iwaszkiewicz, 2000, p. 93). The next day, on 8th October 1924, Anna wrote, "[y]esterday, once again, a painful longing for creativity surged within me, and it always, always ends the same way, it is always someone else's creativity. Simply, calmness came, we read *Król Duch* with Miecio" (A. Iwaszkiewicz, 2000, p. 93). At that time, she revealed her drama to her husband for the first and only time in a letter dated 10th October 1924, commenting on his earlier complaints about writer's block:

> I am going through similar states to those you write about; an overwhelming yearning for something remarkable yet elusive, a profound sense of my own insignificance and lack of purpose. I actually don't understand how you can have everything when you have the ability to express yourself. I know that in me all this is a desperate longing for creativity. It manifests as a ceaseless agony of suppressed desires, yearning to burst forth and causing me physical anguish. I am acutely

> aware of a fully formed vision within me, awaiting the inner impetus or unknown stimulus to materialise into reality. I sense that there is a mysterious spring missing between my brain and my hand, there's some link missing. In such states, I cannot read poetry; it seems to me that I could not listen to music either; the feeling would be so intense, the pain too excruciating, driving me to the brink of screaming. It all seems like nonsense; why am even I writing this? (A. Iwaszkiewicz, J. Iwaszkiewicz, 1998, p. 182).

By the late 1920s, it had become evident that Anna's psychological limitations prevented her from engaging with original literature, and motherhood had not alleviated her yearnings. The problem now shifted towards translation, where she again found herself caught in a continuous cycle of feeling the desire to create, only to sabotage her own efforts. Following a conversation with Jean-Aubry and her husband, who encouraged her to translate Joseph Conrad's novels, on 16th October 1928, she wrote: "Unfortunately, I have no illusions. Once again, I am confronted with my ailment […]. The inability to be creative, even in a semi--creative way, makes me hesitant to take the risk. Besides, I am well aware that a translator of a great writer must also be a great writer, or at the very least, an artist" (A. Iwaszkiewicz, 2000, p. 225). A year later, on 24th April 1929, she wrote about Marcel Proust's novel, two excerpts of which she translated at Wilam Horzyca's request and published in *Droga* [The Road] (Proust, 1929): "If I had the talent for writing, I would devote my life to translating Proust. […] I won't do it because it simply goes against my 'principles' regarding these matters. I always insist that only a good writer can make a truly good translation, especially when it comes to Proust. It should not be attempted just by anyone. I reject this temptation, even though it is great, and I know that here lies a repository of joy, an escape from the spectre of nervousness that so often torments me…" (A. Iwaszkiewicz, 2000, p. 235).

Such phrases and terms as 'divine gift,' 'unspoken impulses,' 'push from within,' 'unknown stimulus,' or 'mysterious spring between brain and hand' evoke the concept of *habitus* as understood by Pierre Bourdieu. This refers to a set of unconscious beliefs and social practices, determining the career path of members of a given class, race, religion, or gender, so deeply internalised and ingrained in individual actions that they are considered 'natural' (see Bourdieu, 1987; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). In Anna's case, this means suppressing her own creative impulses by activating the misogynistic

modernist beliefs about the limitations of the female intellect. She understands these limitations not as feminists do, and she mocks feminists in the previously cited passage from her diary concerning the talents of George Sand and Zofia Stryjeńska. For Anna, these limitations are not a product of dynamic historical conditions, but a static set of her own intellectual characteristics which she could overcome on her own if only she were granted that 'divine gift' and had internal strength. Anna does not believe she possesses either of those, although her intuition tells her that she is at the intersection of the forces of free will and determination.

In her notes dated 29th March 1925, she admits to having youthful dreams of a "literary career," immediately suppressed by the predestined knowledge that "nothing will come of it." She was "mainly terrified by the thought of the work involved, the amount of writing and conversations, especially the conversations, which seemed insurmountable to me. Instead, I settled for creating various extraordinary situations and novel plots in my head" (A. Iwaszkiewicz, 2000, p. 108). Later in the passage, it is revealed that her imagination of female literary creativity during her boarding school years revolved around novels in the style of *Trędowata* [The Leper] (1909) by Helena Mniszek, highlighting the widespread association of women's literature with romance at that time. Looking back, Anna despises both this kind of creativity and her own ambition at the time to pursue it because, in the present moment, she considers true Art to be works such as those by Juliusz Słowacki, and she feels incapable of creating such works herself. She sets the bar as high as possible so that she cannot surpass it. Yet, she manages to do so just once, which she reports to her husband joyfully in a letter dated 7th April 1925. However, she does so as if confessing a sin and promising to improve: "At the end of the strange day yesterday, something incredible, phenomenal happened: I wrote a poem. Don't be alarmed, it certainly won't happen again, and without graphomania, I find myself quite ridiculous" (A. Iwaszkiewicz & J. Iwaszkiewicz, 1998, p. 365).

Anna's internal resistance also arises from the lack of visible examples of a female artistic career path that would satisfy her both spiritually and intellectually. It is particularly interesting that in her notes and letters from the 1920s, there is not a single positive example of a successful female literary biography. It is as if Anna lived in a culture created exclusively by men. One might argue that she simply did not notice accomplished women writers. Instead, her attention was drawn to female authors, along with their lifestyles,

genres, and themes, whom she perceived as unbecoming of the dignity of Woman and Art. It is surprising, therefore, that there are no references to Maria Konopnicka and Eliza Orzeszkowa, the most outstanding women who took up the pen at the end of the nineteenth century, nor to Zofia Nałkowska and Kazimiera Iłłakowiczówna, well-known writers who debuted before the First World War and continued their careers in the interwar period. Instead, there are critical remarks about poet Anna Słonczyńska, satirical novelist Magdalena Samozwaniec (entry dated 15th May 1923), and feminist journalist Irena Krzywicka (entry dated 2nd May 1932), towards whom Anna felt a mixture of distaste and jealousy. The first feeling originated from the behaviour of these writers in public, manifested in the celebratory proclamation of their status as creators and conviction of their self-worth, as well as their focus on issues she considered inappropriate. The second feeling arose from the visible creative effort these women undertook, which culminated in reader success, while Anna wished that "everything would write itself":

> A funny girl, this Słonczyńska. It seems to me that she really considers herself a great poet. Otherwise, she would be pleasant, were it not for this conviction of her greatness. It is simply unfortunate to be so taken with one's role as a genius in any field. The same thing concerns Madzia Starzewska. She was extremely nice and amusing until she became famous as the wittiest person among contemporary women and the author of what is, in fact, a brilliant parody novel. Now she always wants and must be witty, and for that very reason, she rarely succeeds (A. Iwaszkiewicz, 2000, pp. 34–35).[3]
>
> I feel like writing, yet I don't; in other words, I wish everything would write itself. What I write here, I do so carelessly and terribly. I lack the patience to select my sentences, often repeating myself or forgetting something crucial. It's challenging; I console myself by acknowledging that, at least in this article on Proust's form, which Gryc has accepted and will publish, I managed to express a few significant points. At times, I lament not possessing the talent or even the desire to write, like Krzywicka, for instance. Because what she has to say represents the pinnacle of internal destitution. What does she perceive in books and life? Primarily and almost

3 Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz also wrote about Anna Słonczyńska, noting that her "mother organised dinners with poetry readings, to which one had to come in tailcoats and evening gowns" (J. Iwaszkiewicz, 1993, p. 63).

> exclusively, sexual matters, 'women's issues,' 'women's problems,' to the point of revulsion! Have mercy! Free love, mistresses of renowned men, sexual freedom – these are the great concerns! (A. Iwaszkiewicz, 2000, p. 272).

Finally, what biographers of the Iwaszkiewiczes rarely and incidentally mention is the inhibiting role that being the Poet's Wife played in Anna Iwaszkiewicz's creative development. Inferiority complex in the relationship with the husband would benefit from a more detailed examination. However, there are not many written traces of it because – I will risk saying this – Anna understood it well and thus concealed it. When reading her diary, one can sometimes get an impression similar to the one Irena Krzywicka confessed to while reviewing the intimate notes of Maria d'Agoult, and even though Anna Iwaszkiewicz dismissed Krzywicka, she read her carefully. About the account of Franz Liszt's long-time partner and their life together, Krzywicka said,

> [the narrative] is bristling with reflections on Bossuet, Raphael, Italian art, Swiss nature. Nothing less than Dante will do! She was an intelligent woman, certainly, even exceptionally so for her time, but what a bore! […] On the matter most important to her and to us, her relationship with Liszt, we hear almost nothing. Is it modesty, an inability for introspection, or a deliberate shifting of focus from sad realities to vague and arbitrary 'spiritual' matters? (Krzywicka, 1931c, p. 2).

It is only by juxtaposing Anna's diary and her correspondence with her husband that one can gain some insight into the extent of her self-sacrifice for a man who combined a shallow character with outstanding artistic talent, and toward whom she felt ambivalent emotions: admiration and respect, as well as jealousy and contempt. On 4th December 1932, in Copenhagen, she wrote an insight: "my whole true life flows outside of all this, […] I truly live alongside my life" (A. Iwaszkiewicz, 2000, p. 292). On the same day, she also recorded the 'duty of joy' over Jarosław's poems, which she recognised as her own: "I had one great joy here, of which was not fully conscious: I knew it should be a great joy. One evening, Jarosław read some of his latest poems to me, and those poems, which I listened to, were as if mine – they were what I would have liked to write if I had been writing. I recognised them…" (A. Iwaszkiewicz, 2000, p. 292). On 12th August 1934, a few months before her most serious nervous breakdown, stunned by the morning beauty of Stawisko, she wrote: "This sentence emerged from my subconscious; it could be the beginning of a poem: At dawn, I saw those flaming

flowers. No, I do not write poems or anything else. Others do. It is good as it is. Am I not, after all, endowed beyond measure?" (A. Iwaszkiewicz, 2000, p. 316).

Shakespeare's Sister, or Irena Tuwim. I am encouraged by Virginia Woolf's concept introduced in 1929 to formulate a 'hypothesis' of the existence of a 'Shakespeare's sister' in Polish poetry, and to 'verify' this hypothesis using as an example the biography and work of Julian Tuwim's sister, Irena Tuwim. Therefore, I am responding to the appeal made in 1960 by Stefania Podhorska-Okołów in her review of *Wiersze wybrane* [Selected poems] to "bring this distinct creative individuality out of the shadow of her great brother […] and establish her place in the hierarchy of past years" (Podhorska-Okołów, 1960, p. 5). It is not an easy task.

The bio-bibliographical material on Irena Tuwim is surprisingly sparse, especially when compared to the extensive library of reviews, commentaries, and memoirs devoted to her brother, who continues to spark the enduring interest of successive generations of admirers and researchers of his life and work.[4] There are brief responses by Irena Tuwim to the interwar survey in "W pracowniach pisarzy polskich" [In the workshops of Polish writers] (1933) in *Wiadomości Literackie*, her post-war volume of short memoirs *Łódzkie pory roku* [Seasons in Łódź] (1952),[5] and the interview she gave in the 1980s to Renata Goszczyńska (1981, p. 6) and Ludwik Grzeniewski (1981, p. 8). Apart from these, we have at our disposal only a few isolated sentences in memoirs, diaries, and journals of participants in interwar and post-war literary life. Brief dictionary entries that compile these mentions (Korzeniewska, 1964, p. 369–371; Szałagan, 2003, pp. 381–385), as well as notes on the Julian Tuwim and Irena Tuwim Foundation website,[6] and a biographical article by Anna Augustyniak ("Irena płacząca za szafą," "Wysokie Obcasy" 2010, No. 46, pp. 20–26) provide basic, and therefore,

4 See e.g. Stradecki, 1959, 1964; Degler, 1976; Opacki, 1982; Sawicka, 1986; Marx, 1993; Ratajczak, 1995; Matywiecki, 2007; Urbanek, 2013.

5 The volume also includes two short stories published already in the 1930s in *Wiadomości Literackie*: "Antosia i my" [Antosia and us] (1934, nr 34) and "Czarnomska" (1936, nr 9).

6 Fundacja im. Juliana Tuwima i Ireny Tuwim [Julian Tuwim and Irena Tuwim Foundation], https://www.tuwim.org/

from my perspective, fragmentary information needed to reconstruct the living and working conditions of the Polish 'Shakespeare's sister.' In order to achieve this, I will revisit the biographies of four important men in her life and attempt to 'read' Irena Tuwim from their context.

Irena Tuwim (1898[7]–1987) was born into a "moderately affluent, bourgeois family of Jewish origin, assimilated [and] deeply rooted in Polish culture" (Stradecki, 1986, p. 21). She was the second child of Izydor Tuwim and Adela née Krukowska. After graduating from the Eliza Orzeszkowa Gymnasium in Łódź, she made her debut with a poem titled "Panienka" [Maiden] in the Łódź-based periodical *Godzina Polski* [The Polish Hour] (1916). In the first decade of Poland's independence, she was active as a poet and published three collections: *24 wiersze* [24 poems] (1921a), *Listy* [Letters] (1926), and *Miłość szczęśliwa* [Happy love] (1930). In the 1930s, she turned to translating children's and young adult literature from German, Russian, and English. She had social, artistic, and familial connections with the Skamander group, and primarily published poems in the group's periodicals: *Skamander* (1922–1925, 1927–1928) and *Wiadomości Literackie* (1926, 1929–1930, 1932–1934, 1936). However, she occasionally submitted her works to other magazines, such as *Kurier Polski* [The Polish Courier], *Kurier Poranny* [The Morning Courier], *Polska Zbrojna* [Armed Poland], *Pani, Bluszcz, Kobieta Współczesna, Ponowa*, Warsaw's *Kultura*, and *Pion* [The Counter].

In 1922, Irena Tuwim married Stefan Napierski (1899–1940), a poet, translator, and literary critic. She officially got separated from him after eight years of marriage, although at this point she had already formed a relationship with Julian Stawiński (1904–1973), a lawyer and translator, whom she married in 1935. After the outbreak of the Second World War, she moved with her husband, first to France, then to Great Britain, and in 1945 – to Washington, USA, where her husband took up the position of press attaché at the Polish embassy. She returned to Poland in 1947 and settled in Warsaw, where she continued her work of translating children's and young adult literature. In 1957 she received

7 Dictionaries indicate the year 1900, but the website of the Julian Tuwim and Irena Tuwim Foundation lists the year 1898, and this is the date I am adopting for the purposes of this study.

the Prime Minister's Award for her translations and in 1981 she was awarded the Polish Pen Club prize for translations from English. Irena Tuwim was a member of the Club from 1930. From 1925, she was a member of the Union of Polish Writers, and after the Second World War, of the Polish Writers' Union. After the suspension of the latter in 1983, she joined the new Polish Writers' Union controlled by the authorities. Irena Tuwim died at the age of 87. Like her brother, she had no children.

The transition from poetic activity to translation occurred at the turn of the 1920s and the 1930s when Irena Tuwim got divorced from her first husband and her financial status declined (although she remained under the caring protection of her brother and her former and future husbands). Together with Napierski, in 1930 Irena Tuwim translated August Strindberg's play *Erik XIV* (1899) into Polish. Also, she managed the translation of Herminia zür Muhlen's autobiography *The end and the beginning* (1929) on her own in 1931, with Napierski only providing the introduction. In the 1930s, after marrying Stawiński, Irena Tuwim devoted herself exclusively to children's and young adult literature, which she translated from English under her husband's guidance. All three men helped Irena Tuwim take her first steps in translation, but in her conversation with Gorczyńska, she gratefully remembered only her own brother and Stawiński. Before the outbreak of the Second World War she published e.g. the Grimm's brothers' fairy tales (1812–1858, trans. 1938), *Miki, Apsik i Pyzia* [Mickey, Donald and Goofy] (1938), based on multiple fragments from Walt Disney's comic books, and Walt Disney's *The Mickey Mouse Fire Brigade* (1936, trans. 1938), L.P. Travers's *Mary Poppins* (1934, trans. 1938[8]), and Alan Alexander Milne's *Winnie the Pooh* (1921, trans. 1938).

After the Second World War, when the political order in the country made it impossible for women to pursue the pre-1939 common female model of a 'wife', and the decreed socialist realism in literature limited the freedom of artists, the field of children's and young adult literature, as well as translation, was no longer just an 'opportunity' for Irena Tuwim to earn extra money or realise literary aspirations, but rather a necessity and a consciously pursued profession. During

8 The first edition of Irena Tuwim's translation of Travers's novel was titled *Agnieszka*; it was later restored to the original *Mary Poppins*.

this time, Irena Tuwim primarily translated Soviet literature. However, her fame as a translator was solidified by her translation of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852, trans. 1954) by Harriet Beecher Stowe, stories by Oscar Wilde, and the *Winnie the Pooh* and *Mary Poppins* series. She considered her work as 'adaptation' in the sense of cultural translation, rather than a mere 'translation' of the linguistic layer of the text.[9]

Four interconnected reasons can be identified for Irena Tuwim's transition from poetry to translation, that is, from the 'high' register of literature to its 'low' counterpart. Firstly, her personal life circumstances played a role: the family home, where the emotional focal point was her brother, as well as her marriage and subsequent divorce, followed by a long-term relationship only legalised after her father's death. Secondly, Irena Tuwim inherited the essentialist beliefs about the 'nature of women' and the lack of originality in female and Jewish intellect. Finally, there was the peculiar internal dynamics of the Skamander poetry group, and, more generally, of the external poetic field, with particular emphasis on binary oppositions: the model of Young Poland poetry versus the model of modern poetry; Skamander versus avant-garde; the feminine versus the masculine; and love poetry in the Skamander style versus love poetry in the style of Maria Pawlikowska.

Four years younger than Julian (1894–1953), Irena Tuwim grew up in a family where intellectual aspirations, almost scholarly, were represented by her father, while poetic aspirations were embodied by her mother.

Her father, Izydor, a bank official by profession, was a declared Francophile with linguistic interests. He was an avid reader and enjoyed browsing dictionaries and encyclopaedias. When he retired, he began learning Italian. According to Irena, her father maintained a "benevolent distance" (I. Tuwim, 1963, p. 10) from all matters related to the upbringing and education of the children, which made them gravitate towards him, while their mother – constantly concerned about food, clothing, and lessons – harboured deep resentment that, over the years, grew into a profound rift between the spouses.

9 In her opinion, a translator should "constantly check themselves, sometimes even transform into the author, in order to adapt the book to the knowledge, concepts, sense of reality, and language of the children for whom the book is intended" (I. Tuwim, 1952, p. 10).

Her mother, Adela, kept albums from her youth filled with poems she liked which she had handwritten herself. These were, in the spirit of the late nineteenth--century education, works by Adam Mickiewicz, Juliusz Słowacki, Władysław Syrokomla, Adam Asnyk, and Maria Konopnicka. Adela often read both these drafts as well as a similar album written by her mother, Ewelina Krukowska née Łapowska, to her children. Julian, as an adult, carefully preserved these documents of "constant, multi-generational close contact with Polish poetry" (Lipski, 1994, pp. 11–12) practiced by women in his family. He later added a draft book of his sister's poems to the notebooks written by his grandmother and mother.

The emotional focal point of the family was the firstborn son who synthesised the intellectual heritage of his father and the poetic legacy of his mother. The symbiotic bond between Julian and his mother intensified along with the growing anti-Semitic sentiments in Poland; sentiments related to his famous birthmark on his left cheek. His mother's sense of responsibility for this birthmark as a "sign of her son's otherness" and the "curse of fate" (Sandauer, 1971, p. 65) that befell him became particularly pronounced after her husband's death in 1935 and the family's move to Warsaw. Adela's obsession eventually turned into a neurosis that required treatment in a psychiatric institution. Only Irena visited her there; Julian's visits were forbidden by the doctors as they threatened to worsen her condition. She sensed the looming catastrophe of the war and feared for her son's life. She never saw him again, as she was murdered by German soldiers in Otwock in 1942, while the Tuwim siblings were in exile.

Irena grew up and lived in the shadow of her older brother, as reflected in both her own memoirs and in the articles and books written about Julian. In her preface to *Łódzkie pory roku,* Helena Boguszewska emphasises the central theme of the volume: "The brother is an extremely significant figure, someone who dominates. […] It is through him and thanks to him that the tragic childhood at home was, after all, bearable" (Boguszewska, 1979, p. 7). According to Irena herself, her childhood was "full of nightmares, fears, and nocturnal terrors, entangled in the myths of grim everyday life," spent in "black, smoky Łódź" and "the apartment on Andrzej Street: five large, uninviting rooms" (I. Tuwim, 1979, p. 9). In "Czarodziej" [The Magician], Irena confirms Boguszewska's words: "Everything that happened to me somehow revolved around him" (I. Tuwim, 1963, p. 9). This short text, written in honour of her brother after his death, subtly

shows that Irena looked at Julian with the same intensity with which Julian's attentive gaze rested on their parents during childhood and youth.

As a child, she saw him as "the good household spirit whose mere appearance in the house, crossing its threshold, would ward off a storm" (I. Tuwim, 1963, p. 9). During adolescence, she watched his chemistry experiments, which almost set the apartment on fire. In high school, she admired his ability to earn money through tutoring, which allowed them to have a Christmas tree in their home for the first time. She also read volumes from his poetry library, including works by Leopold Staff, Arthur Rimbaud, Paul Verlaine, Charles Baudelaire, Konstantin Balmont, Valery Bryusov, and Alexander Blok. In her pre-graduation years, she envied him "his own room where he would sit with friends or lock himself away mysteriously for hours" (I. Tuwim, 1963, p. 13). Along with her parents, she experienced consternation when, after the key to Julian's drawer got lost and it had to be opened by a locksmith, it revealed notebooks filled with his poems. After the publication of "Wiosna" and especially after the debut volume *Czyhanie na Boga* [In Lurking for God] (1918), when Tuwim became the subject of widespread admiration and condemnation, she commented, "again, Julek worries me, intrigues me, and dazzles me. Who is my brother really?" (I. Tuwim, 1963, p. 15).

For years, observing his lifestyle and work, Irena pondered the "simultaneity, the balance of constant cabaret production with the ever-flowing source of purest poetry" (I. Tuwim, 1963, p. 15). After hearing "Teogonia" [Theogony] from *Treść gorejąca* [A Burning Matter] (1936), she experienced "fear about the matters […] of mortality. Who is this brother of mine? What is seething within him? What secrets does he reach for?" and confessed, "I would prefer it if you didn't write such poems. I'm afraid of who you are… […] I would prefer you to be ordinary. Just like others. An ordinary man" (I. Tuwim, 1963, p. 17).

Irena stated that she had a very close relationship with her brother. She says, "We saw each other almost daily, sometimes living under the same roof […]. I could reach him at any time of the day, […] and he never used lack of time as an excuse. He called me every day and showed interest in even the smallest details of my daily life, not in a paternal but rather a maternal way" (I. Tuwim, 1963, p. 15). However, there is no mention anywhere of him being particularly interested in her poetry, supporting her literary efforts, or encouraging her to recite her latest poems. It is likely that he did so, considering her collaboration with Skamander in the 1920s, but not so intensively that any other evidence of it remains. We do

know that he read his latest works to her; even though he never offered to do so, he enjoyed being asked to read aloud. As Andrzej Z. Makowiecki writes, only "Maria Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska was considered by the 'Skamander' group the only true candidate for the highest poetic laurels" (Makowiecki, 2013, p. 129). Makowiecki cites Juliusz Sakowski's account of frequent meetings of Tuwim, Lechoń, and Pawlikowska at the famous mezzanine of the *Ziemiańska* café and Julian's joke that they should be photographed together with the caption: "The best contemporary poets" (Sakowski, 1962, p. 133).

Irena's natural place was thus in the shadow, the second row of, first, the family, and then, social and literary life. Piotr Matywiecki – who from all the scholars of Juliusz Tuwim paid most attention to Irena, devoting one page to her in his book *Twarz Tuwima* [Tuwim's face] (2007) – in the chapter titled "Siostra" [Sister], states that Julian saw himself reflected in Irena as if she were his mirror. He searched her biography for the reverse of his own fate, making her the guardian of family memories and the confidante of his creative dilemmas. Irena could be anything, just not herself:

> The sister, Irena Tuwim, a poet and author of the brilliant translation of *Winnie the Pooh*, was the person to whom he revealed most of his phobias, neurotic obsessions, and uncontrolled passions, often hidden behind the masks of social life. This is evident in the large and extremely valuable collection of letters that Tuwim wrote to his sister during his exile and in the first months after returning to Poland.[10] In 1956, Irena published a memoir titled *Łódzkie pory roku*, some fragments of which she had already published during the war in the London press. Julian was familiar with these texts and deeply affected by them, as he could see his childhood in Łódź through his sister's eyes. He must have been particularly moved by his sister's account of her last meetings with their sick mother, as he had been forbidden by psychiatrists from visiting her for the patient's well-being.
>
> From his letters to his sister, it can be inferred that Tuwim treated Irena as if she were his *incognito* in the world: from childhood, she was his closest hostage and witness to the truth about the sources of his emotional life, his 'external soul.' Perhaps he valued her lyricism because this poetic shadow of himself (seen as such

10 Correspondence between Julian and Irena Tuwim is held at the National Library in Warsaw collection, signature 7955, vol. 1–2, signature mf 58205-58206. Julian Tuwim's letters were published during the Second World War. See: J. Tuwim, 1968, pp. 386–392.

> by readers) quietly expressed something fundamental, accurate, and sincere about him, without directly confronting his personal myth, which eclipsed the truth. But the sister also held the role of the Great Intermediary between Julian and their mother's madness: she was the only one who visited their mother during her illness and then relayed these visits to her brother. Sister – poetry, sister – childhood, sister initiated into misfortune, into a bad fate (Matywiecki, 2007, p. 79).

An analysis of Julian Tuwim's poetic journey reveals two parallel yet distinct life and creative paths of children from the same family. These paths differentiated their upbringing and education processes based on their gender.

Julian Tuwim started his poetic apprenticeship in 1911 by translating Leopold Staff's poems into Esperanto. Two years later, he met the Master in person and received encouragement to continue his work. His linguistic abilities and interests were developed not only under his father's favourable eye but also under the pressure of History. Julian was a resident of Łódź, a city known for its multilingual and multicultural environment. Although he identified with Polish culture, he was a Russian subject and had to attend a government high school because his parents could not afford anything else. Jerzy Szapiro remembers Julian feeling ashamed of this situation in his peer group. Szapiro writes, "In the higher grades, we tried to hide this embarrassment by competing with students from Polish schools in our knowledge of Polish history and literature. It took a lot of extracurricular effort to do so" (Szapiro, 1963, p. 44).

The development of his intellect and imagination between the Scylla of the Polish culture and the Charybdis of the Russian culture yielded results during his high school years. He began by translating Symbolist poems by Balmont, Bryusov, Blok, and Sologub, and later progressed to translating Futurist works by Vladimir Mayakovsky. Tuwim regarded this activity as a demonstration of his linguistic interests and his worldview. He viewed it primarily as a workshop exercise, aligning with his advice to young poets: "Seek as much influence as possible, of course, influence from good poets […] and strive to avoid imitation" (Karski, 1963, p. 126). Only later did his translation practice become a conscious cultural activity, encapsulated in the laconic editorial formula of *Wiadomości Literackie*: "to contribute as much as possible to reestablishing the long-severed contact with European art and culture. […] to participate in the action aimed at demolishing the wall that separates us from the centres of contemporary civilisation" ("Od redakcji," 1924, p. 1).

In 1914, after graduating, Julian Tuwim went to Warsaw to study law and philology. During this time, he published in the student magazine *Pro Arte et Studio*, which later transformed into *Pro Arte* due to an aesthetic and moral scandal caused by his dithyramb "Wiosna." In the same year, he co-founded the café *Pod Picadorem* with a group of poets who would later become known as the Skamandrites. This café hosted artistic evenings that were modelled after the poetry concerts of Russian Futurists. It was during these evenings that the "dictatorship of the poetariat" and the triumvirate of Antoni Słonimski, Julian Tuwim, and Jan Lechoń reigned (Słonimski, 1963, pp. 99–104). The popularity of both the group and these public meetings stemmed from the sense of community that was characteristic of the entire generation after the First World War. This generation sympathised with slogans promoting civilisational progress, pacifism, the democratisation of life, and national anti-martyrdom. They eagerly responded to Lechoń's call to "see spring in spring, not Poland" from the poem "Herostrates," and they recognised their own needs in the gesture of "throwing off the cloak of Konrad" from Słonimski's poem "Czarna wiosna."

Tuwim's unique position as a representative of the "youngest" poetry was not solely attributed to the exceptional quality of his talent, which became evident in volumes like *Czyhanie na Boga* (1918) and *Sokrates tańczący* [Dancing Socrates] (1919). These volumes, indeed, caught the attention of critics. Julian Tuwim's extraordinary status as a poet was also partly a result of his precise linguistic formulas for capturing the mood of "the joy of a regained garbage dump," as described by Juliusz Kaden-Bandrowski in his novel *Generał Barcz* (Kaden-Bandrowski, 1923/2024, p. 33). Tuwim skilfully employed these formulas in his poetic works. The dynamics of Tuwim's early work, like those of the entire Skamander group, were in sync with the political, economic, and social changes in the young state (Hertz, 1948, p. 27). As a poet, Julian Tuwim struck a balance between the Polish tradition and the challenges of modernity, which greatly appealed to his audience (Zacharska, 1996, pp. 11–25). He skilfully incorporated avant-garde themes from European lyrical poetry while still honouring traditional forms of their treatment (Głowiński, 1986, p. IX). Tuwim's works expressed an acceptance of the imperfect present, free from patriotic duties, and celebrated the new literary hero – the ordinary man. He placed value on everyday themes, non-pathetic emotions, and street language (Sawicka, 1979, p. 209). This egalitarian programme was championed by Tuwim through a lyrical subject

described by Michał Głowiński as "the poet among the world" (Głowiński, 1962, p. 111), which broke the Young Poland antinomy between artist and community.

From the perspective of the sociology of literary life, it can be argued that the alignment of the audience's needs with Tuwim's poetic offerings represents a new model that emerged in Polish literary culture: that of a successful writer. The writer's success was attained through their own creative effort and further validated by financial prosperity. Moreover, this success was particularly remarkable as it became evident in two realms traditionally seen as incompatible in the nineteenth century: art and commerce (Czapliński, 1994, pp. 115–127). For writers who were not part of the intelligentsia aspiring to Polish high culture, Tuwim, like other Skamander poets, became proof that democratic mechanisms were effective in the young state. Thanks to these mechanisms, literary creators could sustain themselves through their writing and find simple human happiness: a comfortable home and a happy family. The relative prosperity enjoyed by a significant part of Warsaw's intelligentsia at the end of the first decade of Poland's independence fostered a pacifist, liberal, pro-democratic attitude that calmed political disputes of the time. The contradictions that form the foundation of all of Tuwim's interwar work – "joyful vitality" and "catastrophism," "superficial cabaret" and "depth," "admiration for the crowd" and "fear of the crowd" – were not yet as visible during that period. This "lover of the bourgeoisie" had not yet become its "enemy," and this "Polish patriot" had not yet "feared the Polish street" (Sandauer, 1971, p. 64).

A decade later, these antinomies deepened. On one hand, this was due to the increasing aesthetic attacks on the passéistic poetry model of the Skamander group, which was associated by representatives of other poetic groups and artistic concepts with Tuwim's lyrical model. On the other hand, there were antisemitic attacks that denied Julian Tuwim's Polish identity and talent. According to Irena Krzywicka, "These were times […] when the ridiculous belief prevailed that a Jew could not be creative, that his type of intelligence did not allow it" (Krzywicka, 1992/2013, p. 200). Tuwim expressed these antinomies through the catastrophic themes of his poetry, addressing the demoralising power of money, the manipulation of words for political purposes, and the ethical compromise of both the elite and the masses. He poetically explored the uncertain position of art and artists in a commercialised society by confronting the Horatian themes of *exegi monumentum*, *non omnis moriar*, and *odi profanum vulgus*, as interpreted through Polish Romantic and Modernist myths. Furthermore, cracks appeared

in Tuwim's public image as details of his personal life emerged. He suffered from severe agoraphobia, possibly triggered by the discovery of his previously idealised wife's infidelity (Matywiecki, 2007, p. 161). This complicated his daily life and hindered his ability to interact with the world. Additionally, the passing of his father and the illness and seclusion of his mother added to Julian Tuwim's ongoing spiritual anguish.

In the 1930s, Tuwim's world was confined to his own apartment and a quiet study with an impressive library, where he practiced the art of words. During this time, Tuwim fully revealed his 'metaphysical' and 'technical' approach to language, which formed the basis of all his creative endeavours (Sandauer, 1963, p. 44; Matywiecki, 2007, p. 465–540). His poetic, lexicographical, editorial activities, and those focused on collecting reached their peak. He expressed his linguistic stance most clearly in the essays found in the volume *Pegaz dęba, czyli panoptikum poetyckie* [Oaken Pegasus, or the poetical panoply] (1950) (Krzyżanowski, 1955, pp. 444–477), which were closely aligned with the concepts of the Russian Formalist school, especially regarding the "sound form of words and the technique of defamiliarisation" (Sawicka, 1979, p. 215). Jan Brzechwa recalled that "[p]oetry became […] the only sense of his life" (Brzechwa, 1963, p. 119), and Ludwik Hieronim Morstin remembered 'rhymes' as the main topic of Tuwim's conversations with fellow writers (Morstin, 1963, p. 147). Others, like Wacław Zawadzki and Józef Chudek, mainly remembered Tuwim as a 'bibliophile' and 'collector' of rare books and curiosities (Zawadzki, 1963, pp. 195–201). Meanwhile, Gabriel Karski states that the foundation of Tuwim's friendships at that time were "a bibliophilic passion, an interest in translation, linguistics, and lexicography, and collecting literary curiosities" (Karski, 1963, p. 125).

The library became Tuwim's 'natural' environment, as evidenced by interviews conducted by journalists who were not familiar with the poet. In the second half of the 1920s, correspondents for cultural magazines drew attention to his collection of books. For instance, Roman Zrębowicz observed that "the most important aspect of the poet's study was his books. They were splendid bibliographic curiosities, collected with great taste and expertise, and with admirable consistency" (Znamor [Zrębowicz], 1994, p. 16). Similarly, Noe Pryłucki described "a monstrously large cabinet filled with books" in the room where Tuwim appeared to him as "an unassuming prisoner" (Iks [Pryłucki], 1994, p. 22). However, by the early 1930s, old books started to fill "the walls of

the study from floor to ceiling. There were many of them, several thousand" ("U Juliana Tuwima," 1994, p. 36). Zbigniew Troczewski, in turn, listed "luxury editions, and the grey ones, perhaps the most loved, and antiques," and expresses his admiration: "Yes – in the atmosphere of this house one can live and write" (Zb.T [Troczewski], 1994, p. 49). By the middle of the decade, Daniel Silberg wrote that Tuwim's study "gave the impression of an antiquarian's bookshop" (Silberg, 1994, p. 53).

Following Pryłucki's observation that Tuwim was an 'unassuming prisoner' of his comfortable apartment with a central study-library, one could add that he was also protected by it, like in a cocoon or a mother's womb. This metaphor would reappear later in the context of Napierski. Equally importantly, Tuwim's wife was also confined to the antiquarian apartment. She was a prisoner of both the physical space and Tuwim himself. Since his first panic attack caused by agoraphobia, she had accompanied him almost everywhere, only sometimes delegating the task to a nurse or close friends and acquaintances. By then, the Tuwims' marriage had become a symbiotic dyad, resembling a parental relationship where the wife cared for her husband like a mother. The husband, helpless in daily life like a child, fulfilled the social duties of a man. He maintained the household and ensured a high standard of living for the marriage – marriage, not family. This deviated from the prevailing model of the family according to the concepts of the time (see Sierakowska, 2003).

The decision to remain childless was made by Tuwim early in the relationship, almost immediately after marrying Stefania. He had met his wife during high school and had idealised her for many years during their engagement (she was the subject of love poems published in a separate volume). They got married in 1919. According to Ewa Drozdowska, Tuwim was constantly delighted by the fact that such a beautiful woman loved him. Although he liked children, he did not want to risk his wife's death in childbirth. He remembered the death of a neighbour from his Łódź days and is said to have remarked shortly after the wedding: "Babiacka died in childbirth […] so Stefa will not give birth" (Drozdowska, 1963, p. 25). In this context, it is worth considering how much of the poet's fear for his wife stemmed from the fear of losing her, and how much was a result of a neurotic refusal to let a child – rather than himself – be the centre of her attention. The psychological situation became clearer in the 1930s when Julian, following Stefania's infidelity (if we accept Matywiecki's hypothesis of her affair), experienced a narcissistic episode. He expressed his anxiety through

physical symptoms and regressed to the role of a child in Stefania's life. He became attached to her and restricted her to domestic life, placing her exactly where, according to the bourgeois family model, she was expected to be.

By birth, Irena Tuwim belongs to the Skamander generation: she began writing around the same time as other members of the group, and their debut dates in the press and the publication of their first poetry collections are closely aligned. Julian Tuwim's juvenilia were created from 1911 onwards and published in the volumes *Czyhanie na Boga* (1918) and *Sokrates tańczący* (1920). Wierzyński's youthful poems were written starting in 1914 and were included in the volume *Wielka niedźwiedzica* (1923). Słonimski and Iwaszkiewicz began writing in 1913. As for the Skamandrites, Lechoń, Tuwim, Wierzyński, and Słonimski debuted in 1913, Iwaszkiewicz in 1915, and Irena Tuwim in 1916. With respect to the first collections of the Skamander members, we have: Tuwim's *Czyhanie na Boga* (1918), Słonimski's *Sonety* [Sonnets] (1918) and *Harmonia* [Harmony] (1919), Iwaszkiewicz's *Oktostychy* [Octostichs] (1919), Wierzyński's *Wiosna i wino* [Spring and wine] (1919), Julian Tuwim's *Sokrates tańczący* (1920), and Irena Tuwim's *24 wiersze* (1921a). However, while the Picador, and later, Skamander poets published their poems in the university magazine *Pro Arte et Studio* and *Pro Arte* before releasing individual volumes, Irena Tuwim published only three pieces in daily and cultural newspapers before the publication of *24 wiersze* (I. Tuwim, 1921b, p. 5, 1921c, p. 147, 1921d, p. 5). Julian Tuwim, when he began his poetic apprenticeship in 1911 by translating Leopold Staff's poems into Esperanto, met the Master in person two years later and received encouragement to continue his work; in contrast, Irena Tuwim had no patrons for her debut, and her brother was not one, either.

Thus, she did not belong to the Skamander circle during its formative period, neither ideologically nor aesthetically. This is because she remained in Łódź after completing high school, while her brother studied at the University of Warsaw. Another reason for Irena Tuwim's remaining beyond the Skamander milieu was the social situation in the early days of Poland's independence that made it difficult for women to participate in the bohemian artistic life. Her collaboration with *Skamander* after the publication of *24 wiersze* in 1921 was also not as intense as one might expect. In 1922, Irena published one poem in its pages, followed by five poems in 1923, five in 1925, only two in 1927, and finally, six poems in

1928.[11] However, if we assume that there was a selection mechanism within the Skamander group, whose sole criterion, as stated in the programmatic article, was craftsmanship – referred to by Karol Irzykowski as 'talentism' – then Irena Tuwim clearly satisfied this criterion, according to the opinion of the editorial board. Irena Tuwim was widely seen as a representative of the group and an embodiment of the 'today's poetry' model created by its members in the early interwar period. Michał Głowiński writes that Skamander was a 'situational group' that did not propose a specific model of poetry but sought to be solely the voice of the young generation and secure a strong position in post-war literary life (Głowiński, 1977, pp. 202–222), and claims that, in contrast to their efforts, the Skamandrites were not perceived as a generational phenomenon, but rather as the achievement of a specific group of creators. Among this group, Głowiński includes not only the "Great Five," but also Stanisław Baliński, Władysław Broniewski, Gabriel Karski, Stefan Napierski, Maria Pawlikowska, Leonard Podhorski-Okołow, and indeed, Irena Tuwim.

For the early Skamander poetics, the assassination of President Gabriel Narutowicz in 1922 was a significant turning point that muted the bright tones and introduced darker ones. To view Irena Tuwim's early poems against the backdrop of this poetics, one must refer to her debut volume *24 wiersze,* published in 1921 and never reissued. This collection did not receive a single review. Equally significant is the fact that Irena Tuwim's volume published after the Second World War, *Wiersze wybrane* [Selected poems] (1958, 2nd ed. 1979) does not contain any poems from her debut collection. Instead, it includes the rest of her poetic legacy, namely the collections *Listy* [Letters] (1926) and *Miłość szczęśliwa* (1930), as well as other poems scattered across various periodicals. A number of inferences can be made regarding her decision to disown her early works. These reasons could have been both personal and literary.

One of those personal reasons could be the need to invalidate youthful emotional engagements, significant at the threshold of adult life, but reevaluated in hindsight and distanced from. Among the poems comprising *24 wiersze*, there is a cycle of love poems, also developed in her next two volumes. Initially,

11 See: I. Tuwim, 1922, p. 583, 1923a, p. 228–231, 1923b, p. 105, 1925a, p. 253, 1925b, pp. 300–301, 1925c, p. 114, 1925d, p. 373, 1927, pp. 48–49, 1928a, pp. 104–105, 1928b, pp. 40–43.

the love depicted in those lyrics boldly breaks social conventions for showing affection in public spaces, like in the poem "***Jeszcześmy poszli przejść się" [We went for a walk again]:

> It was time to say goodbye. A shadow of sadness swept over…
> 'Will you write?' – 'Tomorrow morning'… 'Take care'… 'My love'…
> And on the bustling street, on a holiday, in broad daylight,
> We kissed each other on the lips to say goodbye (I. Tuwim, 1928a, p. 12).

This affection, however, inevitably ends in separation from the beloved or his death, like, for example, in the poem entitled "***Choć dziś jestem po tobie w głębokiej żałobie" [Though today I mourn deeply after you]:

> (You have died: no illusion will deceive me anymore) […]
> You know, when sometimes on the street
> A profile flashes before me – and my heart suddenly howls with pain,
> And then I can no longer hold back – I burst into tears,
> Thinking that they are hidden behind the tulle veil (I. Tuwim, 1928a, p. 10).

After the work of mourning, there follows the emotional rebirth of the female psyche and the beginning of a new cycle: flirtation ("***To było na jakimś koncercie" [It was some sort of a concert]), a new romance (e.g. "***Idę spotkać się z tobą" [I'm off to see you], "***Zostań. Nie odchodź jeszcze" [Stay, don't go yet]), and its conclusion (e.g. "***Codziennie wieczorem biją dziewiąte godziny" [Every evening nine o'clock strikes]). The female lyrical subject, usually identified by literary criticism with the real-life author, appears here as acting in accordance with the stereotype of a woman focused on love, moving from one beloved and loving man to another. It cannot be ruled out that the mature Irena Tuwim, in the period after the Second World War, was constructing for herself a different version of the identity narrative, one that did not fit the image of the interwar narcissistic coquette.

As for the literary reasons for Irena Tuwim's rejection of her early work, it can be suggested that she shared the impression of all the Skamander poets that anachronism was a significant part of their writing. This impression was noted by their audience as early as the mid-interwar period. Its source lies in the same characteristic that ensured the success of the "Great Five" at the dawn of independence, namely, eclecticism. The features that distinguish the early

Skamander works from the early 1920s are: urbanism (introducing the city, including both its main streets and its less desirable areas, and exploring the city as a setting and theme in poetry); vitalism (celebrating everyday life in all its forms, sometimes with a focus on biology); a new type of poetic hero, that is, the city dweller (whether it be the 'terrible bourgeois' absorbed in daily concerns or the unemployed vagabond); a more informal tone of poetic expression (using colloquial language that reflects everyday communication); and finally, new poetic genres, such as vignettes depicting everyday life or narrative accounts of reality.

Michał Głowiński describes these realisations as "poetry of conversation," "poetry of fact," and "poetry of being overwhelmed by the world" (Głowiński, 1986, pp. XXXI, XXXIII). He emphasises the particular significance of unconventional techniques in this poetry, such as short and abrupt sentences, colloquial syntax, colloquialisms, the intonation of lively conversation, and the mood of all-encompassing optimism. The syncretic character of early Skamander poetry is determined by the overlap of poetic tendencies from the last few decades. Their works contain elements of impressionism, such as highly lyrical description; the moodiness and metaphors of Young Poland; personification of mental states; the song-like character of works, which is most persistently present in Skamander's love lyrics; as well as Expressionism, Futurism, Classicism, and Parnassianism. All these elements were mentioned in the preface to *Skamander*:

> We want, once more, but this time in a unique and unprecedented way, to portray the refreshing breath of spring mornings and the melancholic liquidity of evenings, the wild march of iron trains made and the reseda scent of moonlight, the dishevelled hubbub of city streets, and the soft peace of white manors hidden by orchards – to absorb all of this and convey it with a word as simple and broad as the embrace of a mother's arms.
>
> We also wish to be seen only as people conscious of their craft and executing it impeccably, within the limits of their power. Taking on this part of human labour, aware of our responsibility for it, we wish to be diligent in it; thus, we do not disdain the craftsmanship of our trade. That is why we unwaveringly believe in the sanctity of good rhyme, the divine origin of rhythm, the revelation of images born in ecstasy, and the forms forged in labour (Horzyca 1920, pp. 4–5).
>
> And even if this song speaks only of things as fleeting and unworthy of attention as drops of morning dew trembling with stars on the fluffy grass, we will not be ashamed of it and will not deny it (Horzyca 1920, p. 5).

Irena Tuwim's debut collection *24 poems* possesses all the above-mentioned characteristics of the early, eclectic Skamander poetics. However, the dominant tendencies in it belong to the historical layers of poetic art, starting with Symbolism (e.g., "***Morze przed nami" [The sea before us]), through impressionistic works à la Leopold Staff's "***Deszcz jesienny" [Autumn rain] ("***Jesieni się w mem sercu" [My heart autumns], "***Przez szyby okien znowu jesień do mnie wgląda" [Autumn looks inside through the window panes], "***Deszcz pada" [It is raining]), to the inner landscapes of the soul (e.g., "***Przyjdę do ciebie o wieczorze" [I will come to you in the evening], "***Z dala od miast huczących wrzawą i hałasem" [Far away from the cities rumbling with tumult and noise]), and melancholic images of the past deposited in objects and everyday rituals (e.g., "***Stary zegar wydzwania kwadranse" [An old clock tolls every quarter]). All of these respect the principles of diligent poetic craftsmanship: rhyme, rhythm, classical versification, and sanctioned traditional metaphor. However, the debut collection of Irena Tuwim also contains a few poems that are a successful synthesis of the Skamander model of poetry and the female experience of modernity – and for this reason, they still strike with freshness.

For instance, the poem "***Przedwiośnie" [First Spring. Once winter has finally gone away] records the experience of moving from private, enclosed, and safe space to public, open space full of exciting uncertainties, which is a record of the female everyday experience of the city and the crowd (Nieszczerzewska, 2006, pp. 411–422. In contrast to heroines of Polish and Western novels from the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries analysed by Agnieszka Dauksza (2013), the lyrical subject of this poem no longer feels the embarrassment associated with walking alone through the streets of the city and confronting its other inhabitants. Nor does she shyly lower her eyes when meeting a male gaze that assesses the aesthetic and erotic potential of the female body:

First spring. Once winter has finally gone away,
The crowds poured onto the streets *en masse*.
Ladies in furs, but thinking of spring outfits,
Because the sun shines from the sky unceremoniously.

In prams, white babies, delightful darlings,
Arrogant schoolboys, young women, and students,

Bows and glances, "eyes" and smiles –
Spring! From behind the florist's windows, a mass of flowers beckons.

I walk. In the shop windows, in large restaurants,
I critically examine my own figure –
And I am pleased by the signs of lively adoration
From middle-aged gentlemen, who hit on me.
[…] (I. Tuwim, 1928a, p. 17).

Irena Tuwim's poem records a modern way of experiencing the city that is determined by being in motion, 'walking through the city' as a constitutive element of everyday life (de Certeau, 1984, pp. 91–110), and a reference to the sense of sight – the "glances" and "eyes." The female subject of the text not only cannot assume the male role of the nineteenth-century *flâneur* who blended into the crowd to observe it while remaining unseen; she also no longer wants to be "invisible" in the public space (Wolff, 1985, pp. 37–46). On the contrary, the modern woman in the modern city carefully observes other people, women and men alike, and wants to be seen by them, consciously exposing herself to their gazes (Friedberg, 1994, pp. 15–46). Therefore, in the female experience of the modern city, the emancipatory potential meets tradition, as the image of the woman (seen by others and by herself) as an object of gender-determined, male contemplation is maintained here. As John Berger in *Ways of Seeing* aptly puts it, "The surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed is female" (Berger, 1977, p. 47). The urban space is a kind of gender theatre in which both women and men participate, regardless of their social and marital status: young women, elegant women in furs, mothers with prams, schoolboys, students, and family fathers – women look at themselves in shop windows to check their appearance and enjoy the impression they make on men; young men address them arrogantly, while mature gentlemen cast only significant glances.

The female experience of the city in Irena Tuwim's poem is just as ecstatic as the male experience described in her brother's early poems in the collection *Czyhanie na Boga* (1918). In both volumes, this experience is intertwined with the exuberance and vitality of youth. However, their objectives and approaches to navigating the city are different (see Brzozowska, 2007). Julian writes about the exhilaration of youth, coupled with the liberation and independence that come with aimlessly roaming the streets of a city awakening from slumber or settling into sleep: "In June on a Friday morning, / In the pink, sunny capital, / I walk

down the middle of the widest street, […] I feel strong, beautiful, and young!" ("Ja" [Me], in: J. Tuwim, 1918, p. 23), "And as I walk down the street in the evening, […] As I walk ahead, young and magnificent, […] My drunken happiness rolls through me!" ("A jak sobie wieczorem" [When at night I], in: J. Tuwim, 1918, 24), "A man walks against the wind, / walks young down the bustling street, […] Among billions of 'peoples' – the only one, […] And this young's name is Julian, / After his father and grandfathers, Tuwim" ("Symfonia o sobie" [A symphony of myself], in: J. Tuwim, 1918, p. 36). Irena, on the other hand, writes about the intoxication of youth, combined with community, interdependence, and love, and the road she takes through the city always leads to a specific person: "Joy spreads in my soul like a river / It is spring, I am twenty years old, and this makes me happy. / You are walking toward me." ("***Przedwiośnie," in: I. Tuwim, 1928a, p. 21).

Two other poems, beginning with the incipits "***I nie rzucę w twoją stronę ani razu dziś spojrzenia" [And I won't cast a single glance your way today] and "***Obcy pan z bladą twarzą z ponad czarnej mokki" [A strange man with a pale face over black mocha] record yet another interwar cultural shift, namely the transfer of flirtation from the bourgeois salon to the liminal space of the modern café. It combines the atmosphere of intimacy, characteristic of cozy enclosed places, born from physical closeness and intellectual familiarity among a group of people who know each other to varying degrees, with a sense of freedom and spontaneity that arises in open spaces. Much like 'walking through the city,' this invites a mutual observation of the sexes, inducing both erotic tension and non-verbal flirtation. In 1931, Irena Krzywicka appreciated the merits of the modern café in *Świat Kobiecy*, writing about the most famous meeting place of the Skamander poets, namely, the *Ziemiańska* café in Warsaw:

> That mezzanine, ironically named Parnassus by some, is a modern version of a club where ongoing topics are debated – everything that ignites, worries, or captivates; every premiere, every book, and, contrary to what outsiders may hear, only occasionally and sparingly, each other. It is also noteworthy that these hours-long conversations occur over a cup of coffee and that vodka, which frequently acts as a bridge between the artist and the world, is absent. Such a café table provides the most enjoyable means of social interaction among acquaintances (I don't say friends, because friendship requires greater quiet and closeness). One may come and go as one pleases, and speak or remain silent as one wishes; there is none of that compulsion, that heavy labour of conversation which burdens and spoils all

> five-o-clocks and social events. There is no frazzled hostess worrying about serving and entertaining guests, and no one is obligated to endure a visit when they are bored or tired. However, isn't a café table essentially a modern-day version of the salon? After all, it is a place where one comes solely to join a conversation, and not to fulfil a mundane obligation, to have a meal, or to engage in a dulling distraction of a card game. The French have long understood this concept, which is why they have a "Café" on every street corner (Krzywicka, 1931b, p. 20).

Let us consider Irena Tuwim's rhymed vignette "***I nie rzucę w twoją stronę ani razu dziś spojrzenia," which can be treated as a sociological study of a café 'conversation' taking place on two planes. On the official, social plane, an intellectual discussion unfolds in mixed company about the latest literature. On the other – secret, intimate plane – an erotic game takes place between a woman and a man, for which literature is only a pretext:

> And I won't cast a single glance your way today,
> We'll sit by the liqueur, in two club chairs, *par distance*.
> I'll just drop a word about Ewers, a few words, casually,
> You'll catch them wisely and immediately fall into a trance.
>
> And the conversation will flow light, lively, about *Alraune*.
> The lamp's shaded light will softly fall on our corner.
> And you'll likely enjoy my opinion on Frank Braun,
> For the liqueur affects me, so I deliver a sharp judgment.
> […] (I. Tuwim, 1921a, p. 20).

The catalyst for both intellectual discourse and erotic play is the name of Hanns Heinz Ewers, a German author of horror novels and a literary successor to Edgar Allan Poe, who was extremely popular in Europe and Poland in the early twentieth century. His works were widely regarded as controversial, and therefore, avidly read. He tackled scandalous themes with boldness; they included perverse eroticism, madness, violence, and the Nietzschean detachment with which he demonstrated the existence of the animal in man, just waiting for an impulse to cross social norms. The novel *Alraune* (1911) is the most famous part of a trilogy which also includes *Vampire* (1920) and *The Sorcerer's Apprentice* (1910), all three connected by the character of Frank Braun. The novel, translated into Polish in 1917 by Jadwiga Przybyszewska and prefaced by Stanisław Przybyszewski, by 1921 reached its third edition. It is based on the Frankenstein motif and discusses the

hotly debated eugenic issues of the early twentieth century. The title character, Alraune, is an experimental 'living being,' born from the artificial insemination of a prostitute with the semen of a murderer. Following the tradition of this motif, which Ewers embedded in the modernist concept of the battle of the sexes, Alraune is amoral, commits scandalous acts, and ultimately takes revenge on her creator.

The café discussion about Ewers, Alraune, and Frank Braun, in which the female lyrical subject of Irena Tuwim's poem participates, is not only a neutral exchange of thoughts among educated interwar intellectuals, but also a contemplation of the concept of 'nature' in men and women as presented in literary texts. However, for two people in the aforementioned poem, the discussion takes on an erotic flirtation, serving as a test to determine how the discussed ideas manifest in reality outside of literature. The fact that these ideas do have an impact is evident in the poem's conclusion, which brings forth *das Ewig Weibliche*, a concept often referenced during interwar public discussions about the modern gender contract. In this conclusion, the female lyrical subject dismisses the intellectual potential of the discussion about the foundations of male-female relationships, opting instead for a statement rooted in erotic impulse and physical fascination: "What are our words compared to the beautiful lines of your shoulders / And the casual elegance of your slender, aristocratic legs?" (I. Tuwim, 1928a, p. 20).

Among Irena Tuwim's debut works, two other poems also stand out: "***Obcy pan z bladą twarzą z ponad czarnej mokki" and "***Pani – chcąc z karku zgarnąć włosów węzeł gruby" [The lady – wanting to gather the thick knot of hair from her neck]. They encapsulate in a condensed form all the most important features of her early poetry, also typical of most of her later works. These are: the reduction of metaphor to a subordinate role and a fondness for the world of things – of their sensory perception and vivid visual representation, of their brutalisation on the one hand and, on the other, the emphasis on their intimacy, a preference for using in lyric poetry the narrative techniques of realistic storytelling, and finally, a favouring of everyday language, often close to colloquial speech:

A strange man with a pale face over black mocha,
Raised his masculine gaze to me: wise and deep.
[…]

With aromatic warmth, like the finest drink,
The kiss of those golden eyes washed over me.

Suddenly, feeling strange, dull murmurs in my heart,
I fixed my gaze on the poster of yesterday's premiere.

When the deer-like fear fled from my startled heart,
The strange man with a pale face had already left the café.
[…] (I. Tuwim, 1928a, p. 15).

In Irena Tuwim's poetic oeuvre, the setting of the poem is usually precisely defined; in this case, it is a café. In other of her works, the setting could be a salon in a bourgeois house, a promenade in the city centre, or a garden of a suburban villa. Since the scene is connected to a memory of a real experience, the poem includes various incidental impressions: smells, images, sounds, and signals from one's own body. The emotional layer emerges from the real layer in this poem, with emotions being indirectly expressed through gestures. The event depicted in this text is incredibly intimate, personal, and psychologically authentic. It revolves around glances that the lyrical subject assigns an erotic significance to. The public nature of the meeting place with the stranger stimulates erotic imagination while also preventing the practical verification of assumptions. It can be said that this is a mini novella about an event that may seem trivial to other patrons. However, both the protagonist-narrator and the readers of her story are surprised by the sudden decision of the stranger to leave the café, which releases the emotional tension present in the event. Like many other poems in the collection *24 poems*, this text ends with an epigrammatic formula that verbalises hidden emotions such as regret and tenderness: "I could have taken his head in both hands / And kissed his beautiful, greying temples" (I. Tuwim, 1928a, p. 15).

The poem "***Pani – chcąc z karku zgarnąć włosów węzeł gruby" is another example of Irena Tuwim's early poetics:

The lady – wanting to gather the thick knot of hair from her neck,
Reveals overly stout, unattractive wrists.

Through delicate chiffon and white lace
Shines a beautiful, milky, and lazy body.

The man – in a dark suit, smiles faintly,
And in his soul, finds me more attractive than usual.

The wife pretends to know nothing, but she senses
That her husband finds me more appealing than her.

The husband, in a dark suit, wanting to please his wife,
Speaks to me in a dry and polite tone.
[…] (I. Tuwim, 1928a, p. 16).

As in the previous poem, the story takes place within micro-distances. The emotional dynamic between the participants in the erotic triangle unfolds in a typical social setting through facial expressions, glances, and gestures. The lyrical subject observes these interactions with the precision of a film camera. Emotions are not directly expressed, but rather embedded in the subtle details of clothing, skin colour, body posture, and tone of voice. The narrator not only documents her own subjective impressions, but also reconstructs the entire emotional drama of the situation, including its various phases that lead to a surprising climax, which is captured in the epigrammatic conclusion of the wife's reaction to her husband's thoughts and behaviour: "The lady – seeing this manoeuvre – forces a smile, / Politely offering me a box of dates" (I. Tuwim, 1928a, p. 16). No direct verbal communication is recorded, and none is unnecessary, as the participants in the triangle engage in a non-verbal one, in which the true rivals are exclusively the women. The drama of conflicting emotions is also accentuated by the language used, which creates an impression of colloquial speech. This effect is reinforced by simple techniques, such as aligning sentence boundaries with verse boundaries.

Against the backdrop of women's poetic achievements in the early years of independence, Irena Tuwim's *24 wiersze*, published in 1921, stands out distinctly, along with two other volumes: *Na pewno książka kobiety* by Wanda Melcer (1920) and *Niebieskie migdały* by Maria Pawlikowska (1922). Despite the undeniable differences evident in the sources of their stylistic inspirations (Melcer being influenced by Futurism, Tuwim by Acmeism, and Pawlikowska by Art Nouveau), all three share a set of features identified by interwar criticism as 'women's poetry.' These features include the predominance of everyday realities over lofty ideas, sensual impressions over intellectual formulations, a life-affirming attitude balanced on the edge of hedonistic amorality, and subtle formal experimentation. This last feature is realised on two levels. On one level, the trivial subject matter, such as an exchange of glances over a cup of coffee, a box of dates, or a broken heel, is combined with almost formal virtuosity.

On another level, the craftsmanship of all three women poets is revealed through their high degree of technical skill. It should be noted, however, that the aforementioned remarks only apply to a select few works within these collections. These standout pieces shine like genuine gems amidst a plethora of costume jewellery. It is important to consider that these collections were created prior to the authors establishing close social relationships with the Skamander poets. Consequently, they exhibit greater formal diversity, with stark contrasts between poetic clutter and attempts at innovative solutions, in comparison to their later collections published in subsequent years.

Importantly, only Pawlikowska's collection received a response from critics, with the older generation writer Ostap Ortwin standing out infamously as the proponent of the interwar model of deprecating women's poetry. This model was later realised in various forms by younger representatives of all poetic groups. It was Pawlikowska's collection that triggered a generational tension among the Skamander poets, who had already featured her in their magazine. In 1923, Julian Tuwim defended her with the poem "Do Marii Pawlikowskiej." Ortwin's review became a pretext for the Skamander poets to articulate their own views on 'young poetry' and establish their place as the 'angry young men' on the poetic Parnassus.

For Pawlikowska, who originated from the Kossak family and married into the Pawlikowski family (see Nasiłowska, 2010), the reception of her debut was of great importance. Meanwhile, for Melcer, the absence of such reception was significant for her future, leading her to withdraw from poetry and instead focus on prose. It is worth noting that *Na pewno książka kobiety* was the second collection by this poet, who had previously debuted with the modernist *Płynące godziny* [Passing hours] (1917). The level of poetic skill demonstrated in her debut and the radical departure from Young Poland's style in her subsequent collection highlight Melcer's considerable lyrical potential and the originality of her artistic imagination.

Yet, Melcer presented her 'woman's book' prematurely. Firstly, she rejected the conventions of modernist literature in favour of avant-garde experimentation at a time when the interwar cultural press market was still developing. While it was not devoid of opportunities, there were no prominent publications receptive to modern creativity. Secondly, Wanda Melcer belonged to an intellectual milieu and moved in the same circles as the young Zofia Nałkowska. She was the daughter of the well-known musician, composer, and teacher, Henryk Melcer,

niece of Jadwiga Szczawińska, and wife of Władysław Dawid, the editor of *Głos*. She studied philosophy at the University of Warsaw, and painting and sculpture at the Academy of Fine Arts. Therefore, she came from a background that was supportive of the early artistic, literary, and scientific endeavours of their wives, sisters, and daughters (Górnicka-Boratyńska, 1995, pp. 212–233). However, this same milieu did not see the need to openly comment on or critique female debuts in the press. Finally, as a debutante of the late modernist period, Melcer, much like Kazimiera Iłłakowiczówna, was not of interest to the poets associated with Picador and Skamander. With the rebelliousness typical of youth, these poets sought a reason to engage in an artistic dispute with the past. It is likely that even if her 'woman's book' had received unfavourable critical reception, it would not have provoked a reaction from the Skamander poets. In 1920, the group had not yet achieved the level of ideological, organisational, and social consolidation that it did by 1922 when Pawlikowska's *Niebieskie migdały* was published.

Irena Tuwim's social and literary position at the time of her debut was the weakest compared to Melcer and Pawlikowska. She lived in Łódź and her family did not belong to an intellectually active artistic and intellectual community, despite its internal poetic traditions. Furthermore, she herself did not belong to any literary group. Julian, who was primarily focused on his own career and his feelings for his future wife, Stefania Marchew, did not provide support either. Consequently, it is not surprising that *24 wiersze,* like Melcer's 'woman's book' and many other women's collections during the interwar period, was not recognised by critics. Nevertheless, they deserved attention because, I dare say, her later works are not as original as her debut. However, like Melcer, Irena Tuwim also presented her poetic proposals, paradoxically, too early and, at the same time, too late. The paradox lies in the fact that under the Young Poland veneer, these proposals contained features that were only recognised by the Skamander group's court critic, Karol Wiktor Zawodziński, and only after the publication of Irena Tuwim's second poetry collection *Listy* in 1926. These features constitute the originally reworked inspirations drawn from Russian Symbolism and Acmeism in the form practiced by Anna Akhmatova in the early period of her work.

The only critic who appreciated the collection *24 wiersze* immediately after its publication was the young Stefan Napierski. The collection was released in the autumn of 1921 and, by December of that year, Stefan Napierski visited Irena

Tuwim's apartment. He had previously written a letter in which he praised her debut volume and requested a meeting. After their first conversation, Napierski asked if he could write to her, and she agreed. Following three months of correspondence, he returned to propose marriage, and she accepted. Their wedding took place in June 1922 in Łódź.

For many years, Napierski's work did not generate much interest among scholars of interwar Polish literature. This was because they, like the critics of that era, primarily regarded him as a poet, the author of nine lyrical volumes, and a secondary practitioner of Skamander's poetics. His vast critical output, dispersed across cultural journals of the period, escaped their notice. However, in recent years, a more complete understanding of his contributions has emerged.[12] As Jan Zięba writes, Napierski is now recognised as "one of the few critics in Poland during that period who possessed the ability to engage in intellectual discussions about art at a European level" (Zięba, 2011, p. 8).

Stefan Napierski, whose real name was Stefan Marek Eiger (1899–1940), was born into a wealthy, assimilated Jewish family as the son of Bolesław, a cement factory owner, and Diana from the Siberstein family of Łódź. Maria Kamińska, his eldest sister and a well-known communist activist, mentioned in her memoirs that Marek had literary interests since childhood (Kamińska, 1960, p. 421). Thanks to the care of Diana Eiger, who had a "strong and interesting personality" and who gladly escaped "into the world of intellect and poetry" (Mortkowicz-Olczakowa, 1959, p. 338), the children received education at both foreign and domestic institutions and were instilled with a sense of patriotism. For example, Marek studied Polish and German philology at the University of Warsaw between 1918 and 1921, with a break for military service in 1920 and, later supplemented his education in Germany. In 1917, he was baptised. His mother was a very important figure in his life. For instance, Hanna Mortkowicz-Olczakowa recalls that thanks to her, Napierski had a steady monthly income, a comfortable apartment, an excellent library, and paintings by modern artists; he often visited her and, in later years, also lived with her.

12 Szymański, 1998, pp. 505–522, Maciejewska, 1993, pp. 473–498, Pasterski, 2000, Zięba, 2006, 2009, pp. 5–34, 2011, pp. 7–21; Twardowska, 2011, pp. 23–28; Domagalski, 2014.

Napierski debuted as a poet in the press in 1920, during his student years. However, as Janusz Pasterski's research indicates, he neither published in *Pro Arte et Studio,* nor was involved with the *Picador* club, so he probably only "observed his older colleagues and established social connections" (Pasterski, 2000, p. 63) with members of the university literary circle. At the end of 1920, he formed a closer relationship with Iwaszkiewicz whom he took in when Jarosław had difficulties with accommodation, and two years later recommended him for the position of secretary to Marshal of the Sejm, Maciej Rataj. Iwaszkiewicz wrote: "Finally, one of the aspiring writers, very young then Marek Eiger, took care of me. My friendship with Marek Eiger, which lasted many years, dates back to that period" (J. Iwaszkiewicz, 1994, p. 240).

Both Pasterski and Tomasz Kaliściak highlight the possibility that Iwaszkiewicz may have been the person who introduced Napierski to homosexual culture. Both point to a passage in *Pamiętnik mówiony* [Spoken memoir] by Aleksander Wat, who claims that Napierski married Irena Tuwim for reasons other than love: "His parents wanted to cure him of pederasty into which one of our colleagues had drawn him while living with him" (Wat, 1990, p. 98). Kaliściak also emphasises the influence of Berlin's gay culture, which thrived during the liberal Weimar Republic. Ever since his university studies, Napierski felt a deep connection to German culture and frequently visited Germany (see Kaliściak, 2011, pp. 181–228; Kaliściak & Warkocki, 2013, pp. 113–135). Thus, Napierski's marriage to Irena Tuwim received his parents' approval. They hoped that a wife would help him conform to heterosexual norms, even though the Eiger family, with their high social and economic standing, viewed the union as unsuitable due to Irena's modest means and lack of connections. Iwaszkiewicz stated that the "Jewish plutocracy" disapproved of Napierski's literary connections and of his marriage, as well as "all of his intellectual pursuits, which had nothing to do with the numerous and extensive businesses of his wealthy and large family" (J. Iwaszkiewicz,1994, p. 240). Nevertheless, according to Mortkowicz-Olczakowa, Napierski's mother welcomed Irena Tuwim to the family and "extended maternal care to his wife, the beautiful and talented poet" (Mortkowicz-Olczakowa, 1959, p. 343).

The parents' hopes were proven futile. Homosexuality was a significant aspect of Napierski's identity, both as a person and as a critic, as he regarded it as a product of modernity. For instance, in his essay on Marcel Proust, he stated that "the culture of the twentieth century can no longer be imagined, let

alone understood, without this element of inversion," and that "today, inversion is almost an institution sanctified in the West" (Napierski, 2009, p. 305). He dedicated considerable attention in his literary sketches to the portrayal of queer themes in the works of writers such as Proust, André Gide, Jean Cocteau, Max Jacob, August von Platen, Stefan George, Arthur Rimbaud, Paul Verlaine, and Raymond Radiguet.

By marrying Irena Tuwim, Napierski primarily married the sister of the poet he admired, Julian Tuwim. According to Mortkowicz-Olczakowa, "this marriage, although brief, was amicable and fulfilled Marek's desires to some extent. It also provided him with a connection to a literary family, which can be seen as a form of *Wahlverwandschaften*" (Mortkowicz-Olczakowa, 1959, p. 343). Napierski regarded Julian as the representative poet of their generation (Napierski & Miłosz, 2009, p. 16). He admired Julian for qualities that were not yet acknowledged by most critics and poets at that time. Zięba explains that "Napierski saw Tuwim not as a poet who introduced entirely new elements into Polish poetry, but instead […] a creator who brought it closer to the dominant European trends represented by Mallarmé, Rilke, and Valéry, by emphasising the autonomy of the poetic word, exploring the 'magic of word creation,' and embracing a modern conception of the poetic subject" (Zięba, 2009, p. 16). In this way, Napierski achieved his own dream of creating a community of poets that was welcoming to families and where literature and everyday life were closely intertwined. An excellent example of this unity can be found in early twentieth-century Russian literature, particularly in the role of Acmeism. Acmeism, which sought to discuss and move beyond Symbolism, was represented by Anna Akhmatova, her husband Nikolai Gumilev, and their friend Osip Mandelstam. It gained popularity prior to the First World War through the journal *Apołłon* [Apollo]. In 1922, Irena and Stefan began collaborating with *Skamander*, which, at that time, transitioned from being led by Władysław Zawistowski to being edited by Mieczysław Grydzewski. That year, Napierski published his poem "Karp" [The Carp] in *Skamander* (Napierski, 1922, p. 331), and Irena Tuwim published "Ono" [It] in a later issue (I. Tuwim, 1922, p. 583).

In 1924, Napierski published his first collection of poetry, *Poemat* [A poem], and regularly contributed to Skamander (1925–1926, 1928, 1936–1937). He also ran a review column titled "U poetów" [At the poets'] in *Wiadomości Literackie* (1924–1934). In the public consciousness, he became strongly associated with the Skamander group, both socially and artistically, to the extent that he was

affected by the anti-Skamander campaign conducted by the 1920s conservative critics (Stradecki, 1977, p. 89). Despite this, Pasterski suggests that "the common perception of him as a member of the Skamander circle" was "somewhat exaggerated, as people often failed to reflect on the poetry of Napierski" (Pasterski, 2000, p. 65).

The testimonies of the time, as well as accounts constructed *ex post* by participants in the interwar artistic culture, indicate Napierski's difficult status in the literary milieu, not only within the Skamander circle. First, his position as a wealthy rentier was a source of resentment among many of his literary colleagues, for whom literary and critical activity often arose from the need to earn a living. Napierski, however, did not write for money, and thus, economically independent, he expressed himself freely as a poet and critic, convinced of the important place of art, literature, and criticism in social life. He financed the publication of his own lyrical volumes, translations from foreign languages, and collections of analytical essays. In the 1930s, he could also afford to edit his own magazine, *Ateneum*. However, Napierski's stable financial situation did not change the fact that, as Paweł Hertz recalls, he considered "writing to be difficult and thankless work. And he had every reason to feel that way. His poems, difficult and requiring a great deal of literary culture from the reader, were not very popular" (Hertz, 1948, p. 55).

Secondly, Napierski's extensive literary knowledge and familiarity with the latest trends in contemporary poetry set him apart from other writers and critics of the time. Karol Irzykowski, a representative of the older generation, regarded him as "the only one among Polish 'illiterates' who had the ambition to learn on a European scale and was not ashamed of it" (Irzykowski, 1964, p. 393). Similarly, Tymon Terlecki, who wrote in exile, stated: "Napierski was somewhat of a writer beyond our reach. There was no place for him in Warsaw, no place in Poland. […] He was too European for our incomplete Europeanness, which we were only just beginning to build" (Terlecki, 1945, p. 348). Members of rival poetic groups saw this as the main reason for the Skamandrites' hostility towards Napierski. Czesław Miłosz wrote that "despite his marriage to Tuwim's sister, Irena […], they marginalised Marek simply because he was too educated for them and wanted to write reviews in a language that was not easily accessible to readers of *Wiadomości Literackie*" (Miłosz qtd. in Pasterski, 2000, p. 65). Stanisław Piętak expressed a similar sentiment: "The Skamandrites considered him a talented

spectator who should be satisfied with being able to move in their circle and admire their poetry through lengthy articles" (Piętak, 1963, p. 120).

Moreover, Napierski's lyrical output was not highly valued by his contemporaries. They saw him as just another talented yet not outstanding imitator of Polish and foreign poets. Irena Maciejewska, whose findings I draw upon here, writes that "Napierski's poetic work, when considered against the backdrop of interwar poetry, represents one of the frequently travelled paths of that time: […] from fascination with Young Poland lyricism, through expressionist inspirations and interest in everyday themes, to classicism" (Maciejewska, 1993, p. 475). It is worth noting that in the critical reception of Napierski's lyrical output, the same terminology was employed that was used to describe the work of most women who took up writing. For example, in 1928, Karol Wiktor Zawodziński wrote, "In terms of spontaneous poeticism in the broadest sense of the word, this poet bears an analogy to Tuwim" (Zawodziński, 1928b, p. 164). Four years later, he added, "In Napierski we encounter an exceptionally extensive literary culture, which provides this poet and critic with such invigorating creative juices. Yet, this also poses a threat of what is humorously termed the 'philologist's disease' of a man who, having known countless souls, has lost his own" (Zawodziński, 1933, p. 35). Władysław Sebyła similarly commented, "The poems of Stefan Napierski […] testify to the wide literary culture of their author. We find in them forms […] of the most prominent new poets of the West. […] Still, in the mass of influences, the individuality of the author has been lost" (Sebyła, 1936, pp. 49–50).

Furthermore, I believe that Napierski's homosexuality should not be ignored in this context. Homosexuality was not seen as a vice among the literary circles associated with the liberal *Wiadomości Literackie*. The liberalisation of attitudes towards homosexuality was confirmed in 1932 with the removal of 'pederasty' from the penal code. However, diary entries from Maria Dąbrowska, Iwaszkiewicz, and Lechoń indicate the internal conflict experienced by those involved in non-heteronormative relationships during the interwar period (Zawiszewska, 2009, pp. 92–122). Additionally, Napierski was rumoured to have faced legal charges. Public opinion was not as tolerant as the progressive intelligentsia in the capital. Even people in the arts documented their resentment towards Napierski, not so much because of his homosexuality itself, but rather because of his outward display of it. The matter was not verbalised and, like in the cases of Lechoń or Iwaszkiewicz, it was treated as an open secret, with gossip circulating that

Napierski mainly fulfilled his desires during trips abroad. During one such stay in Berlin, Napierski met Wat whom he took to gay nightclubs. There would be nothing strange about this, were it not for the fact that, according to Wat, it happened during Napierski's honeymoon.

Thus, while Iwaszkiewicz wrote with a benevolent distance about his 'closeness' with Napierski in his memoirs written after the Second World War, summarising their relationship with the words: "His outstanding intelligence, enormous culture were overshadowed by countless quirks that were jarring in the café setting" (J. Iwaszkiewicz, 1994, p. 240), his correspondence with Grydzewski from the early 1930s suggests something contrary to 'closeness.' In a letter dated 29t June 1933, the editor of *Wiadomości Literackie* apologised to J. Iwaszkiewicz for sending his volume *Lato 1932* [Summer of 1932] to Napierski for review: "I apologise for sending the volume to Marek; it was not malice, but a mistake" (Grydzewski, 1997, pp. 33–34).

Let me conclude this concise portrait of Napierski with a paragraph about his unusual lifestyle. All the accounts of him indicate that Napierski frequently relocated in search of the perfect quiet living space and often travelled abroad, sometimes just for one day. This led them to believe that, as Ewa Twardowska writes, Napierski "suffered from a restlessness of an unspecified origin" (Twardowska, 2011, p. 25). Irena Maciejewska sees this restlessness, like those in the biographies of Tuwim and Franz Kafka, as stemming from the growing antisemitic and fascist sentiments in Europe and Poland, and "the terror of the world, which was later confirmed in ghettos, camps, and crematoriums" (Maciejewska, 1993, p. 482). The symptoms of this anxiety were the suffering caused by facts that were imperceptible or incomprehensible to those around him, as they were considered an inseparable part of everyday urban life. For example, Hanna Mortkowicz-Olczakowa recollects the poet's complaints that during periods of illness he "suffered from insomnia and was overly sensitive to sound," and got distracted from work by "[t]he noise from the squeaking and grinding elevator" (Mortkowicz-Olczakowa, 1959, p. 346). This experience, among other things, explains Napierski's interest in the life and work of Proust, who spent his final days in a room lined with cork. When his neurasthenia worsened, according to Paweł Hertz, he either "stayed at home, in a bathrobe, and disconnected the phone" (Hertz, 1948, p. 56), or, as recalled by Czesław Miłosz, "dragged his insomnia and migraines elsewhere" (Miłosz, 1994, p. 2000). However, instead of permanently leaving Poland, he "created a substitute for

a journey, searching for an unattainable place that would provide the safety of a mother's womb" (Miłosz, 1994, p. 200).

The aforementioned image of Napierski's lifestyle indicates that the regularity of married life played a role in stabilising his mental state. According to Irena Tuwim, "My husband used to work extensively, locking himself up in the attic with a view of the garden and writing from early morning" (qtd. in Grzeniewski, 1981, p. 8). In the evenings, they enjoyed socialising, including playing bridge. Regardless of their location, Napierski's study always had a similar appearance: bookshelves covering the walls, heavy curtains hanging over the windows, a coffee maker on the table, and a cat jumping around on the furniture. In these rooms, he collected the latest works on European literature, wrote reviews and essays on Polish and foreign writers, composed his own poetry, translated foreign poems (mostly French), and worked on an anthology of forgotten Polish poets from the nineteenth century in collaboration with Juliusz Wiktor Gomulicki (see Gomulicki, 1981). Starting from the early 1930s, writers would often visit him, "particularly the younger ones" (Hertz, 1948, p. 57). Napierski's temperament, reclusive lifestyle, and the contradictory nature of his creative pursuits were similar to Tuwim's.

We can only speculate about the married life of Irena and Marek, and how it brought both peace and disappointments. It remains unclear how Irena discovered her husband's homosexuality, or what her thoughts were on the matter. However, she was one of several such wives in the Skamander and *Wiadomości Literackie* circles, including Anna Iwaszkiewicz and Halina Lenczewska-Bormanowa. Furthermore, we have no information about Irena's daily routine while her husband locked himself in his study to write. We do not know if she had 'a room of her own,' with her own desk and library. We do not know what Napierski thought of Irena, whom he married as a promising poet, but who did not work as intensely as he did. Both of them felt existential loneliness, as evident in a passage from his "Elegia" [Elegy] in the collection *List do przyjaciela* [A letter to a friend] (1928): "My friend confides everything to his wife / As if one could ever confide anything. / Why try for impossible happiness?" (Napierski, 1928, p. 44). This sentiment is also reflected in her affair with Julian Stawiński. The poem "Nędza" [Misery] and the cycle of short prosaic texts "Nienawiść" [Hatred] come from Irena Tuwim's collection *Miłość szczęśliwa* [Happy love], published in 1930, which marked the definitive separation of their marriage. These poems are remarkable within the context of women's poetic production

in the interwar period. They continue to be impressive, as they capture the feminine experience of abandonment and aversion towards a partner.

Misery

When I search, when I ask for apartment number 62
In the rat-infested courtyard, where the smell of gas and cats lingers,
You stand at the windows behind the deathly sweaty panes,
[…]

You stand at the windows, intrigued,
Who is she, this lady with the pale face, wrapped in a fur coat, a mysterious woman?
Maybe it's like in the movies, Mia May, the sad, rich lady,
Your sister or mother,
Will finally play the happy epilogue to your drama?
[…]

I will not perform any miracles. I am a beggar of love,
I ask for a bit of alms. Poverty drives me out of my home.
Do not kindle hope. Return each to your own darkness.
Listen: My misery is three times worse than yours.

A bald, half-blind cat, exiled to the hallway,
That one still has a bit of hope.
It waits for something on the sand-strewn stairs.
It is beaten, taught. It looks at me intently with a mature human gaze.
My friend, our eyes have long lost their sparkle
(I. Tuwim, 1930, p. 14).

Hatred

1.
You still don't know, maybe you don't suspect at all that this is the end.
When I sometimes look at you, into your dark eyes, I no longer know that I once loved you.
I simply do not remember it.
I only often think: Ah, so this is how it happens, this is how someone's misfortune occurs,
So this is how one doesn't know – and this is how a lie occurs?
I have a hatred for you, which has now turned into a flat, coarse anger,

Which, in moments of tension, brings pleasure, but when it passes, it leaves behind shame.
Today, when you were eating lunch, your jaws moved rhythmically. Then the little shrew,
Which has recently grown in my heart, spoke up within me
And I thought that, eating like that, you look like a cow.
And often I dream that you would die.
[…] (I. Tuwim, 1930, p. 36).

Adam Ważyk recalls meeting Napierski and Irena at Tuwim's house in 1923. During his initial visit to the Napierskis, he states, "He talked to me about lyric poetry, and I talked nonsense. Irena read a lyrical poem from a colourful scrapbook" (Ważyk, 1983, p. 319). Later, he frequently visited them, even when they resided with Napierski's parents, in a household that observed all conventions of social visits, including handing in visiting cards. Marek greeted him visibly embarrassed, while "Irena waited in an armchair, her hands clasped on her lap" (Ważyk, 1983, p. 320). By the mid-1920s, Stawiński also visited them frequently, calling on Irena, while Ważyk came to see Napierski to discuss literature. Ważyk said, "When we went downstairs, Irena was standing by the window with the man who would become her second husband, and she often asked me about him" (Ważyk, 1983, p. 320). Ważyk concludes the story of Irena and Stefan with the words: "After parting with Irenka, Marek travelled" (Ważyk, 1983, p. 321). Mortkowicz-Olczakowa adds that after separating from Irena, "he seemed lost and had lost all sense of direction" (Mortkowicz-Olczakowa, 1959, p. 346).

Irena Tuwim met Stawiński at a bridge game at the Baders' home and, according to her account, it was mutual love at first sight. Understanding the situation, Napierski behaved with class and said: "Go to him for a year. If you are not happy, you can always come back" (I. Tuwim qtd. in Grzeniewski, 1981, p. 8). The following months were filled with emotions Irena had never known before. She flees from them to Paris, where Stawiński follows her: "I was experiencing great turmoil. I was very attached to Marek, who for eight years of our marriage had created an atmosphere of friendship and peace, but my 'obsession' was stronger. Stawiński and I were made for each other" (I. Tuwim qtd. in Grzeniewski, 1981, p. 8). Irena breaks up with Stawiński. He shoots himself. She takes him, with a bullet in his lung, to the hospital. He returns to Poland, she stays in Paris: "And

then I wrote that he should come, that I was going to marry him" (I. Tuwim qtd. in Grzeniewski, 1981, p. 8). During her separation from her husband she lived in boarding houses, which she recalls as a difficult time socially, economically, and aesthetically: "It was a big leap: from a luxurious villa in a modern district to a boarding house in a tenement building in the city centre" (I. Tuwim qtd. in Grzeniewski, 1981, p. 8).

Irena Tuwim's second collection of poems, *Listy*, records the early phase of her relationship with Stawiński, full of dramatic breakups and reunions, arrivals and departures, crises and ecstasies. For anyone familiar with the literary circles of Skamander and *Wiadomości Literackie*, the autobiographical nature of *Listy* was clear, which is why they were regarded as another realisation of the 'women's poetry' model. Yet, this time, unlike in her debut, Irena Tuwim's social and literary status, determined both by her brother Julian Tuwim's poetic stature and her husband's literary-critical profession, forced a critical response. The reception of *Listy* can be described as generally unfavourable; they became a pretext not only for another open attack on female authors, but also for a veiled critique of the Skamander poets and their concept of poetry, since the mid-1920s associated with the work of Julian Tuwim and the poetic criticism of Stefan Napierski. It is therefore no surprise that Irena Tuwim was criticised not only by representatives of the poetic groups competing with the Skamandrites, such as Witold Zehenter in *Gazeta Literacka,* who wrote about the "missteps of verbalism" and the "wilted spectre of Symbolism" (Zechenter, 1926, p. 2), but also by critics who sympathised to some extent with the ideological and artistic programme of the Skamander circle, such as Jan Zahradnik in *Słowo Polskie* (Zahradnik, 1926, p. 6) or Leon Pomirowski in *Głos Prawdy* (L.P. [Pomirowski], 1927, p. 6) as well as the collaborators of *Wiadomości Literackie,* like Anatol Stern, who accused Irena Tuwim of the impressionistic "lack of clarity" (ast [Stern], 1926, p. 3).

Only Zawodziński, who had encountered Formalists, Symbolists, and Acmeists (see Białek, 1969) during his studies in St. Petersburg before the First World War, was able to objectively evaluate Irena Tuwim's works and recognise her as a 'difficult poet,' setting herself a poetic goal of achieving "complete, absolute immediacy" in her programmatic poem *Cel* [An objective]: "[a] goal, of course, impossible to achieve" (Zawodziński, 1928a, p. 505). Despite confirming the most important criticisms previously made against her: Symbolism, Impressionism, and verbalism, Zawodziński identified a group of good poems

in *Listy*. They were good because they utilised the poetic model of Akhmatova and the cultural model of the 'eternal feminine' focused on love:

> The form may be borrowed, regardless of its inventor, but the key lies in its application. […] Many excellent poems in *Listy* possess the metrical and stanzaic structure, syntax and rhythm, lexicon and intonation, composition, and themes that are characteristic of Akhmatova's most notable works. The remarkable Russian poet, through whom *das ewig Weibliche* spoke most sincerely and beautifully, and who undoubtedly influenced not only Russia but created a school, has no student more brilliant or perceptive than the author of these few poems. They share the same main charm: the contrast of powerful emotion, a heart-wrenching lament conveyed with restraint, reserve in expression, the simplest, even impoverished vocabulary, and economy of expression. Simplicity is difficult to imitate; it requires great talent to create original works within such strict boundaries. And nothing impedes our admiration, even when we recognise stylistic features such as contradictory constructions in the introduction, repetitions in a folk style, or the omission of the subject of a sentence, which are characteristic of the fervour of the complaints. I assert that we will memorise these poems, and that 'Ręce' [Hands], already mentioned in the reviews, will be included in the anthology as a true masterpiece of simplicity and composition (Zawodziński, 1928a, p. 506).

The critical reception of Irena Tuwim's third collection, published in 1930 under a title *Miłość szczęśliwa*, did not differ in tone from the reception of *Listy*. Like *Listy*, *Miłość szczęśliwa* was influenced by two main factors. Firstly, there was the open secret of her affair with Stawiński, her separation, and divorce from Napierski. Secondly, there was the growing resistance of literary groups to the prominence of the Skamandrites, their press organs, and their poetic model. There was also tension surrounding Napierski within the Skamander-*Wiadomości* circle itself. For example, Marian Piechal wrote in *Kwadryga* that there were far fewer interesting poems in *Miłość szczęśliwa* than those "that we not only do not feel but simply do not understand" (m.p. [Piechal], 1929, p. 143). K. Grzybowska in *Dziennik Poznański* considered the volume a "typical symptom of today's ease of versification and the adoption of a certain suggestive technique popular among some groups of poets and the poetisers," such as Słonimski or Tuwim (Grzybowska, 1929, p. VII).

However, the most significant aspect of the reception of *Miłość szczęśliwa* is the fact that, from that moment onwards, Irena Tuwim began to be compared

and contrasted not only to Akhmatova but also to Pawlikowska and Iłłakowiczówna, who had by the late 1920s become stars of the first magnitude in Polish women's poetry. The results of these comparisons varied depending on the critic's perspective. For instance, Piechal acknowledged that Irena Tuwim's latest collection contained several poems that were so perfect that they surpassed the achievements of other female poets: "Neither Iłłakowiczówna nor Pawlikowska knows how to, so to speak, relate to their subjective experiences in such a non-fantastical and non-coquettish manner as Irena Tuwim does. This is her accomplishment and originality" (m.p. [Piechal], 1929, p. 143). Grzybowska was of a different opinion: "These excessively self-centred poems, therefore, lack any concept or perspective towards the world that would elevate them beyond mere clever verses. The importance that an idea brings to contemporary poetry, which is predominantly unremarkable, cannot be denied. […] The impact that such an idea can have is easily grasped by reading, for instance, Pawlikowska's collection of poems about Caruso or Iłłakowiczówna's poems about Lithuania and her reminiscences of childhood" (Grzybowska, 1929, p. VII).

The belief that Irena Tuwim was being influenced by a growing circle of authors was solidified by Zawodziński. In his writing, he stated that while the strong influence of Akhmatova in Tuwim's earlier work was "thoroughly absorbed in *Miłość szczęśliwa*, it was done so discreetly" (Zawodziński, 1931, p. 146–147). However, there were also unsuccessful references to Pawlikowska: "Another influence is clearly evident: Pawlikowska. A few minor poems, where this influence is noticeable […], are far from possessing the charm and ease of invention found in the original. They lack its sharp contours, striking epigrammatic style, and brilliant painterly lines. Instead, they reveal a different, increasingly prominent individual voice of Irena Tuwim. They appear as if Chekhov were imitating Edgar [Allan] Poe" (Zawodziński, 1931, p. 147).

Thus, Zawodziński once again reads Irena Tuwim's works via the works of other female poets: no longer only 'through' Akhmatova but also 'through' Pawlikowska, without attempting, however, to hear her original voice. In another section of the article, he compiles a list of the shared characteristics between the poetry of Akhmatova and Pawlikowska, which he believes Tuwim embraced. In reality, all the elements mentioned by Zawodziński were already present in Tuwim's early works, published in the volume *24 wiersze* and unnoticed by critics. Pawlikowska did not influence Irena Tuwim because she debuted later. However, due to the magnitude of her talent, which undoubtedly surpassed that of Irena

Tuwim, Pawlikowska sharpened the features of Akhmatova's early poetics in her subsequent collections. She slanted them through her own imagination and emotional sensitivity. As is often the case in the history of reception, the perfection of a poet's works overshadowed the fact that many elements of her poetics were introduced into literary circulation earlier (see Jauss, 1970).

> The first thing that strikes is the rich thematic environment, which leans towards narrative. However, the work still maintains a sincere lyrical quality. This is not only because of the pervasive and immediately apparent yet undefined 'lyricism,' but also due to the qualities of lyric poetry that can be detected through analysis as a genre. The plot is only implied, reaching us through its emotional reflections. The principle of stasis, the effort to capture a moment, is maintained despite the chronological order of the motifs, by tying them to the methods of lyric poetry. This involves harmonising their expressiveness in the direction indicated by the theme […]. Finally, the epithets also define the emotional relationship to the subject matter. Next […] there is the realism of everyday life, the objectivity of this poetry, and correspondingly, a further lowering of style, even below the colloquial language of Pawlikowska. In harmony with this, there is also a loosening of the metrical scheme. However, the poem remains capable of fulfilling its function, and at certain moments, the element of musicality may come to the forefront […]. Concreteness and realism facilitate compositional tasks. A clear awareness of a specific theme, subject, or slice of reality serves as a springboard for inspiration and automatically determines the construction of the work. Despite the apparent carelessness in this regard, the works in *Miłość szczęśliwa* cannot be cut arbitrarily or have their stanzas rearranged, which is often possible with the poems of many of our contemporaries. Moreover […], there is a clear delineation of the poetic subject, the poet's 'lyrical I.' In this respect, Irena Tuwim's poetry is in clear contrast to the direct, especially erotic, lyricism of Iłłakowiczówna, despite any similarities that could be detected in the external form (the tendency toward verse) or in the most generally conceived themes (the unfulfilled need for love). Abstraction and generality seem to me more and more to be the fundamental flaws of poetry, while the concreteness of the detail and the authentic scent of the world, the entry of a living person onto the printed pages filled with dead type, constitute a truly indispensable condition for lyrical poetry as well. This is what we must recognise as one of the most essential features of Irena Tuwim's talent (Zawodziński, 1931, pp. 148–149).

Jerzy Litwinow writes that "just as the poetry of F. Tyutchev, A. Fet, and A. Blok, the work of Akhmatova was, for Zawodziński, a benchmark for the value of

contemporary poets, and comparing their names with [Akhmatova] was the highest praise" (Litwinow, 1968, p. 528; see also Semczuk, 1999). Although he also compared Pawlikowska and Iłłakowiczówna with Akhmatova, it was Irena Tuwim whom he regarded as the best and most perceptive student of the Russian poet. However much he valued Irena Tuwim, this does not change the fact that, in his perception, she was always 'the Polish Akhmatova' and not herself. He could also write about her as a 'little-known poet' because familiarity with Akhmatova's work in the interwar Poland was also limited to a small circle of poets:

> This state of affairs was also influenced by the simplified image of Akhmatova in the contemporary Polish literary criticism presenting her as a chamber poetess whose domain was exclusively love lyricism. This opinion was also confirmed by the translations of works, mostly taken from the early period of Akhmatova's work and related to a narrow range of personal experiences. The few and general statements by critics, mostly close to the Skamandrites, emphasising the new values in Akhmatova's poems and, above all, the expansion and deepening of themes particularly evident in works from the 1920s, could not change this image (Litwinow, 1968, p. 526).

The penetration of Acmeist poetry, including Akhmatova's, began around 1917 when the first Russian émigrés arrived in Warsaw and started popularising their country's culture. The first to translate Akhmatova's poetry into Polish was Iwaszkiewicz, who in 1920 published the translations of two poems from the collection *Rosary* in Kurier Polski. The next stage of introducing Polish readers to her poetry came in 1923 with the publication of the anthology *Nowa poezja rosyjska* [New Russian poetry], featuring translations by Iwaszkiewicz, Maria Hanna Szpyrkówna, Leonard Podhorski-Okołów, and Wacław Denhoff-Czarnocki. In 1925, when Akhmatova's *Beads* was released in the collective translation by Wanda Borudzka, Helena Niemirowska, and Janina Kramsztyk, Poles once again became interested in her writings. The interest in Akhmatova during the interwar period was essentially confined to the Skamander circle, which Litwinow explains by the similarity of views of the Acmeists, the early Akhmatova, and the early Skamander on the 'essence of poetry:' "The themes and classical simplicity of the Russian poet's verses were certainly much closer to them than to representatives of other literary schools. This is why certain traces of Akhmatova's poetic manner appeared in the work of poets close to the

Skamandrites" (Litwinow, 1968, p. 527). As early as 1928, Zawodziński diagnosed these influences in the work of Irena Tuwim, but I would argue that they were present, and moreover, creatively reworked, already in her debut *24 wiersze* from 1921.

Miłość szczęśliwa was published in 1930. In that same year, Irena Tuwim divorced Napierski and eventually married Stawiński, a lawyer and translator proficient in English and Russian (Kotowska-Kachel, 2001, pp. 456–458). Her marriage with Napierski resembled a literary triangle of mimetic desire, with the enigmatic Julian Tuwim serving as the central figure: the Brother, Master, and Poet, to use by René Girard's well-known concept. Irena Tuwim attempted to embody the archetype of a female poet by emulating the examples closest to her: first her brother, and then her husband. This is a model defined by gender, race, and profession: the model of a man, a Jew, a Man of the Book, stretched between the antipodes of the anxiety of influence and the compulsion to originality, and a bustling social life combined with ascetic study work, where the Woman plays the role of a Muse or a supportive Wife and in which there is no room for parenthood. Wanting to realise her femininity, Irena Tuwim had to abandon motherhood and choose the model of 'being a *literati*' that was at hand. This model was also defined by gender, race, and profession; it was the model of a translator and children's writer, thus a mediator and educator, corresponding to the views on the intellectual dependency of women and Jews that prevailed at the time.

As a poet, Irena Tuwim was never 'good enough.' She was first compared to her brother, then to Akhmatova and, finally, to Pawlikowska, who was favoured by the Skamandrites. As a translator, she was 'in her place.' Her transition from the field of original creativity to translation was, of course, not a one-time radical cut but happened gradually. In the early 1930s, Irena Tuwim still published a few poems in socio-cultural magazines and the so-called women's magazines. Yet, overall, there is a noticeable increase in her activities in the field of prose and translation.[13] After 1935, that is, after her marriage to Stawiński, her poetic

13 Detailed information about the literary activity of Irena Tuwim during the interwar period can be found in the so-called A. Bara catalogue – the Card Index of the Bibliography of Literary Content in Polish Periodicals of the Nineteenth and Twentieth

creativity faded, only to flare up briefly again during the Second World War. For critics unfavourable to women writers but well-versed in their familial, social, and artistic connections, Irena Tuwim's biography and creative path provided a visible confirmation of the popular interwar concept of "defence against the flood of femininity in literature" (Morstin, 1933, p. 5). This was most forcefully expressed in 1933 in the pages of *Wiadomości Literackie* by Ludwik Hieronim Morstin: "We must engage with women as women, more intensely, with greater enthusiasm. A man's kiss usually wipes the kiss of the muse from a woman's forehead" (Morstin, 1933, p. 5).

Centuries (up to 1939) at the Institute of Literary Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences.

Women Poets in Poetic Groups – Kwadryga

To explore the presence of women in the poetic group Kwadryga, I refer to a statement from Stanisław Ryszard Dobrowolski's book *Chmurnie i durnie* [Frowned and foolish] (1980), which provides an overview of his literary activities during the interwar period. In the following passage, Dobrowolski discusses the bohemian artistic life in Warsaw at the end of the 1920s, in which the poets of Kwadryga actively participated. At some point, he remarks, "for some unknown reason, our company at that time consisted almost exclusively of men" (Dobrowolski, 1980, p. 62). This statement reveals a discrepancy between the temporal and sociological perspectives within Dobrowolski's own consciousness. He reflects on the interwar events as a mature man, who has already saw multiple women participate in the literary and cultural activities. He can, therefore, appreciate the difference between a decisively masculine model of interwar artistic life and a more inclusive model of culture after the Second World War. However, the reasons behind this difference remain unknown to him, just as they were unknown in the early days of independent Poland. Nevertheless, the memoir narratives about Kwadryga, crafted not only by Dobrowolski, but also by other Kwadryga members who survived the war, including Mieczysław Bibrowski, Aleksander Maliszewski, and Stanisław Maria Saliński, consistently highlight the theme of establishing a male literary tradition, one that excluded or imposed special conditions on women's participation.

Among the poetesses associated with the Kwadryga poetic group, two names stand out: Nina Rydzewska and Elżbieta Szemplińska. For the purpose of this study, I will focus primarily on Rydzewska.

What makes Rydzewska's case particularly intriguing is the fact that she joined the group during its initial phase, known as the first phase of Kwadryga, which extended until the late 1920s. However, she came on board after the crucial stage of forming the group's membership and ideological programme

had concluded.[1] Rydzewska's entry as a woman into an already established male community offers valuable insights into the internal dynamics of the group. By examining the accounts of the era, we can consider her individual situation as a cultural model. When Szemplińska joined the Kwadryga circle later on, her social and artistic position mirrored that of her predecessor, following a similar cultural script.

Another aspect that makes Rydzewska's case worth studying is the scarcity of information available about her life. According to memoir materials, she continuously modified her own family history during her involvement with the Kwadryga circle from 1928 to 1930. Additionally, she did not leave any written accounts of the interwar period, although she enjoyed talking about it. This sets her apart from her literary colleagues, who skilfully utilised the youthful slogan of 'socialised literature,' to establish themselves within the ideological order and literary life after the Second World War.[2] From the 1960s to the 1980s, benefiting from the new order, they delighted in sharing amusing anecdotes about the last Polish literary bohemia. The belief that Kwadryga plays a significant role in understanding the literature and literary life of Poland's interwar period is emphasised by Saliński's caustic remark about the deliberate 'silencing' of the group's achievements. He directed this remark at academics from the Institute of Literary Research (IBL), stating, "At the IBL session in 1964, barely a few forced

1 The following writers were associated with Kwadryga (1927–1931) and Nowa Kwadryga (1937), for shorter or longer periods: Mieczysław Bibrowski, Stanisław Ciesielczuk, Józef Czechowicz, Czesław Dobrowolski, Stanisław Ryszard Dobrowolski, Jan Jakub Feldman, Stefan Flukowski, Konstanty Ildefons Gałczyński, Jerzy Horzelski, Sergiusz Kułakowski, Aleksander Maliszewski, Marian Markowski, Czesław Miłosz, Marian Piechal, Nina Rydzewska, Stanisław Maria Saliński, Władysław Sebyła, Włodzimierz Słobodnik, Elżbieta Szemplińska, Lucjan Szenwald, Zbigniew Uniłowski, Andrzej Wolica.

2 For example, Dobrowolski worked in the editorial offices of several literary magazines and in the Ministry of Culture and Art. He was also the president of the Society of Authors ZAIKS. Flukowski served as the literary director of Juliusz Słowacki Theatre in the 1940s, commissioned exhibitions of Xawery Dunikowski's art, and collaborated with theatrical magazines. Piechal was active in the Łódź branch of the Union of Polish Writers (ZLP) and the Front of National Unity Committee. She also worked in the editorial office of Poezja [Poetry].

sentences were squeezed out about [Kwadryga], but more could and should have been squeezed out, if only to avoid misleading the session participants" (Saliński, 1966, p. 99).

Another distinguishing factor between Rydzewska and Szemplińska is their choice of literary form. Rydzewska primarily wrote poetry during her involvement with the Kwadryga circle, but in the 1930s, she shifted towards prose.[3] In contrast, Szemplińska practiced both literary forms until the end of her life. The different creative paths taken by both writers seem to stem not only from differences in temperament, imagination, and intellect, but also from their similar yet distinct cultural situations.

Rydzewska joined a group of young poets who were searching for their artistic identity. Competitive instincts were strong. Sabina Sebyłowa regularly reported on these dynamics. About a poetry evening in 1929 in the City Council Hall where about 30 poets were expected to attend, she reports, "One should not expect that these small associations of creators constantly coexist in harmony or agreement. In fact, it is rather a superficial biting sarcasm […] and an almost obligatory dissatisfaction after reading a new piece by a colleague – both with its form and content. Especially if this new piece comes from a poet from another group" (Sebyłowa, 1960, p. 12). The animosities within the literary circles, resulting from artistic and ideological differences, are still well-remembered by Maliszewski, despite the passage of years. He states, "The deeper you go into the literary environment, the more small envies and masked hypocrisy you find. Every success has a peculiar lining, and someone's misstep becomes a subject of almost joyful contemplation" (Maliszewski, 1964, p. 329).

In contrast, Szemplińska associated with creators who were already established in their work and no longer needed the pronounced displays of authority. It is precisely this period of more mature group relationships that Saliński wishes to remember, as he writes his memoirs to "repay a personal debt of memory and friendship" (Saliński, 1966, p. 98). Similarly, Dobrowolski also values friendship, stating, "[I] do not know of a more beautiful and valuable human feeling than friendship" (Dobrowolski, 1980, p. 283).

3 Although Rydzewska continued to write poems, she never published them. There is a manuscript of a volume titled *List w zaświaty* [A Letter to the Afterlife].

Furthermore, Szemplińska has become the subject of a very interesting, well-documented doctoral dissertation by Olga Soporowska-Wojtczak (2013).[4] Therefore, I will not attempt to provide a detailed reconstruction of the cultural situation of a writer who already has an extensive monograph dedicated to her.

Kwadryga… The history of the formation of the Kwadryga group and the crystallisation of its ideological programme is well-known. This is because, similar to the Skamander poets whom they opposed but also emulated, the Kwadryga members left behind a significant collection of written testimonies. These official versions are almost entirely consistent with one another.[5] Additionally, the group left behind an extensive archive of everyday life documents, including substantial correspondence housed in the collections of the Pomeranian Library in Szczecin. The information stored there is replicated in the majority of well-known compendiums used by Polish literature scholars and it forms an indispensable element of the intellectual toolkit for students, educators, and teachers in the humanities.[6] To reconstruct the interwar cultural situation of women with poetic ambitions, we should revisit these syntheses and the well-known factual material.

Firstly, when reading the memoirs of the Kwadryga members and the literary commentary on their work, one is struck by the gender-differentiated education system that supported the creative activity of men. The nucleus of the group consisted of four friends who were talented students at the renowned Mikołaj Rej

4 Soporowska-Wojtczak's doctoral dissertation titled *Twórczość Elżbiety Szemplińskiej-Sobolewskiej [Elżbieta Szemplińska-Sobolewska's oeuvre]* written under the supervision of Prof. Ewa Kraskowska at the Faculty of the Polish and Classical Philology at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, and defended in 2013. It has remained unpublished, but is available at the Repository of Adam Mickiewicz University (AMUR): https://repozytorium.amu.edu.pl/items/354d28d9-b047-4b5f-b943-d1c6355684a8.

5 See e.g.: Sebyłowa, 1960; A. Maliszewski, 1964; Saliński, 1966; Piechal, 1972; Dobrowolski, 1977, 1980, 1981; Kamieńska & Śpiewak, 1961; Pauszer-Klonowska, 1963; Cichla-Czarniawska, 2000; Pryzwan, 2011.

6 See e.g.: "Kwadryga," 1965, pp. 117–119; Szymański, 1961, 1970, 1979, pp. 308–319; Drozdowski, 1979; Marx, 1983, pp. 72–95; Sierocka, 1975, pp. 104–106; Rymkiewicz, 1975a, pp. 438–451; Gazda, 1991, pp. 521–524.

High School in Warsaw and who met in 1925: Stanisław Ryszard Dobrowolski, Mieczysław Bibrowski, Wiesław Wernic, and Bronisław Kornblum. The school was famous for its lecturers and high academic standards. For example, among the Polish literature teachers were Leon Rygier, a poet of the Young Poland movement and the first husband of Zofia Nałkowska, and Kazimierz Kosiński. Rygier and Kosiński took the young literature enthusiasts under their protective wings, thus realising both the left-wing elements of the intelligentsia ethos that involved bringing 'the light of education' to the lower social strata, and the patriarchal, master-apprentice relationship model, based on mutual loyalty. Therefore, the socialised poetry' programme of Kwadryga was not independently formulated by its members but was passed down by their Polish literature teachers as a component of the modernist heritage worthy of creative continuation. Bibrowski provides concrete examples of the "process of passing on social ideas from the older generation of progressive intelligentsia to its newly radicalised generation, which already had a different social background" (Bibrowski, 1979, p. 147):

> Thanks to Rygier, I managed to print in the fourth issue of *Kwadryga* an unpublished essay by Wacław Nałkowski that praised the demolishing of the decayed order. In the same issue, Dobrowolski's review of Kosiński's monograph on Stanisław Witkiewicz appeared, in which the existing social systems were compared to sewers, of which not a stone would be left standing (Bibrowski, 1979, p. 147).

Rygier's and Kosiński's students adopted this programme as their own, implementing it rather clumsily in the 1920s but refining it in the following decade. The masculine model of mutual support in creative endeavours was realised not only on the intellectual level but also practically, concerning the financing and technical organisation of publications. The first issue of Kwadryga was printed on a hectograph in twenty copies, while the next two, which presented the programme of 'socialised poetry,' were already produced in a professional printing house, thanks to Rygier's and Kosiński's connections. An equally important element in shaping the identity of the young poets and the group they formed, along with its periodical, was the necessity of defining themselves against other groups and poetic models. In the case of Kwadryga, this was mainly Skamander. The title *Kwadryga* [The Quadriga] refers to ancient culture and its high status in contemporary humanistic education – just as the

titles *Skamander* [Scamander] or *Helion* did – continuing the ancient thread in modernism, which was still strong in the 1920s.

As the Kwadryga members themselves consistently emphasised, they maintained an ambivalent attitude towards the Skamander poets. While they imitated their poetic model, they criticised their "lack of ideology, mindless vitality, and acceptance of a life that was completely unacceptable to us and hit us hard" (Dobrowolski, 1980, p. 52). Dobrowolski's and Maliszewski's recollections clearly show that the source of this ambivalence was the difference in class status between the two groups. The Kwadryga members attacked the Skamander poets' lack of ideology stemmed from what was visible to the naked eye. The Skamandrites were admired and envied, both as poets and as individuals, for their literary recognition, popularity among readers, wealth, and high social standing. Literature practiced in the Skamander style, seemed like an attractive career path for those outside the intelligentsia during the interwar period. The Kwadryga members were seduced by the Skamandrites on a class level, which is most evident in their fascination with Julian Tuwim:

> During those years, we were absorbed in the works of the poets associated with the monthly magazine *Skamander* […]. We were particularly fascinated by Tuwim. […] We often followed him through the streets of Warsaw, trying to learn as much as possible about him. We even knew how much he paid the building's caretaker to open the gate after eleven o'clock at night and the name of his beautiful wife. […] He looked like a poet from a painting, like a dream of young girls. A young, elegant man with a slender figure, gracefully swinging a thin cane, caught the attention of the passersby. […] We desired to meet him in person (Dobrowolski, 1980, p. 20).

The dream came true, and the young men were invited by Tuwim. The poet received them "in a beautiful study, sitting at a desk against the backdrop of high bookshelves." Aware "of what this visit meant for two high school students possessed by the demon of poetry, he played with [them] like a cat with two frightened mice. It was evident that he was trying to be charming, full of grace" (Dobrowolski, 1980, p. 21). Dobrowolski's naive question about why Tuwim also wrote songs and cabaret texts, to which he answered that he liked "to live and live it up," was something the young Kwadryga poet could not "forgive" him for a long time (Dobrowolski, 1980, p. 21), not so much because it was "the Ideal – now brought low on the pavement" (Norwid, 1864/2021, p. 67), but because he had openly expressed the shameful dreams of Dobrowolski. Contrary to the

Romantic and neo-Romantic beliefs cultivated in Polish culture during the period of partitions, for the poets of Kwadryga, 'being a poet' was as much a response to the economic and political crisis of the late 1920s and early 1930s and a social duty to use their talent for social change, as a conscious decision regarding a career path. Reflecting on his activities undertaken from high school juvenilia to the formation of the first Kwadryga, Dobrowolski writes about his internal transformation: "I told myself I would be a poet – and that was it. I now read a lot, dedicating many hours a day to reading in various fields of knowledge" (Dobrowolski, 1980, p. 324).

In summarising the theme of the class seduction of the Kwadryga poets by the Skamandrites, it is important to note that in the young poets' vision of a cultural advancement the plebeian element took precedence over the intelligentsia. The Kwadryga poets primarily focused on the "consumerist" aspect of the Skamandrites' artistic and financial success, such as their elegant clothing, frequenting expensive venues, and indulging in exquisite dishes and drinks. However, they disregarded the signs of cultural advancement and success emphasised by the intelligentsia, such as accumulating libraries, collecting works of art and antique furniture, traveling to European cultural centres, and regularly attending theatres and museums in the capital. When Saliński recounts the thoughts of his generation of students at the University of Warsaw, he expresses a longing for the Skamandrite "life and living it up":

> Secretly, we considered taking over the baton from them. They had already achieved importance, with *Szopka Picadora*, *Skamander*, the *Ignis* publishing house, and Mortkowicz at their disposal. They enjoyed half a cup of black coffee at *Ziemiańska* and savoured Baczewski's *Perła* and Łańcut vodkas at *Oaza*. Compared to us, they were financial magnates; daily, they had no problem affording a glass of mazagran with real arrack and indulging in several twenty-grosz cakes with their half a cup of black coffee. Ha! (Saliński, 1996, pp. 87–88).[7]

7 It is also worth quoting Dobrowolski's words as he recalls, with embarrassment, the only visit that the young members of Kwadryga paid to Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz. While they admired and envied Tuwim, they behaved rudely toward J. Iwaszkiewicz. When the host tried to steer the conversation toward poetic matters, they opposed him with their own plebeianism in a – so to speak – 'physical' rather than intellectual form. Instead of engaging in a substantive debate about 'socialised poetry' and presenting the

Kwadryga has its beginnings with the aforementioned four high school students, who, equipped with cultural knowledge by their master teachers, entered the University of Warsaw in 1926. They quickly formed connections with members of the Literary Circle, including Stanisław Ciesielczuk and Aleksander Maliszewski, as well as their group of friends: Stefan Flukowski, Stanisław Maria Saliński, Władysław Sebyła, Włodzimierz Słobodnik, and Lucjan Szenwald. The idea of publishing their own literary magazine appealed to everyone involved, leading to the release of successive issues of *Kwadryga*. Again, the memoirs of the Kwadryga members reveal the role of male support and loyal collaboration. In this case, they mention how Dobrowolski's mother's lodger, Władysław Górski from Biała Podlaska, mediated with a local printer to release an issue at a symbolic price. They also credit another high school friend, Feliks Topolski, for designing the title vignette. This makeshift cooperation continued with the publication of the first volume of *Biblioteka Kwadrygi* [The Kwadryga Library], which included Sebyła's *Modlitwy* [Prayers] and Maliszewski's *Oczy – usta – serce* [Eyes – lips – heart] (1927). After its publication, the editorial team established a collaboration with Marian Sztajnsberg, the head and owner of the *Hoesicka* publishing house, where subsequent volumes of *Biblioteka Kwadrygi* were published.

The class background of the Kwadryga poets, originating from peasant, working-class, and petty-bourgeois environments, holds significance. As Wiesław Paweł Szymański writes, "[t]he path through high school and university was for them not only about acquiring cultural values but, above all, a means of social advancement" (Szymański, 1979, p. 229). Of course, the support of their high school teachers was crucial, but it was their parents' decision to send their sons to a good school that made it all possible. Both the memoir materials and Zbigniew Uniłowski's novel *Wspólny pokój* [A Shared Room] (1976) depict the lives of this bohemian group during their student years, revealing that their mothers funded their existence through physical labour. While these young men

arguments of the proletarian milieu, they shifted the discussion to "topics of cuisine, extolling the virtues of bigos, tripe, red borscht with dumplings, and other similar Polish culinary specialties," "persistently returning to herring salads, sausages with mustard, and hot kielbasa, and ultimately to 'pure vodka' with just about anything" (Dobrowolski, 1980, pp. 80–81).

sought some income, their main focus was on literary and clerical professions, and they did not engage in physical labour. Even Dobrowolski's occasional job as a bill collector cannot be considered as such. Interestingly, Dobrowolski fails to recognise this and often emphasises the fact that he engaged in various paid work after his father's death, but always for himself, not for the family. Looking back, he recalls that most of his friends spent their time "in café conversations, in discussions and arguments, in wandering through December drizzle," and survived "from occasional, ad hoc jobs – giving lessons, from very rare and meagre author royalties," and "from small loans taken from wealthier acquaintances" (Dobrowolski, 1989, p. 34). On the other hand, Maliszewski, who has a greater sense of empathy and class consciousness, realises that his mother lost her job at the school because of his participation in the Pacifist Poetry Evening organised by the Independent Socialist Youth Union. He understands that engaging in 'social poetry' has 'social' consequences, not just for himself but for others as well. He writes about the two women who supported almost the entire group:

> My mother feeds a horde of hungry people, takes care of dirty shirts, missing buttons, and torn sleeves, and serves as a confidante for the most peculiar matters of the young bohemian crowd. These are often issues that do not align with her concept of morality and living 'according to God's commandments,' but guided by intuition, she always finds a solution, only to then worry about the question: 'What will become of you? What kind of people will you grow up to be?'
>
> The homeless go to Nowiniarska 2, to the home of Mrs. Władysława Dobrowolska, mother of Stanisław Ryszard. This small, lively, busy, seemingly rough woman treats visitors without prying or sentimentality. If you have nowhere to sleep, sleep here; the beds are wide enough for three. […] Sometimes, in her clasping of hands, the lowering of her head, and the gleam in her eyes, I see the same doubts and worries as my mother's: What will become of them? What kind of people will they grow up to be? (Maliszewski, 1964, pp. 321–322).

We see a similar carefree attitude in the opening of Uniłowski's Wspólny pokój. When the main character, who "hated any work that had nothing to do with literature" (Uniłowski, 1976, p. 10), arrives in the capital after several months of convalescence in Zakopane, his first steps lead him to Zygmunt (i.e., Dobrowolski), where he hopes to stay for a while. When asked about the rent, Zygmunt, "with his mouth full of food, replied that he didn't know, that

it was his mother's business. In his voice, Salis felt the warmth of friendship and the disregard for this question. The initial awkwardness at the start of the conversation disappeared, and they began to chat politely. They discussed their shared interest in young literature and their colleagues, with whom they formed a group of writers" (Uniłowski, 1976, p. 5).

… and women. The Kwadryga members' attitudes towards women were influenced by the social changes that occurred after the First World War, particularly in Poland's capital, as well as the gender norms prevalent in their social classes. The Skamander poets were a cohesive male group, especially at the beginning; but it were the younger members of Kwadryga were generally more patriarchal. From their accounts, it is clear that they were decidedly heteronormative, which is particularly evident in the passages of their memoir concerning Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz[8]

8 This is most evident in the accounts of the Kwadryga members' visit to Iwaszkiewicz and the poet's meeting with university students at the University of Warsaw. After his stay in Heidelberg, the author of Oktostychy decided to 'take action' and sought to gather young poets around him, following the model of Stefan George's circle. For this purpose, he set his sights on the Kwadryga members and invited them to his home. The Kwadryga poets behaved provocatively towards him, but – unable to counter the intellectual refinement and artistic and social standing of Iwaszkiewicz with any cultural value – their challenge took on a class character, manifesting in the enactment of the primitive plebeian stereotype from which they sought to escape through education. Using Witold Gombrowicz's concept, one could say they adopted the 'mask' of a peasant. As Iwaszkiewicz writes: 'The group began to behave provocatively, simply calling me a snob and attacking the antisocial stance of my poetry. […] The moment tea and cakes were served, things took a turn for the worse – they demonstratively pounced on the cakes in an uncivilised manner, extinguished the candles in the room with jokes, and so on.' Only Rydzewska, as she was leaving, asked him for a book with a dedication, which Iwaszkiewicz interpreted as an ironic gesture and a sign of inconsistency within the group. The meeting at the University of Warsaw, which began with a commotion caused by the Kwadryga members, was a "kind of shock" for the poet: "Until then, I had deluded myself into thinking that I was a very charming and well-liked person and that my literature was truly young and appealing to every young person" (J. Iwaszkiewicz, 1994, pp. 272–273).

and Józef Czechowicz.[9] They also had stricter divisions between male and female spheres, public and private life, intellectual and emotional aspects, and their approach to women, especially life companions, was more, so to speak, utilitarian. The personal consequences of their social ascent, where their social mobility became a source of resentment in their relationship with women, is another issue altogether.

In terms of gender, Kwadryga operated differently from the intelligentsia and the liberal circles associated with the monthly magazine *Skamander* and the weekly *Wiadomości Literackie*. These periodicals were more accepting of non-heteronormative views, valued the intellectual and erotic energy of mixed company, and appreciated salon-café flirty conversations that acknowledged the subjectivity of all participants. In this in this circle that, throughout the interwar period, Tadeusz Żeleński-Boy emphasised and praised the benefits of harmony between "mind and gender." Additionally, the Skamander poets chose their life companions based on different criteria. Many memoirs about them mention the "beautiful" women they loved and married. Drawing on Ute Frevert's analysis of the role of female beauty in stabilising the class order in Germany during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (see Frevert,

9 The most extensive passage is found in Saliński's memoirs, where, he explains his 'inexplicable' aversion to Czechowicz. He employs a strategy of insinuation, suggestion, and innuendo, which he could afford in relation to someone who was already deceased: "I admit it, I valued and still value him as a poet, as a highly educated mind, but I did not like the touch of his hand, somewhat doughy, nor did I like his sidelong glances. He belonged to a physical type that always irritated me in an inexplicable way. This irrational flaw has followed me throughout my life, from my early high school years, when I could not stand one of my classmates for no apparent reason. For eight years, from the first grade to graduation, he was universally liked, talented, interesting, and sociable. Over that time, I exchanged maybe two or three words with him and only touched him once – when I slapped him on the back of the neck. I have had quite a few such aversions in my life, similar to the one I had toward that unfortunate classmate. For some reason, I avoided certain people, sometimes to my own detriment, but I couldn't overcome my aversion to them. Such was my aversion toward Czechowicz and, indirectly, toward his circle. It probably didn't help that Czechowicz, completely unaware of it, reminded me of a certain episode from my distant seafaring youth – an episode sufficiently repulsive that I'd rather not remember it" (Saliński, 1966, p. 179).

1997), one could argue that the Skamander poets owed their high social status not only to their talents, hard work, and connections, but also to their marriages with women who embodied a combination of beauty, elegance, and intelligence – qualities that were considered a valuable 'dowry' in the cultural context of the intelligentsia. This aspect has a class dimension, as mentioned earlier.

The topic of girls is only mentioned in the memoirs of the Kwadryga poets when they discuss their university years. This is understandable, given that coeducation was rare during the interwar period, and the Kwadryga poets attended all-male secondary schools. When girls are mentioned, they are usually from outside the university environment and are described as recipients of affection or subjects of attempts to 'educate through poetry.' In other words, they were involved in activities intended to help them understand who the boys were, what they did, and what they considered important. Saliński was particularly strict in maintaining a distinction between these two worlds, as illustrated by an anecdote he shared about a mutual understanding he had with a Warsaw messenger. Upon seeing Saliński with various women in the city, the messenger would always inquire about the health of his wife, to which Saliński would invariably respond that he was in no rush to marry (Saliński, 1966, p. 14). Dobrowolski, on the other hand, dedicated his poetry collection to Miss Julianna Wanda Quindt, one of his female housemates. He had a brief infatuation with her and tried to introduce her to the café lifestyle (Dobrowolski, 1980, p. 110). However, his efforts were in vain, as she was a diligent student who valued a practical profession and was not interested in a closer relationship with a dreamy poet dependent on his mother. Another unfortunate romantic pursuit was Andrzej Wolica's relationship with Wanda, a worker at the Tobacco Monopoly who was a friend of Maliszewski's sister. This time, the obstacle was the mother, "lacking in class consciousness," as Maliszewski recalls. Her daughter, "honoured by the poet's love," unwisely showed her the poem "Córka mularza" [The mason's daughter] dedicated to her. The lines, "The mother bent over the washtub in the silvery foam of soap / Dreamed of a fairytale prince for her sick little daughter. / The apartment smelled of cabbage and human misery," so infuriated the mother that she effectively chased away the creator of this 'socialised poetry':

> 'Look at him, snooping around my home! He says the cabbage stinks the flat, who does he think he is, a count in tattered pants!' 'But dear madam, I…,' the poet

> of proletarian misery tries to explain. 'I'm no dear madam to anyone!" yells the agitated mother. 'And don't you dare set foot on this doorstep again! Jesus, Mary, the girl's found herself a fiancé – where are your eyes, girl?' (Maliszewski, 1964, pp. 380–381).

On the other hand, when the girls were fellow university students, they were either invisible to the male gaze or treated with disdain and condescension. Dobrowolski ignored and disliked them as he was at that time constantly looking 'upward' socially, aiming for cultural advancement, an ambition in which he believed women could not assist him in this regard. He did not mention any women among the participants of the University of Warsaw's Student Creative Section, and he did not recall any women participating in artistic discussions at the *Kresy* café, where he met people "previously known to us only from reading their works, viewing reproductions of their art in albums and magazines, and admiring them on theatre stages and cabaret platforms" (Dobrowolski, 1980, p. 33). Neither did he recall any female reciters of Kwadryga poetry that would perform during their poetry evenings. Finally, he negatively assessed the level of education in Polish studies, which he abandoned for law (also unfinished), claiming that it adjusted to the low intellectual level of female students:

> I came from too good a school not to be disappointed. For example, the level of the proseminar in the history of Polish literature, which I was particularly interested in at the time, was very low compared to the standard of teaching that Dr Kazimierz Kosiński had raised in the last two years at the M. Rej Gymnasium. At the time, as much as today, there were much more female students in Polish studies than male ones; and the papers presented by them could evoke pity in a graduate of a good secondary school in Warsaw (Dobrowolski, 1980, p. 94).

Maliszewski and Saliński remember far more, but they are also more sensitive to the social dimensions of gender differences than Dobrowolski. Thanks to them, we know that the Kwadryga poets participated in academic poetry events organised by the University of Warsaw Literary Circle, where female *literati* – Maria Krzyżanowska, Hanna Huszcza-Winnicka, and Zofia Miszewska – also read their works and discussed literature (Maliszewski, 1964, p. 294). In addition, declaimer Zofia Małynicz (Maliszewski, 1964, p. 330) collaborated with Kwadryga, along with regular reciters like Henryk Ładosz and Władysław Bieńkowski. Other women, including female colleagues from Polish or law

studies, future writers and scholars, like Karolina Beylin, Wanda Borudzka, Julia Dickstein, Irena Krzywicka, Gabriela Pauszer, and Xenia Żytomirska, as well as students of artistic disciplines, like Hanna Mortkowiczówna, Teresa Żarnowerówna with Mieczysław Szczuka, or Eugeniusz Cękalski with his entourage (Maliszewski, 1964, pp. 261–265; Saliński, 1966, pp. 85–86), were also present at *Kresy*.

Thanks to Saliński, we have an anecdote that gives an idea of the scale of difficulties women had to overcome and the strength of character they needed to persevere in law studies, considered one of the last bastions of the 'traditional' masculinity in the interwar period. The anecdote involves a difficult exam with Professor Ignacy Koschembahr-Łyskowski, a distinguished professor of Roman law who also served as Rector and Prorector of the University of Warsaw in the 1920s. The professor "had a reputation for being harsh towards female students, treating them during exams in a blunt and shocking manner":

> The exam was about the decrees of some Diocletian or Titus […], and one of those decrees stated that only married women could run brothels in Rome. The professor asked the first question: 'Could you run a brothel in Rome?' Without hesitation, the female student replied, 'Not me, but your wife could.' 'Thank you. That's all.' He reached for her student record book and signed the note for passing the exam with a flourish. The student, prepared for a longer ordeal, was left speechless (Saliński, 1966, p. 82).

The cohesion of the group and the depth of male mutual understanding on matters of the gender contract, despite the previously mentioned poetic rivalry among its members, must have been strong, so much so that forming stable emotional relationships with women was seen as 'betrayal.' Konstanty Ildefons Gałczyński was the first to 'betray' his friends (Dobrowolski, 1980, p. 154), and from what can be read in their memoirs, the other Kwadryga poets were grateful to him for this gesture. He had the strength to break the taboo, which he drew, among other things, from the fact that his bond with Kwadryga was the weakest, and, as Jarosław Marek Rymkiewicz writes, "he did not adopt anything from the Kwadryga model of poetry and contributed nothing to it, already constructing his own poetic model" (Rymkiewicz, 1975a, p. 440). However, it was Sabina Sebyłowa who was "the first wife of Kwadryga," as referred to by Maliszewski. From his remark that this "good, reasonable person probably has difficulty acclimating to our crazy circle" (Maliszewski, 1964, p. 326), it can be inferred

that Sebyłowa was the first to painfully feel disconnected from the male group which had a shared history, communicated through codes known only to them, and derived joy from reminiscing about their past exploits.

Maliszewski uses gender-neutral language to describe Sebyłowa, his colleague's wife. On one hand, this indicates the writer's neutrality, showing that he does not view his colleague's wife as a sexual object. On the other hand, it also demonstrates his acknowledgment of the subjectivity of wives, including his own and others', by treating them as "people" or "rational beings" with whom he communicates differently than with other women. Dobrowolski employs a similar stylistic approach when discussing painter Maryla Weppo in a paragraph already mentioned at the beginning of this chapter:

> For some unknown reason, our company at that time consisted almost exclusively of men. The only woman who joined us – and as it turned out, stayed with us forever – was the young painter Maryla Weppo, who had a somewhat masculine disposition and a bohemian lifestyle. She later became the wife of Stanisław Maria Saliński. We all liked her because she was a good companion and appreciated our poetry. Her unique monopoly was only broken when Nina Rydzewska appeared in our circle (Dobrowolski, 1980, p. 62).

As we can see, a woman may join the Kwadryga circle only as a non-woman ("masculine disposition," "bohemian lifestyle," "good companion") and a non-partner ("appreciates our poetry"). It is not coincidental that only Weppo felt comfortable among the Kwadryga men. During that time, the Polish artistic bohema was familiar with relationships between two creators, such as the one between Szczuka and Żarnowerówna or Karol and Zofia Stryjeńscy. In the literary group, such relationships were much rarer. The Skamander poets, like Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz, Antoni Słonimski, and Kazimierz Wierzyński, whom the younger colleagues admired, did form emotional bonds with creative women. However, apart from J. Iwaszkiewicz, none of them married a female writer.

Having a steady partner, fiancée, or eventually a wife threatened the cohesion of the group and symbolised "settling down." On the one hand, this was associated with bourgeois stability, which the Kwadryga poets sought and which involved finding a stable job and an independent apartment. On the other hand, "settling down" meant redirecting energy from "higher" literary matters to the practicalities of everyday life. This ambivalence is evident in the accounts kept by Maliszewski, who observed his 'domesticated' colleagues gradually giving

up their pursuit of "ordering the world" in favour of "ordering paperwork." First Gałczyński, then Sebyła:

> [I] saw a few days ago how Stanisław Ryszard was leaning dangerously over the ear of a black-haired beauty, revealing some great secret in a booming whisper – he will be the third. Stanisław Maria Saliński, attached to the side of the painter Maryla Weppo, has the glint of a tamed bird in his eyes […] – he will be the fourth. And this one here [Marian Kulisa] – he was eager to order the world, and now I hear he will be ordering paperwork at the desk of a Kielce city official (Maliszewski, 1964, p. 326).

Yet, the older the Kwadryga poets got, the more they appreciated steady partners whose presence in their colleagues' lives they first recognised in favourable changes in their external appearance. As bachelors, they were often dishevelled, but as engaged or married men, they displayed good hygiene and a well-groomed appearance. For example, when Maliszewski reunites with Marian Kulisa after a long break, he observes, "I know he has a diploma in his pocket and is wandering around with a diploma but no job; that important thing he wants to talk to me about must be related to some position because his shirt is the right sise, and his tie matches his suit; he's clean-shaven, fresh, and almost unrecognizable" (Maliszewski, 1964, pp. 325–326). Meanwhile, the important things Kulisa has to say is to ask Maliszewski to be his best man. Similarly, Dobrowolski writes about Lucjan Szenwald:

> For a few days, Lucjan attracted attention at the *Ziemiańska* café with an unusual elegance, only to show up the following week covered in dirt, with outrageously muddy shoes and a crumpled, dirty shirt. He was a lost cause (Only towards the end of the interwar period, under his wife's firm control, did he start appearing clean-shaven, in a pressed shirt, and with polished shoes. A happy marriage can work wonders!) (Dobrowolski, 1980, p. 327).

However, the private lives of the Kwadryga members do not appear as a separate theme in their memories of the past. Dobrowolski's statement is a telling example: "I also changed my marital status after meeting an extraordinarily beautiful young pianist at the Broniewski household. But that no longer belongs to our story" (Dobrowolski, 1980, p. 155). The category of women with whom the Kwadryga members had sexual relations also does not belong to this 'story.' These women included urban proletariat representatives, mainly servants, as

well as prostitutes, whom the poets, to use Uniłowski's literary language, "took care of business" or "screwed." It is interesting to note that, in the 1920s, the Kwadryga members criticised *Wspólny pokój* for exaggerating their lives as eternal students who avoided work and intellectual effort. However, what outraged them the most was the suggestion that they abused alcohol, rather than their disorderly and risky sexual lives.[10] Another literary image that comes to mind is Zofia Nałkowska's *Boundary*, where the narrator analyses the double standards that allow men to have 'adventures' with servants or "the listless, frozen, hungry girls" of the streets that "happened below the level of reality, as it were, and […] remained part of life's underworld, deemed never to have been" (Nałkowska, 1935/2016, p. 83).

…and Rydzewska. Rydzewska appeared in Kwadryga all of a sudden and for a short time, but as Sebyłowa wrote in March 1930, she was considered one of the 'core' members of the group, while Szemplińska belonged to the 'others' who published in the group's periodical "frequently or sporadically" (Sebyłowa, 1960, p. 21).

Rydzewska's poetic activity and her connections with Kwadryga spanned from 1928 to 1930. She made her debut in December 1927, in the Christmas issue of the Piłsudskiite *Głos Prawdy* [Voice of Truth], with the poem "Madonna nędzarzy" [Miserables' Madonna], which immediately caused a literary and political scandal and made her famous. In 1928, she published several works[11]

10 Maliszewski most vehemently distanced himself from Uniłowski's literary vision, attributing to himself and his colleagues artistic and social achievements that they had not yet contributed to the history of Polish literature and literary life in the 1920s, but would only do so a decade later: 'The thoughtlessness and disorderliness of the book's characters are his own thoughtlessness and lack of a place in the world. We see the figures of a pitiful bohemia; we see them guzzling vodka, wandering through bars and cafes, spouting nonsense with the airs of sages, but we know nothing about the fact that at the same time they are finishing higher education, writing books, winning awards in competitions, working hard to make a living, and even participating in social life' (Maliszewski, 1964, p. 355).

11 Some of these works inlclude: Rydzewska, 1827, p. 5, 1928a, p. 3, 1928b, p. 4, 1928c, p. 8, 1928d, p. 3.

in Kurier Poranny, Przedświt, and *Głos Prawdy Literackiej* [The Voice of Literary Truth] (edited by Juliusz Kaden-Bandrowski), among others. She won a readers' poll for the best poem of the last nine issues of *Głos Prawdy Literackiej* (Kaden-Bandrowski, 1928a, p. 4). She only published in *Kwadryga* from 1928 to 1929.[12] Her last public appearances with the group occurred in December 1929 at an evening of "the youngest poetry" in the City Council Hall. Of the 30 poets present, Sebyłowa only mentions Henryka Łazowertówna, Rydzewska, and Lucyna Krzemieniecka (Sebyłowa, 1960, p. 12). In March 1930, she also participated in a "morning of proletarian poetry organised by the Central Theatre Section of the General Board of the Workers' Universities Association." Her works were read alongside those of Tuwim, Słonimski, Aleksander Wat, Sebyła, and Maliszewski, with an introductory word by Stanisław Ryszard Dobrowolski (Sebyłowa, 1960, p. 27). In 1931, Rydzewska neither published in *Kwadryga* nor participated in group literary evenings ("Pro domo sua," 1931, pp. 334–335). Three years later, in *Kurier Literacko-Naukowy* [Literary-Scientific Courier], Jan Szczawiej discussed the "young Warsaw Parnassus" but did not mention her name among the Kwadryga poets (he also did not mention Szemplińska) (Szczawiej, 1934, pp. 3–5). All her poems printed in the press during these years were included in her only poetry collection, *Miasto* [The City] (1929), published in the "Biblioteka Kwadrygi" series. In the 1930s, she began writing prose and joined the Union of Polish Writers in 1934. She was also a member of the maritime section of the Journalists' Association in Warsaw. In 1937, she published a novel about the life of Kashubian fishermen, called *Akwamaryna* [Aquamarine]. She began gathering material for the novel in 1928 when she first travelled to Lake Wdzydze and remained devoted to the fascination with Kashubia until the end of her life.

Information regarding Rydzewska's life in the interwar period is sparse and contradictory, as reflected in her bio-bibliographical compendia. A clearer picture of her daily existence emerges after 1945,[13] thanks to surveys and declarations filled out by writers during the registration with the Polish Writers'

12 Rydzewska, 1928i, p. 4, 1929a, p. 6, 1929c, pp. 8–9.

13 "Rydzewska, Nina," 1964, pp. 72–73; Twardochleb, 1992, pp. 442–443; Zawierucha, 2000, p. 122; K.B. [Batora], 2001, pp. 136–137.

Union or the Party.[14] It is worth quoting a fragment of a biographical note constructed by Jolanta Frydrykiewicz, as it most accurately addresses the gaps in our knowledge about Rydzewska. In her note, Frydrykiewicz avoids the unwarranted certainty that characterises most dictionary entries and is imposed by the poetics of this genre of scholarly writing. She also reveals the tension existing between Rydzewska's conscious self-creation and the concealment of information about herself from her time of activity within the Kwadryga group:

> She was born on 16th February 1902 (although she later gave the date as 1906), probably in Warsaw. It is also possible that she came from a poor, working-class family. We do not know if Nina's father died when she was three years old (as some sources claim) and her mother remarried, or if she was completely orphaned during the First World War and then taken in by the Rydzewski family. Another possibility, as S.R. Dobrowolski recalls, is that she had both parents when he met her in the 1920s. At one point, she maintained that she was a child of a Georgian family and that her parents died during the October Revolution. This hint is corroborated by her middle name, Zaira, and perhaps somewhat by her appearance, such as her large, dark eyes which earned her the nickname 'The Owl of Mokotów'. She married a Georgian merchant with the exotic-sounding name Aslan Bek Barasbi Baytugan and, for some time, signed as Nina Rydzewska-Baytugan.
>
> Rydzewska completed Z. Kudasiewicz's gymnasium in Warsaw and probably the School of Commerce. According to some sources, her family situation forced her to study and work. Among other jobs, she worked as a clerk in the office of the Virtuti Militari Order Chapter (Frydrykiewicz, 1987, pp. 37–38).

Bogdan Twardochleb also points out that many biographical details about Rydzewska are unverifiable and originate from sources tainted by an individual emotional perspective:

> It was also claimed, and Aleksander Maliszewski accepted it as truth, that R. was born in Georgia, orphaned due to some disturbances, and brought to Warsaw where she was adopted by foster parents. However, Stanisław R. Dobrowolski argues that this story was invented by Stanisław M. Saliński, who was fascinated by R.'s extraordinary beauty.

14 Materials for Nina Rydzewska's private archive were donated in November 2014 to the Książnica Pomorska in Szczecin by the family of Edmund Bączyk.

> The information about the atmosphere in her family home is also contradictory. R. talked and wrote about her stepfather's alcoholism, which neither Maliszewski nor Dobrowolski confirmed (Twardochleb, 1992, p. 442).

In the above quotations, it is notable that the knowledge about Rydzewska's interwar biography comes not from herself, but from her fellow writers who had closer contacts with her only in the late 1920s. They saw, perceived, and judged her differently. In their memoirs, written many years later, they referred not as much to her, as to their past selves. A re-reading of the passages about Rydzewska in the books by Dobrowolski and Maliszewski reveals that the Kwadryga members' attitudes towards her varied significantly during their joint activities, and this difference determined their postwar perspectives.

Dobrowolski, who provides most of our information about Rydzewska, does not hide his dislike for her due to her "tendency towards mystification," consisting in Rydzewska giving contradictory information about her origins and family relationships. This antipathy may be the source of his verbosity, as authors often extensively portray disliked individuals while sketching superficial portraits of friends. Two things stand out in Dobrowolski's account. The first is the camouflaged erotic tension and rivalry among the colleagues for Rydzewska's affections as a woman, especially between him and Bibrowski. However, while Bibrowski openly expressed his affection, Dobrowolski likely concealed it out of consideration for his friend. Yet, the matter must have troubled him emotionally to the extent that, even years later, he distanced himself from his own feelings by stating repeatedly, "that's what we thought at the time." Saliński, already associated with Weppo at the time, did not experience such dilemmas; he could afford to simply admire Rydzewska and treat her as a colleague. Another reason for Dobrowolski's dislike of Rydzewska was the gender-determined artistic tension and poetic rivalry that unexpectedly arose in the Kwadryga along with Rydzewska's success, a rare occurrence for a debuting woman poet. Dobrowolski writes:

> After the launching of *Kwadryga*, Rydzewska sent several poems to our editorial office. Bibrowski was the first to read them and, rightly recognising that they were interesting, wrote to the author, inviting her to a meeting at the editorial office on Chłodna Street. After the meeting, he took her to *Kresy*, and from that point on, he tried to be with her constantly.

> She was a good-looking, at least that's what we thought at the time: a twenty--something brunette with a tendency to gain weight and a somewhat exotic, oriental appearance. She worked as a clerk in the office of the Virtuti Militari Order Chapter.
>
> It later turned out that Rydzewska also had a tendency towards mystification. Like I did when I was ten, she claimed she was not the child of her parents and that she came from Georgia. She was so convincing that Saliński, believing her, later created a sensational biography for [her]. She even convinced herself of this and eventually married a Georgian merchant with the impressive name Aslan Bek Barasbi Baytugan. From then on, she signed herself as Nina Rydzewska-Baytugan. She stopped doing this after her husband passed away (Dobrowolski, 1980, pp. 62–63).

The following is an account of a bizarre incident that Dobrowolski considered a turning point in his attitude towards Rydzewska. During the Christmas holidays, Bibrowski told him that "Nina's 'adoptive' father was abusing her, beating her with an iron rod taken from the bed." Concerned that "Rydzewski might want to torment the poet on Christmas Eve," the friends decided to confront the "sadistic father" as soon as possible (Dobrowolski, 1980, p. 63). Dobrowolski "stuffed a revolver that had belonged to our father into pocket and, along with Mietek, went to the Rydzewski household on Mokotowska Street" (Dobrowolski, 1980, p. 63):

> We arrived and found the entire three-person family busy preparing for Christmas Eve dinner. After the daughter introduced us to the elder Rydzewskis, they warmly welcomed us despite our grave expressions. Even though dinner was still a long way off, the family quickly set the table and hospitably invited us to take our places. To our surprise, the 'sadistic father,' who owned a small mechanical workshop, turned out to be as gentle as a lamb and a very kind man and, let's add, very proud of his talented daughter, to whom he showed all the respect she deserved. As the entire Rydzewski family continued to offer us food and drink, the revolver in my pocket burned… with shame. With each glass, my desire to shoot Bibrowski grew.
>
> We left the house with slightly lightened heads, long after the first star had appeared in the sky […]. As we said our goodbyes, I mockingly asked my friend:
>
> 'Tell me, Mietek, where does he get that iron rod from? There isn't a single iron bed in the entire house. I checked.'
>
> 'He probably brings it from the workshop,' replied Mieczysław, unperturbed.
>
> *Amantes amentes* (Dobrowolski, 1980, p. 64).

At first glance, the incident indeed seems grotesque. The 'tendency towards mystification' is only one – and the simplest – possible answer to Dobrowolski's question of whether Rydzewska was telling the truth or not, and if not, then why. Regardless of whether Rydzewska was a Georgian girl adopted by a working-class family who returned to Poland after the war or the daughter of a remarried mother (or a child born out of wedlock, as her biological father remains unknown), the most important aspect of her stories is the question of her social class origin. This makes her stories similar to mythological tales, often taking the form of extended genealogies. After all, Kwadryga is the prime example in the history of interwar literature that showcases the social and cultural emancipation movements occurring in Poland during the 1920s and 1930s. The poets belonging to this group came from impoverished backgrounds, although they were not so destitute that they could not attend good secondary schools and study Polish philology or law at university. Their education and the intellectual and existential aspirations it awakened made them feel superior and culturally dominant over their own social class, even though they still belonged to it in a "social" sense. However, mentally, they had already moved beyond their class due to their education.

This is evident in Maliszewski's recollection. He remembers Rydzewska's home as an open house, a place for social gatherings attended not only by the members of Kwadryga but also by Rydzewska's friends and her parents' acquaintances, all representatives of their own social class. In his account, what stands out is not only the hospitality of the Rydzewski family, but also a slight tone of superiority towards the 'simple people' who welcomed the emissaries of high culture, poetry, and music – 'the Kwadryga brotherhood,' especially Lucjan Szenwald, who was considered the most talented, well-read, and best poet in the group:

> Lucjan is consumed by an insatiable hunger for music; whenever he had access to a piano, he would forget everything else. […] In Warsaw, there was one house that always craved more of Lucjan's music. In Mokotowska Street, […] in the courtyard, there was Józef Rydzewski's metalworking shop.
>
> During the revolution in the Caucasus, the Rydzewski family took in and adopted a homeless, lost girl named Nina.
>
> Today, the beautiful, black-eyed Nina is a member of the Kwadryga group, and her adoptive parents, simple, pleasant, and hospitable people, are delighted to welcome

> the Kwadryga brotherhood into their small apartment – a room with a kitchen. In that room, fulfilling Nina's dreams, there is a piano, a name-day gift from her father.
>
> This is where Lucjan's music evenings often take place, resembling public performances as the room and kitchen are densely packed with listeners. Lucjan's preferred choice is to play Bach (Maliszewski, 1964, p. 322).[15]

Reading these stories, I can imagine that Rydzewska might have simply been ashamed of her background and social standing. Her colleagues also came from poor families, but for a long time they did not have to work for a living. Rydzewska finished school and began working because she could not afford further education or, more likely, because there was no tradition in her working-class family of sending girls to university – only boys were given that opportunity. The fact that resources were allocated for the purchase of a piano, which can be considered a significant but one-time expense classified as a name-day gift, indicates that it was possible for Rydzewska's family to provide for this purpose. However, sending a daughter to university would have required deeper mental changes within Rydzewska's family and social class.

Returning to the theme of physical violence against a child that Rydzewska mentioned to Bibrowski and to which she dedicated her poem "Bękart" [Bastard] (also known as "Malutkie" [The small one]), it is worth keeping in mind that although it has been impossible to verify the violent acts on her father's part, it does not mean they never happened. Dobrowolski's account resembles a community interview conducted by a police officer or social worker. During such interviews, neighbours of perpetrators of violence are often astonished to discover that someone who appears calm, hardworking, and polite, could engage in such acts. In this case, a potential warning sign may have been the presence of alcohol during the Christmas Eve dinner at the Rydzewski home. It was uncommon for working-class families in the interwar period to consume alcohol on such occasion and in such quantities, so as to make them drunk, "with slightly lightened heads," as Dobrowolski puts it.

15 Maliszewski writes about Uniłowski in a similar vein: "The exceptional social qualities […] of this boy," who "knows how to tell stories" for he adopts a "contrary, mocking tone" and possesses "the ability to pick up and adapt authoritative statements heard in the moment," "mask the lack of education" (Maliszewski, 1964, p. 356).

Additionally, it is possible that Rydzewska, due to her social class, preferred the company of certain colleagues over others and did not desire closer relationships with certain individuals. Szenwald, as described in the recollections, was a person who skilfully combined intelligence and talent with unpretentiousness and a genuine fondness for people. Despite his peculiarities, he was generally well-liked. Dobrowolski, on the other hand, appeared to be the most ambitious member of the Kwadryga circle. He constantly strived for success and advancement, which he associated with education: "he dreams of fame […] as if he comes from the proletariat, yet is a genius" (Uniłowski, 1976, p. 16); although, notably, he did not ultimately obtain a university degree. He also seemed to flaunt his perceived social standing, which may have been off-putting to those around him, particularly the allegedly insecure Rydzewska. Dobrowolski's feelings towards his attractive and talented colleague were likely different from those of Bibrowski. While Bibrowski, a romantically infatuated 'Miecio,' took pleasure in the shared feasting during the ill-fated Christmas Eve rescue,[16] Dobrowolski inspected the entire apartment. This is further corroborated by yet another episode involving an emotional triangle, in which the tension resulting from the rivalry and rejection by a girl who preferred Adam Gallis's company over Dobrowolski, the latter resolved by simply shooting at the couple with his revolver (Dobrowolski, 1980, pp. 114–116). It never occurred to Dobrowolski that Rydzewska might have felt uncomfortable in the company of Bibrowski, who constantly tried to accompany her, just as she did in his own aloof and uptight company. It is possible that, like Julianna Quindt, who rejected Dobrowolski's advances, or the working-class mother of Wanda who chased Wolica away, the young representatives of Rydzewska's class – unemployed students, some still financially supported by their mothers – were not seen as attractive men or potential life partners by her. They were simply colleagues. Ultimately, none of the Kwadryga members succeeded in winning her over. It appears that Rydzewska knew what she wanted and understood her

16 A fragment of his memoir article where he refers to Rydzewska has a calm, affirmative tone, thus, again, distinguishing Bibrowski's attitude from Dobrowolski's: "Our Nina, of Georgian descent […], had a broad, beautiful face, black shining eyes, and raven hair, and she wrote rough, powerful poems about the toil, exploitation, and poverty in a grim tone, though she herself had a cheerful and gentle disposition" (Bibrowski, 1979, p. 148).

limitations and possibilities. She worked as a clerk from an early age until the end of the interwar period, married a merchant, led a modest and stable family life, and occasionally published excerpts of her novels about Kashubia in literary magazines.

and the poetesses… Rydzewska made her entrance into literature and the Kwadryga group with a bang, to her own surprise and to the even greater surprise of her fellow writers. Her poem "Madonna nędzarzy" was published in a Piłsudskiite magazine during a politically and socially charged period, right before Christmas in 1927 and the parliamentary elections in March 1928. In January 1928, the Marian Sodality of Gentlemen published an open letter-denunciation in several daily newspapers. The letter criticised the State Prosecutor's Office for its slow response to the 'criminal' Rydzewska, who had published a poem that contained "an insolent and vile blasphemy directed at the Most Holy Virgin Mary, Queen of Angels, of Heaven, and of the Polish Crown" (Twardochleb, 1928/1979, p. 58). The Marian Sodality of Gentlemen had the support of the Association of Catholic Writers at the Piotr Skarga Society and the Brotherhood of St. Zita, which brought together domestic servants. In Rydzewska's defence stood, among others, Kaden-Bandrowski (1928a, p. 4), Maria Jehanne-Wielopolska (1928, p. 4), and Paweł Hulka-Laskowski (1928c, p. 5), who unanimously claimed that "the witch hunt against Rydzewska is one of the elements of the pre-election battle" (Twardochleb, 1928/1979, p. 58) and an attempt to limit the freedom of literature, which has a proud tradition of wrestling with God in the works of Anioł Ślązak, Adam Mickiewicz, Jan Kasprowicz, Leopold Staff, and Andrzej Niemojewski.[17] *Wiadomości Literackie* published the protest of the Kwadryga group, signed by Dobrowolski, Flukowski, Zygmunt Łotocki, Maliszewski, Markowski, Sebyła, Wernic, and Tadeusz Zajączkowski. They objected against "dragging the fight for political gain into the mud at the expense of the highest autonomous values of art" and the "insidious slandering of the good name of an artist and a human being." They declared a "war against the rampant moral boorishness and the medieval butcher's mentality in the

17 See e.g. Hulka-Laskowski, 1928c, p. 5; Karski, 1928, p. 4; Hulka-Laskowski, 1928b, p. 4; Niemojewski, 1928, pp. 39–42.

name of defending the good name of a human being and elevating the level of social culture" (Dobrowolski et al., 1928, p. 1).

According to Twardochleb, the matter quieted down quickly because the right-wing won the March elections. However, this hate campaign against Rydzewska had a significant impact on the internal dynamics of the Kwadryga group. Despite its "essentially uncrystallised political orientation," the group was immediately labelled as the 'militant left,' which led to social ostracism due to the pressures from the high-circulation Catholic-nationalist press (Twardochleb, 1979, p. 56). This realisation showed the Kwadryga poets that 'socialised art' could have real political consequences (Bibrowski, 1971, pp. 257–262) – which, nevertheless, only affected the author of the incriminated work[18] – and forced the to clarify their ideological positions, leading to the beginnings of the group's decomposition. Just a few months later, Maliszewski

18 The poetic recap of the discussion, published in a satirical magazine, is notable for revealing for the first time the extent of criticism that authors of anti-religious or anti-clerical statements had to face, regardless of their talent or social standing. As we recall, in 1928, Tadeusz Żeleński-Boy began his moral campaigns, so the conservative reactions to "Madonna nędzarzy" can now be seen as a warm-up before the main battle ("Na marginesie…," 1928, p. 2):

[…]
And the matter is clear.
To no one in the world,
Whether a small writer or a great poet,
If the desire arises in their souls,
To write about Holiness in a creative rush.
They must not – when this thought emerges –
Approach the Divinity without reverence,
Without words of solemnity, which from the earthly threshold
Are due to God and All with God.
And that's the end. All other considerations,
The "Reasons" of the countess, the Kwadryga talks,
Of the poetess.
Savonarola, with whom Kaden aligns,
Is no argument for Rydzewska.
It won't change the meaning of her poem, nor the fact,
That she acted with at least a lack of tact.

publicly announced in *Wiadomości Literackie*: "Since July, I have nothing to do with the names Ciesielczuk, Bibrowski, Słobodnik, Rydzewska" (Maliszewski, 1928, p. 6). However, before this happened, the Kwadryga poets were very pleased with the attention they received because of "Madonna nędzarzy," as recalled by Dobrowolski: "A real uproar erupted. We strutted around proudly, with Nina Rydzewska at the forefront, enjoying the easily earned fame. And all because of a poem with characteristics of 'socialised creativity'" (Dobrowolski, 1980, pp. 62–63; see also Maliszewski, 1964, pp. 324–325). This matter also had delayed political repercussions. In 1932, a new Penal Code introduced Article 172, which stated that "Anyone who publicly blasphemes God is subject to imprisonment for up to 5 years."[19]

Therefore, it can be said that the controversy surrounding "Madonna nędzarzy" immediately placed Rydzewska among the creators of the so-called "youngest" and "women's" poetry. Her name became known even outside the close-knit literary circles, a level of fame that other members of the Kwadryga group could not claim for themselves. Her artistic position within the group was stronger than that of the other members, not only because of the inherent qualities of her works but primarily due to the conditions of their reception. After all, not every emerging poet was written about by Kaden-Bandrowski, Jehanne-Wielopolska, or Hulka-Laskowski. Furthermore, among the poets associated with Kwadryga, only Słobodnik and Szenwald had their poems published in *Wiadomości Literackie* before Rydzewska, and only her volume was announced by the periodical before it appeared in book form ("Debiut poetki," 1929, p. 4). [BB9] By 1929, when *Miasto* was published, only a few members of Kwadryga had released their own volumes: Sebyła's *Modlitwa* and Maliszewski's *Oczy – Usta – Serce* (published together as *Wiersze* [Poems], 1927), Ciesielczuk's collections *Chałupy w obłokach* [Huts in the clouds] (1927), *Wieś pod księżycem* [A village under the moon] (1928), and *Pies kosmosu* [The dog of the universe] (1929), along with Słobodnik's *Modlitwa o słowo* [A prayer for a word] (1927) and *Cień skrzypka* [The violinist's shadow] (1929). Nevertheless, both Ciesielczuk and Słobodnik

19 See: Rozporządzenie Prezydenta Rzeczypospolitej z dnia 11 lipca 1932 r. *Kodeks Karny, Dziennik Ustaw* 1932, No 60, pozycja 571, p. 1166, https://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/download.xsp/WDU19320600571/O/D19320571.pdf.

represented the "non-socialised," rustic wing of Kwadryga. Simultaneously with Rydzewska, Dobrowolski debuted with *Pożegnanie z Termopilami* [A farewell to Thermopylae] (1929), Flukowski with *Słońce w kieracie* [The sun in the rut] (1929), and Piechal with *Krzyki z miasta* [Screams from the city] (1929). The timing of the publication, along with the title and content of *Miasto*, solidified Rydzewska's status as a full-fledged member of Kwadryga and the leading representative of 'socialised poetry,' a distinction immediately recognised by critics.

In contrast to the more mature critics of the time or those of the post-war period,[20] the interwar younger generation of literary critics[21] valued Rydzewska's artistic proposition within the context of Polish women's poetry and appreciated the fact that she broke with its characteristic conventions, but they did not relate her work to the poetic models of other Kwadryga members. In other words, they considered the native context of Rydzewska's poetry to be women's poetry rather than poetry in general.

For example, Stefan Napierski, known for invoking the categories of femininity and masculinity in the evaluation of poetic works, began his extensive review in *Wiadomości Literackie* by welcoming the "new talent" of Rydzewska. He described the poetess as "still incomparable" to the talents of Kazimiera Iłłakowiczówna, Maria Pawlikowska, or Irena Tuwim but "very promising for the future." Only afterward did he note that

> beside Flukowski, the most interesting poet of this group, Rydzewska occupies a prominent position in Kwadryga; moreover, she alone, at least to some extent, realises the programme of this group. Her distinctive social accent, which sets her apart, at least seemingly, from previous Polish female poets (with the exception of Konopnicka), is not something she outwardly adopts or imposes upon herself. Instead, it arises autonomously from deep sources of inspiration: noble compassion and pity for all creation (Napierski, 1929, p. 3).

20 Marx, 1979, pp. 139–143; Twardochleb, 1979, pp. 55–60; Marx, 1983, pp. 72–95, 1986, p. 10; Krawczykowa, 1992, p. 6.

21 Krzemieniecka, 1929, p. 4; Braun, 1929, p. 6; B.H.-n, 1929, p. 12; Napierski, 1929, p. 3; Rabska, 1929, p. 12; T. T. [Terlecki], 1930, pp. 10–11.

Napierski then returns to the topic of women's poetry, noting that Rydzewska's true innovation lies in this domain, in which, Kazimiera Zawistowska, Bronisława Ostrowska, and the three aforementioned poets "perhaps unconsciously continue the line that began with the first great Polish artist, Gabriella," who was "the first *intellectual* of Polish literature, and was, primarily, like any woman, not devoid of specific, that is, lesbian, genius, *enamoured with herself*, with her intellectual power, with the expanse of her ideas; she was an *egotist*, and moreover – an *immoralist*" (Napierski, 1929, p. 3).

According to Napierski, Rydzewska "boldly breaks with this tradition" (Napierski, 1929, p. 3) as evidenced by both the titles of her entire collection and the individual works within it. One would search in vain for anything resembling Pawlikowska's "Pocałunki" [Kisses], and the language used is far removed from Konopnicka's "verbosity and sentimentality" (Napierski, 1929, p. 3). However, her social stance remains 'feminine' in the sense of the "sincerity of her reactions" to the "influences of the time and environment." It is precisely because of her "greater receptivity, sensitivity, submissiveness, and integrity" (Napierski, 1929, p. 3) that she distinguishes herself not only from earlier female poets but also from the other poets of Kwadryga. Notably, Napierski was the only critic to point out the unique features of Rydzewska's imagination and the poetics of her works, which contribute to what Jan Marx calls "the non-existent canon of Kwadryga" (Marx, 1983, p. 72). These features include a fondness for prayer-like and ballad-like forms, "formal uniformity, which cannot found in the works of the rest of the 'Kwadryga' poets, with the valuable exception of Flukowski," naturalism, brutality and Luciferianism in imagery, worn-out religious symbolism, a rebellious tone, and a rhythm that is "weary, helpless, dragging, and occasionally agitated, transitioning into psalm-like lamentation." There is also "a pathos reminiscent of Ada Negri, but without the idealism of the Italian poet" (Napierski, 1929, p. 3).

Similarly, a reviewer from *Epoka* [The Era] warmly welcomed Rydzewska as "the greatest female talent among the youngest poets" and praised the freshness of language in her poems, free from "banality, sentimentality, and bloodlessness." The reviewer noted the poems' "scope, strength, and sombreness," as well as their vision of a world "filled with struggles and battles for truth and a higher meaning of life" (B.H.-n, 1929, p. 12). Tymon Terlecki's commentary from *Słowo Polskie* is also worth mentioning, as he saw the novelty of Rydzewska's poetry in her departure, as a woman-poet, from the tradition of "rusticity and pastoralism"

towards "the dimension of a new life," namely, the city. The city, for her, becomes "the essence of life's experiences," "a symbol of humanity's struggle against the principle of blind, unknowable violence that dominates the world," "a stone cry of protest against injustice," and simultaneously "the centre of life's misery." Terlecki notes that the "hopelessness of fate" embedded in her poems leads to "the most peculiar mystery of this poetry: to a fervent, tender, profoundly feminine solidarity with all the world's suffering. No other contemporary poetry of the heart possesses such a capacity for self-sacrifice and compassion for human suffering." However, this traditional "feminine solidarity" is expressed in an untraditional, unfeminine language of "vivid realism," "bold to the point of brutality," showcasing an uncharacteristically feminine "boldness of vision" (T. T. [Terlecki, 1930, p. 10) that explores corners of the city typically avoided by women and records the presence of figures usually unnoticed, such as poor children playing in dumpsters or porters.

Despite consistently relegating Rydzewska's poetry to the realm of women's poetry, the overall tone of the reviews of Miasto can be described as affirming. Rydzewska prioritises the social current of women's poetry over the egotistical current dominant during Young Poland and the interwar period, refreshing and enriching both the model of women's poetry and the model of "socially engaged poetry" of Kwadryga. The members of Kwadryga did not entirely appreciate this, but they could not express it directly, especially when the segment of the literary community whose opinion they valued had a positive view of Rydzewska's work. They conveyed their discontent indirectly, as exemplified by reviews of poetry books published in the pages of *Kwadryga*.

In 1928, in Kwadryga's issue 2 of the year, Rydzewska's poem "Zbrodnia" [Crime] is placed alongside a collective review of *Sonety instrumentalne* [Instrumental sonnets] by Witold Hulewicz, *Cisza leśna* [Forest quiet] by Maria Pawlikowska, and *Piękna podróż* [A beautiful journey] by Tadeusz Łopalewski. The review is titled "Wiersze niepotrzebne" [Unnecessary poems] and signed with the initials "am" (Aleksander Maliszewski). According to the reviewer, the poems by all three authors are "contortions, twists, and acrobatics" that symbolise

> the era of mass production of beautiful poems, sometimes complete works of art, sometimes so perfect they become painful. They serve a purpose: either as 'sponges' absorbing the unused energy of idle individuals, or as snobbish decorations in

> bourgeois, manicured boudoirs, or as lenses for hysterical young women who see through the prism of a poetic work the ideal of 'that slender brunette with eyes that shine like stars…' (am [Maliszewski], 1928, p. 5).

This review reveals ambivalence: an acknowledgment of the technical mastery of other poets and the depth of their psychological analyses, as well as jealousy of their popularity, hidden under the accusation of a "lack of ideology in their work." For example, the secret of Pawlikowska's popularity lies in her "unexpected, emotionally impactful associations and comparisons which contemporary poets have adopted as their goal rather than a means, and beyond which lies hopeless emptiness" (am [Maliszewski], 1928, p. 5).

In the first issue of Kwadryga from 1929, two of Rydzewska's poems, "W trupiarni" [In a mortuary] and "Na okręcie" [On the ship], appeared alongside an extensive article titled "W balwierni poetyckiej" [At the literary barber's] summarising the poetic output of the past months, including Pawlikowska's *Paryż*, Halina Konopacka's debut *Któregoś dnia* [One day], Janina Brzostowska's fourth collection *Najpiękniejsza z przygód* [The most beautiful adventure], Józefina Rogosz-Walewska's *Na drodze* [On the road], and Maria Grossek-Korycka's *Pamiętnik liryczny* [A lyrical diary]. The reviewers began their discussion of a group of poems by women poets by making a general observation:

> Women, as a whole, write poetry differently than men. The erotic element, one of the most powerful stimuli for creation, manifests itself differently in a mature poet compared to a female poet. It undergoes a series of filtrations and sublimations in the poet's psyche, compelling him to seek the most perfect expression of his acquisitive and exploratory relationship with the world in his work.
>
> On the other hand, in a female writer, the erotic moment, different in its original structure, appears much more strongly in its pure form. A woman seeks a force beyond the boundaries of her gender, to which she can offer passive resistance when it attempts to dominate her. Descriptions of these quests and their consequences, the tensions and disappointments that arise from them, form the deepest essence of what is known as women's poetry. The apparent sublimation of these drives into the realms of higher cultural interests often takes the form of established symbols becoming an easy cover for erotic content for the writing woman. She may write about God but sees a strong man (Bibrowski & Sebyła, 1929, p. 37).

This is the type of women's poetry that Pawlikowska practices "in its purest form – and consciously so." She is the first "sincere" poetess who "enriches literature with the unadulterated motif of 'femininity,'" while "many of her companions, in a way denying their gender, strive to write like men, without possessing their aggressive and acquisitive attitude toward the external world: they are deceitful and dull." According to the reviewers, the structural axis of "pure" women's poetry and Pawlikowska's poetry is "a man, the struggle with a man, joyful submission" (Bibrowski & Sebyła, 1929, p. 37). Since Konopacka presents in her debut the same "creative attitude" as Pawlikowska, she fulfils the reviewers' expectations for women's poetry. This leads the critics to focus on critiquing Konopacka's technique: "Naturally, these poems are not groundbreaking. They have a calm, balanced post-Skamander production with an inclination towards smooth sound and quatrain-based thirteen-syllable lines, similar to Wierzyński and Lechoń. The works are well-constructed, the mood is there, and the punchlines are in place" (Bibrowski & Sebyła, 1929, p. 38). Janina Brzostowska, as a representative of the "Czartak" group, was judged more harshly, but since she also embodies orthodox 'femininity,' the critique focused on her "artistic lack of control." According to the reviewers, the lack of 'technique' lies in "a strange mixture of writing styles," such as "maintaining traditional rhythms and often imagery, along with the sudden and aggressive forcing of assonance, as dissonant as possible" (Bibrowski & Sebyła, 1929, p. 38). Bibrowski and Sebyła applied a historical and sociological criteria in their assessment of Rogosz-Walewska's "pleasant little poem dedicated to the President." They say, "If we were to judge it based on the contemporary aesthetic and social needs, we would often deny it any value, which would be unfair to the author who fulfilled her role in the era she represents" (Bibrowski & Sebyła, 1929, p. 39). However, this criterion was not applied to the poems of the late Grossek-Korycka: "Unfortunately, they no longer move or capture our interest, neither in their form nor in their technique, which now seems primitive to us, nor in their scope of issues: symbolic and murky metaphysics, or the problem of regaining independence" (Bibrowski & Sebyła, 1929, p. 39).

The last review of women's poetry collections appeared in *Kwadryga* in 1931, when Sebyła briefly assessed Wanda Kragen's *Poza rzeczywistością* [Beyond reality] and Sabina Raciążkówna's *Chińska akwarela* [A Chinese watercolour] as very weak volumes, showing leniency only to Hanna Mortkowiczówna's *Niepotrzebne serce* [Unneeded heart], whom he knew personally from shared

gatherings at Kresy: "[f]ormally, Mortkowiczówna's poems do not rise above the recognised level of achievements (Skamander) and they are often heavily influenced by Iłłakowiczówna" (Sebyła, 1931, p. 328).

In summary, it can be said that no female poet, from Pawlikowska who stood alone on the heights of her artistry, to the crowd of post-Skamander mediocrities, to the lowly commemorative poetry of Rogosz-Walewska, found recognition in the eyes of the Kwadryga members. If they were "painfully perfect," they lacked "ideology"; if they "aspired to write like men," they were "deceitful and dull"; if they were "feminine," they were not sufficiently "sincere"; if they were "sincerely conscious," they were either "post-Skamander-like" or "artistically unrefined." They were never good enough. They were only accepted when they adhered to the traditional literary model of femininity focused on "man" and "the struggle with man," offering him "passive resistance" and ultimately "submission." Considering the various turns of this vicious cycle, Rydzewska had an ideology, wrote like a man, but was not dull, did not follow the Skamander model of poetry, and was artistically refined. She contradicted the interwar, and also that of Kwadryga, views on women's poetry.

Among the poets associated with Kwadryga, only Piechal appreciated the uniqueness of Rydzewska's poetry against the backdrop of the "abundant women's creativity," characterised by "subjectivism, egotism, egocentrism in the flow of uncontrolled lyricism" and expressing the "inherent 'ivy-like' nature of the female psyche." The only common feature between Rydzewska and contemporary poets such as Iłłakowiczówna, Pawlikowska, Tuwim, or Mortkowiczówna was the "characteristic female compassion," which dominated in the collection *Miasto*. And it was only because it was filtered through affiliation with Kwadryga that it produced something so "new," "youthful," and divergent from the poems of "contemporary female authors absorbed in their own psychological nausea": "This is finally a healthy understanding of emancipation, of which Rydzewska is the first natural (without deceit) representative in Polish poetry" (Piechal, 1930, p. 4).

and modernism… I suggest catching up on the historical and literary interpretations of Rydzewska's *Miasto* by following the insights offered by those interwar critics who commented on it only briefly, and then only in connection with "Madonna nędzarzy." "Since these critics were slightly older than the members of Kwadryga, they were able to recognise the Young Poland influences

in Rydzewska's work. Because these influences were obvious to them, they did not discuss them in detail. Critics such as Hulka-Laskowski, Adam Niemojewski, and even the younger Napierski and Piechal noted that Rydzewska's use of lyrical models followed those used previously by Jan Kasprowicz, Leopold Staff, and Andrzej Niemojewski. This would suffice as a full characterisation of the author's poetic work in Miasto, if it weren't for the fact that the Young Poland model, when applied to the artistic, political, and social context of the interwar period, conveyed not only old meanings but also new ones. Therefore, in this part of the chapter, I am returning to "Madonna nędzarzy" in an attempt to finally understand its blasphemous potential:

Keep in Your holy care,
Beautiful Virgin Mary,
Your Sister – the Mother of the Poor,
And her child covered in sores.

Clothe them in Your grace,
As in warm rags,
Beg five pennies for them
From the wealthy.

Take in Your hands all their pains
And the tears that impatiently crowd
Towards eyes faded like the dawn,
Towards festering eyes.

And weigh these tears and pains
On the fair scale of His –
See how under their weight
Your Heaven will bend.

And let me tell You something more,
And let me tell You even more:
You will see in their hungry eyes
Your face stained with shame.

Be ashamed, Beautiful Virgin,
Confess your sin before God,
That your sister – the Mother of the Poor
Is dying of hunger on the doorstep (Rydzewska, 1929b, pp. 21–22).

At first, I agree with Niemojewski that, artistically speaking, this is "a trite piece worthy of schoolgirls" and "does not even match the album verses of great-grandmothers from a hundred years ago." If Rydzewska commits any crime here, it is a crime "only against Polish literature" and can be classified as 'graphomania' (Niemojewski, 1928, p. 42). "Our poetry left behind these 'scrofulous' sores and that melodramatic 'rags' and this whole poorly rhymed ranting […] twenty years ago; conceived in the spirit of revolution, these rhymes shook the edifice of then-prevailing hypocrisy" (Niemojewski, 1928, p. 40). This last sentence makes me consider the 'blasphemous' potential of "Madonna nędzarzy" and the poems from the *Miasto* collection. The author stands in the same ideological place as her great predecessors, especially Kasprowicz or Staff. However, it is a place where they began their inner journey at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries – one of despair and rebellion against God, rather than the place they reached on the eve of the First World War, which was humility and affirmation of the Divine order.[22] In this sense, Rydzewska challenges the conclusion of their existential, spiritual, and intellectual development, which, in the new artistic and ideological context of the 1920s, takes on primarily a political dimension.

Still, it is doubtful if this a fully conscious action and Rydzewska's deliberate intention. The image of two Madonnas, one representing the well-fed and wealthy and the other representing the hungry and poor, along with the language used to accuse the first Madonna of indifference towards the second and those on the social margins, evokes the ethical concept of philanthropy rather than class rebellion. This is because the lyrical statement in the analysed poem is directed towards the figure of social privilege, rather than the figure of deprivation that the lyrical subject advocates for. Therefore, I believe that Rydzewska's most important source of artistic inspiration was the Polish modernist canon, as conveyed by public institutions such as schools, libraries, and her home environment. Later, this list of institutions expanded to include a group of peer writers, who influenced her through textbooks, anthologies, excerpts, books, pamphlets, journals, author meetings, private discussions, and so on. This does not mean that either the canon or Rydzewska herself are

22 See e.g.: Filipkowska, 1983, pp. 301–340; Górski, 1983, pp. 341–369; Jasińska-Wojtkowska, 1983, pp. 371–422.

disregarded. The internal consistency of her poetic vision demonstrates her thorough understanding of the lessons taught by the literature of the Young Poland movement and her intellectual effort as a self-taught individual. As Jan Marx writes, this leads to "the poet's unique formal eclecticism, drawing from expressionism, futurism, and naturalism as demanded by the lyrical theme" (Marx, 1983, p. 80).

Due to her early entry into the professional realm, Rydzewska did not have the opportunity to continue her studies at university or regularly participate in the artistic milieu, where she could have furthered her literary education and clarified her creative programme. Therefore, I believe that the "astonishing commonality of lyrical inspirations" and themes, such as hunger, poverty, decaying suburban shanties, impoverished children, the sick, and the injustices suffered by the innocent (Marx, 1983, p. 87), which Marx highlights as qualities shared by Rydzewska and the other members of the Kwadryga group, are somewhat superficial. From her first interactions with the group, Rydzewska always remained somewhat separate, despite sharing an intellectual awareness of class deprivation with the Kwadryga poets. However, she was distinguished from the other members of the group by the profound existential experience of her own social deprivation and the "ideological hue"[23] of her works. Ultimately, it seems to me that this 'hue' became a determining factor in the divergence of her artistic path from that of the Kwadryga poets. It is worth briefly revisiting the programme of Kwadryga at this point to understand Rydzewska's uniqueness in relation to the group.

As Rymkiewicz writes, three factors contributed to the poetic 'I' once again being identified with the historical 'I' and the poets feeling obligated to participate in social and political life (Rymkiewicz, 1975a, p. 439) These factors were "the burden of the Romantic legacy," "the sudden economic collapse and the onset of the Great Depression," and the "social background" of the

23 I draw here on Tadeusz Bujnicki's observation regarding Szenwald's early poems: "The role of conveying ideas is taken on by the elaborate metaphorical imagery, usually characterised by exaggeration, often reinforced by sound instrumentation […]. Since such images are shaped to evoke certain emotional suggestions, the concept of tonality or ideological hue more closely corresponds to the content of the poem than the clear-cut term, idea or worldview'" (Bujnicki, 1982, p. 295).

poets debuting within the Kwadryga circle at the turn of the 1920s and 1930s (Rymkiewicz, 1975a, p. 439). This resulted in the political radicalisation of the group and their creative work, such as the breakup of the first Kwadryga and the formation of the New Kwadryga, as well as the transition from 'socialised' to 'revolutionary' poems. The Kwadryga members did not create an original poetic programme. They did not formulate a theory of the word and symbol, nor a concept of tradition to approach it critically. However, they did create a "moral programme" regarding the poet's duty to poetry and its audience:

> According to this programme, poets should not be isolated aesthetes; they should turn towards life and create works that refine the morality of the audience. By revolutionising moral attitudes, they would also accelerate socio-political changes. Poetry that acts in this way can be considered socially valuable. The Kwadryga programme was directed against aestheticism in general, and it was not just a dissatisfaction with the status quo of Polish poetry, but also with the social system of Independent Poland. The members of Kwadryga saw the Second Polish Republic […] as a state of poverty, exploitation, and social injustice, where revolutionary changes should occur as soon as possible (Rymkiewicz, 1975a, p. 442).

From the poems of the Kwadryga members, one can discern fragments of the group's unformulated programme. Their model of poetic language was eclectic, incorporating elements of Symbolism, Parnassianism, and Expressionism. They used key words of modernist lyricism such as distance, soul, darkness, abyss, and depth. They also employed indefinite pronouns like something and some, as well as the civilisational language of futurists with references to modern gadgets like antennas, towers, and screws. Additionally, they incorporated the conversational style of Skamander poetry with colloquialisms and everyday expressions (Rymkiewicz, 1975a, p. 443). The categories organising the Kwadryga members' imaginative world, including God, Poet, Work, Civilisation, Nature, and History, were ambivalent. God represented a humanised craftsman without transcendence, working to improve the world, but also symbolised the poet-creator. The poet was seen as both a noble Creator and an ordinary person, alternating between emphasising their uniqueness and loneliness within the collective in a modernist manner, and identifying with the crowd, as seen in nineteenth-century revolutionary songs. Work, in turn, was affirmed as a communal effort contributing to the progress of civilisation, but it was also condemned as a means of proletarian exploitation by the bourgeoisie. In the

early works of the Kwadryga poets, civilisation, like in the works of futurists, was praised as a testament to human intelligence, determination, and strength. However, in later stages, the symbols of modernity, such as the city and the factory, became terrifying spaces of enslavement, similar to expressionism. The city was initially inhabited by creative engineers, satisfied workers, and robust builders, but later, it also became home to the homeless, prostitutes, and cripples. Nature, on the other hand, was seen as deserving protection from destruction caused by human civilisational activity, but it was also considered a dangerous force that needed to be tamed. History, too, was viewed as both a creative, rational, and purposeful power, in which man is an agent, and a destructive, mad, and chaotic force that individuals and communities fall victim to (Rymkiewicz, 1975a, pp. 444–451).

Rydzewska's work during her three years with the Kwadryga circle did not evolve. It did not become more politically radical or incorporate new artistic solutions. She joined Kwadryga already fully formed as a poet. Rather than taking from its members, she enriched the group's poetic offerings in the late 1920s with her unique style. While her poetic language showed the greatest convergence with the group, using expressionist, futurist, and Skamander-like registers, she did so in her own way. Her poems cannot be characterised as Skamander-like, unlike those of other Kwadryga members. However, her vision of God and her approach to the theme of the city differed significantly from her colleagues' early creative practices. In my opinion, Rydzewska did not need to become politically or artistically radical. She did not need to abandon her position of "social sensitivity" and move towards "revolutionary engagement" because her original position was politically significant in both the classical sense and that of Jacques Rancière. I believe this is due to her lack of formal literary education and her creative intuition, which suggested to her that the political action of literature does not lie in resolving social problems through genre variations of revolutionary poetry. Instead, it can be found in illustrating and illuminating poetic genres from a different perspective to make them visible anew. Therefore, apart from the poem "Miasto," we do not encounter discursive fragments or revolutionary metaphors in Rydzewska's poems:

> We ask you a hundred times over – answer – is it worth it
> to shine in rags with your chest, torn like a red banner?

And to lay bricks in agony and sweat, layer by layer, under the foundation?
To build a new empire on injustice, oppression, and poverty?

And if one day a cry bursts from our throats, red as blood –
you stay silent! And in stony silence, clench your stone teeth!
And if the rebellion is crushed by the defeat of spilled blood –
you flood them with a deluge of tenements and crush their victory!

(Rydzewska, 1929b, pp. 10–11).

Szemplińska's "Przemocą" [By violence] from the collection *Wiersze* [Poems] (1933), on the other hand, sounds entirely different. It reflects and expresses the poetess's political consciousness, heralding a class upheaval:

Thus the revolution will pour over you, […]
events will sweep you away. […]
swept into the whirlpool
of historical, dangerous changes,
like the flow of a river,
the rotation of the earth,
the setting of the sun –
inevitable (Szemplińska, 1933, p. 8).

The setting of Rydzewska's poetic images of physiology is not so much the modern city but the shameful areas referred to as suburbs in the interwar period and slums today. However, the term "setting of action" is not precise or appropriate when describing its poetic depiction. It would be more accurate to speak of a place of "eternal stillness" or "eternal imprisonment" because once depicted, the "action" solely consists of the production and reproduction of vice in a world from which there is no escape. The emotional tone, themes, imagery, construction of the world of visions, and language of the narrative collectively contribute to the portrayal of a *cité infernale*, one of the embodiments of Evil in fin-de-siècle literature. Specifically, the modern city, particularly its "cursed districts," is depicted as an earthly Hell (see Popiel, 1995, pp. 349–357; Jedlicki, 1991, pp. 5–24). The dark colour palette, predominantly black and grey with occasional splashes of red to represent blood or fire, or more broadly, the absence of colour in the description of the slums' physical elements – piles of garbage and coal, brothel-lined alleys, the train station, the factory, the hospital, the morgue, bridges, and lampposts that entice suicide – all symbolise

degradation, helplessness, and despair. The slums are a closed space from which no one escapes alive, and death is the only means of escape. However, even death offers no relief, as it signifies a transition from earthly Hell to the metaphysical Hell of damnation. The inhabitants of the slums, as suggested by certain poem titles – porters, the homeless, illegitimate children, convicts, suicides, physical labourers performing menial jobs – are frail, tainted, and sickly beings ("eyes festering," bodies "covered in sores," "Madonna of the destitute") who resemble physical and moral monsters, allegorical representations of pathology, sin, and vice (alcoholism, prostitution, suicide, infanticide, assassination, physical violence) rather than humans.

Crime

The sin of the night crawls on all fours from the navy-blue void
and in its bulging eyes, there is the red light of the moon. […]
The sin staggers in the darkness with bloodshot eyes… It wanders like a naked and starving beggar. […]
The sin circles with its blind eyes and wags its tail… Its face flushes with brick-red blotches […] (Rydzewska, 1929b, pp. 23–24).

The language, imagery, and religious undertones further intensify the infernal expression of Rydzewska's works. For instance, the all-encompassing despair lurking in every corner of this world is emphasised by its symbolic boundary, where the lower limit evokes the medieval theological image found in Dante's *Divine Comedy*, portraying Hell as the depths of a "navy-blue funnel" ("Zbrodnia" [Crime], in: Rydzewska 1929b, p. 23). However, the upper limit offers no hope either – it is either "Heaven, like a low ceiling" ("Kuszenie" [Temptation], in Rydzewska 1929b, p. 19), or a "blue, deaf well" ("II," in Rydzewska 1929b, p. 29). Thus, both the symbolic image of emotional depth and the symbolic image of transcendence carry negative connotations, suggesting an infinite and eternal void. The monstrous beings trapped in this diabolical space are subject to the decaying energy within it, and as they are shaped by their environment, they lose any hope of liberation from their enslavement to labour, which only ensures mere biological survival rather than a dignified existence. This is exemplified in "Tragarz" [The porter]: "He is so old – he must be seventy – / or maybe only twenty-eight – who knows – – – […] his steps, smile, and words are decrepit" (Rydzewska, 1929b, p. 15); "The porter today, tomorrow, and until death will

carry luggage into the city." (Rydzewska, 1929b, p. 16). The world of "ashen faces" and "stinking dwellings" (Rydzewska, 1929b, p. 15) that he exists in is hostile towards him: "Dawn […] struck his eyes with a sunbeam, like a cudgel," "the day is as hard as rye bread," "sleep fell on heavy eyelids, like a silvered axe," "the night rolls through the streets, like a black hearse" (Rydzewska, 1929b, p. 16). This also applies to inanimate objects that perform some kind of work. For example, even the 'wooden arm' of a barrier is 'exhausted' (Rydzewska, 1929b, p. 15).

There is no promise of salvation in the world depicted in Rydzewska's poems. God, much like in the works of modernists, especially the early ones, is burdened with an extremely pessimistic worldview. He is entangled in the tragedy of existence, searching for the sources of evil in the world, blamed for human sin, the imperfection of creation, death, and suffering. […] Of course, the provenance of such an understanding of God, treated interchangeably with necessity, is far more philosophical than religious" (Podraza-Kwiatkowska, 2011, pp. 103–104). In Rydzewska's poems, the lyrical subject still prays to God. Some of her works subtly fulfil the conventions of religious literature, such as a litany ("O God, God. O You, who art in Heaven… / O You, who art in Heaven – have mercy on us," in the poem "Dzień i noc" [Night and day] (Rydzewska 1929b, p. 14), and incorporate phrases from the most important Catholic prayers, like "Our Father" ("… and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive…," "And as we sin not by our own, but by Your fault, Lord / forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive…" in "II" (Rydzewska 1929b, pp. 29–30). Yet, the self does so mechanically, without belief in God's existence or the possibility of establishing contact with Him. There is a conviction that the Creator Himself inflicts suffering on people and is indifferent to their fate:

I.

Our world is like the inside of a black, burning furnace,
The heavy evenings threaten with wind and rain…
O God, God – look – our hearts are torn open
And we do not know tears of joy, nor spring, nor caresses.

We do not light your oil lamps, for we do not know if you exist.
And when we pray – perhaps you will turn away from us…
Oh, tell me – is it you who waves death over the world with a blue rustle?
Are you fierce and do you hurl anger? Or do you cry with us and mourn with us?
[…]

They say you heal and resurrect – Ah, heal us and resurrect!
[…]
Why – like with a broom – do you sweep us away like trash?
We want to live, though pain twists and wrings our bleeding insides!
Why do you not quiet the crime and sins in empty hearts
And push the despairing into the dirty river from the bridge?
[…]
And do you press the cold revolver into clenched fists?
Is it you who whispers in our ear: it's not worth living any longer?
[…]
Is it you who hands us glasses of corrosive poison?
[…]
Why do you bless us not with bread and sun, but with a black curse?
Why are you full of black anger and wrath? (Rydzewska, 1929b, pp. 7–8)

In the poem "W trupiarni" God, when confronted with death, is stripped of His theological attributes of omnipotence and omniscience: "Night touches your chest with dirty claws, / timid flashlight light crawls over your naked body. / God gropes in the corners, searching for the cause of your death" (Rydzewska, 1929b, p. 27). Similarly, in the poems "Zbrodnia" and "Skazani na powieszenie" [Condemned to be hanged], the redemptive power of the Crucifixion is called into question. In the first of these poems, the Christ of the slums is a suicide victim: "A black man jumped from the sixth floor onto the street / and sprawled out in a cross on the pavement," (Rydzewska, 1929b, p. 23) but his death – the sacrifice of a 'flattened body'" – stems from despair and a sense of the meaninglessness of life, confirming complete loneliness of people in an indifferent world. It thus brings no Good News: "No one saw – only the white and well-fed stars / dripped from the dark blue funnel onto the body spread in a cross. / And the even clearer silence spread over the city, / Like a canopy over the Sacrament on the day of the Great Feast" (Rydzewska, 1929b, p. 23). In the second poem, the "condemned to be hanged" stare like "predatory animals" at the windows "barred with iron crossing," (Rydzewska, 1929b, p. 25) but they remain indifferent to the symbolic meaning of the 'crossing' as a promise of spiritual rebirth. They say: "The threat of the gallows and hell hangs over us like a curse," but if "we break a breach in the stone wall," "we will sneak out into the world, onto new work…" (Rydzewska, 1929b, p. 25). In both poems, the function of the cross is tragic and ironic, as it no longer carries its religious,

tradition-rooted meanings; it is simply a sign of death, as in "Zbrodnia," or a dead sign, as in "Skazani na powieszenie."

This realisation of the motif of the Crucifixion connects Rydzewska's practice with the iconoclastic practice of the modernists. For them, the cross was a sign of "persistent, human suffering" that cannot be removed from the world ("Dzień i noc"): "So live, for you must drain life like a chalice to the dregs" ("Bękart," in Rydzewska, 1929b, p. 18). Wojciech Gutowski writes: "The decisive questioning of the salvific mission of Christ is especially evident in those works where the landscape background of the Crucifixion situation is a catastrophic landscape entirely different from the evangelical vision of Golgotha. It does not appear as the result of the murder of the God-Man, but exists eternally as an infinite, emotionally and ontologically homogeneous space of death, stagnation, hopelessness" (Gutowski, 1993, p. 270; see also Podraza-Kwiatkowska, 1977, pp. 29–78). In the world depicted in the discussed poems, the Divine plans for salvation are doomed to failure. Christ's death does not bring an end to human suffering and does not overcome Evil. Christianity has nothing to offer to the inhabitants of the slums.

The political aspect of art in Rancière's concept lies in the "It is a delimitation of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise, that simultaneously determines the place and the stakes of politics as a form of experience. Politics revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time" (Rancière, 2004/2013, pp. 14–15). The political nature of "Madonna nędzarzy" and other poems by Rydzewska from the "Miasto" cycle thus lies in disrupting the existing social order by changing the point of view and making visible those parts of sensory experience that had previously been controlled by 'tradition.' In this context, Rydzewska's 'blasphemy' consists of showing society images of itself that force it to pause and reflect. These are the images of material spaces gaining metaphorical meanings, such as the poor districts of a modern city and their inhabitants. They function on the margins of the Centre, History, Politics, and their material poverty determines their exclusion from the symbolic orders of Culture, Art, and Religion. The inhabitants of the 'unbeautiful districts' in Rydzewska's poetry do not co-create History, do not understand historical events, and do not know or believe that they have any influence over them. It is precisely this lack of historical context, this perpetual present, that makes her poetry an important

historical document. It provides evidence of the existence, during the interwar period, of environments and groups that were disconnected from the public sphere and had no control over their own destiny. These representatives lived outside of history and politics, and their consciousness was tainted by exclusion, sin, crime, and a lack of love. Both the lyrical self and the community, through which Szemplińska observes reality and provides political commentary, possess a completely different consciousness. For example, in the poem "Inwokacja" [Invocation] from the collection "Poems":

> Yellow old women of hunger argue and cry here: twenty-year-old women. […]
> A cobbler killed his wife here, drunk. Tortured cats scream here.
> Apart from crime, death, and birth, nothing happens. […]
> And he whispers prayers into the abyss of the black night,
> in the stench of a smoking stove and damp, sour diapers,
> crushed by the stone of exhaustion from the heavy sleep of lethargy,
> a jobless man who does not believe in God. […]
> Revolution, river of freedom,
> Revolution, hope of the tormented,
> Revolution –
> TOMORROW –
> The CROWD will tear you from the streets with the rhythm of their steps
> (Szemplińska 1933, p. 4).

The use of a modernist language, such as "wrestling with God," by Rydzewska proves to be more effective in expressing despair than the language of revolution (See Chwalba, 1992). This is also the language that was not articulated in the original context of the Young Poland era, due to differing views on the role of art and the artist in society (Podraza-Kwiatkowska, 1975, pp. 384–411). The slums, marginalised even by revolutionary poetry that demanded activism, were not addressed. Leszek Pułka highlights this, explaining that socially engaged poems before the First World War usually focused on pure relations such as folk culture and working-class culture. The suburb, being a "mysterious island," did not fit within the paradigms of the social roles of the artist at the turn of the century" (Pułka, 1992, p. 56).

and the Polish People's Republic (PRL)… As mentioned earlier, we have more information about Rydzewska's postwar biography. This is primarily due to

the documents required by literary and political institutions, as well as the recollections of people who knew her after the Second World War.[24] For instance, we know that she stayed in Warsaw until 1944, where she experienced the Warsaw Uprising and, after its fall, escaped from a German transport and took refuge in Konin. After the war, she worked as a proofreader and editor for the publishing house *Czytelnik* in Łódź until 1948. She then dedicated herself to literary work, living successively in Jelenia Góra, Wałbrzych, and Szczecin. Her postwar work bears deep marks of the demands placed on art by politics: both the account of the Warsaw Uprising, *Godzina W* [The 'W' Hour] (1946), and the three-volume cycle *Ludzie z węgla* [People made of coal] (1950–1953) were subject to censorship, which the author lamented but could not oppose.

Her personal, social, professional, and political situation was difficult in the late 1940s and early 1950s. In 1947, she joined the Polish Workers' Party (PPR). However, in 1949, she was expelled from the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR) for maintaining correspondence with her husband, who was living in Great Britain. She got divorced but did not seek readmission to the party. While gathering material for her novel *Ludzie z węgla*, Rydzewska voluntarily worked as a labourer in the "Biały Kamień" (later "Thorez") mine in Wałbrzych. According to Jerzy Koprowski, who was part of the group of writers settled in Silesia after the war (among them Czesław Jacek Centkiewicz, Stanisława Iwańska, Edward Kozikowski, Jan Nepomucen Miller, Jan Sztaudynger, and Ludwik Świeżawski), Rydzewska was the first, "before anyone else in the country even thought of it, to go to the Wałbrzych mine to get to know the miners through work and then write a novel about it […]; she went to the mine of her own free will, driven by natural interest" (Koprowski, 1965, p. 135). By doing this, Rydzewska not only continued the interwar traditions of 'socialised literature' or 'engaged literature' that drew inspiration from such diverse sources as French naturalism filtered through the programme of the literary group "Przedmieście" or the Soviet socialist realism filtered through the artistic programme of the Polish communist left, but also demonstrated solidarity with the class from which she herself originated.[25] It can

24 Bursewicz, 1959, pp. 32–33; Fornalczyk, 1961, pp. 30–34; Koprowski, 1965, pp. 134–138; Grzegorczyk, 1986, pp. 122–123; Sidoruk, 1986; Frydrykiewicz, 1987, pp. 37–42.

25 See e.g.: Rydzewska, 1946, p. 21; Rydzewska, 1948, p. 4; cz [Czarnecki], 1949, p. 2.

also be assumed that a need to atone for her contacts with her emigrant husband and prove her loyalty to the new regime. However, her literary efforts after the Second World War did not gain her much popularity in the literary community. For example, at a conference, one of the Warsaw writers mocked her method of gathering material, and Adam Polewka sarcastically asked whether he would need to become a minister to write a novel about one" (Koprowski, 1965, p. 135).

In 1953, when she arrived in Szczecin, she appeared timid and somewhat helpless, according to Feliks Fornalczyk. She was virtually without means of subsistence as publishers were not accepting her books for publication. She survived on "sporadic income," which included snippets of prose in local newspapers, radio reports "from the Szczecin Dredging and Deepening Company," and broadcasts of a few chapters of the novel *Parasemos* about the war in Spain, which she was co-writing with Edmund Bączyk (Fornalczyk, 1961, p. 31). Fornalczyk notes that "her community did not spare her unpleasantness, which was often unjustified, incidental, but always unbearable (Fornalczyk, 1961, p. 33). Initially, she was given a place in a villa where Jerzy Andrzejewski had previously lived, but soon a family with a child was moved in with her, despite her protests that she could not work creatively in such conditions. After 1953, as Fornalczyk writes enigmatically, "the situation turned in Mrs. Nina's favour"; the thaw, as for many other Polish writers of that period, also meant for her a "change in publishers' attitudes towards her and the opportunity for steady work. She found employment at the Szczecin radio station and was elected several times as President of the Szczecin Branch of the Polish Writers' Union (1954–1957). In 1956, she received the Gold Cross of Merit, and in 1957, she was awarded the Szczecin City Award for her life's work. She passed away a year later due to a heart attack.

Koprowski defended Rydzewska against criticism of her novels during the thaw period, which accused her of simplifications and schematism (Koprowski, 1961, p. 135) and complacency with censorship. He revealed that she lived a difficult life, isolated both personally and professionally as a writer, despite being a representative of pre-war 'socialised poetry,' which should have benefited her after 1945:

> Some might say that she did not have to do it. It's easy to say today, when we have left that gloomy period behind us. It was much harder to do back then – in a time of overwhelming pressure from all sides. Besides, anyone who knew Rydzewska knows

> that she was a modest and quiet woman who based her writing on observation and intuition. She had no literary theory and was not inclined towards theorising. Because of this, she easily trusted advisors and often gave in to suggestions. And, after all, she had to make a living. Being alone, she could not rely on anyone's help, and writing was the essential content of her life in the most ordinary, everyday sense of the word (Koprowski, 1965, p. 136).

After reading commemorative articles that appeared in the press after her death, I get the impression that Rydzewska's postwar existence was generally about 'not drawing attention to herself,' not only due to her temperament but, primarily, for social and political reasons. Koprowski's extensive essay on this stage of her life highlights the element of "absolute loneliness" in Rydzewska's biography. She "no longer maintained contact with her former companions from Kwadryga" and "never participated in congresses or official meetings. She was afraid of such gatherings altogether." Instead, "she felt most comfortable within the four walls of her room," where she spent "several hours a day" writing. Despite her isolation, "she rejoiced in the success and achievements of her colleagues, always ready to help and share her last penny with those in need" (Koprowski, 1965, p. 137). She was "a quiet and modest fellow writer" (Koprowski, 1965, p. 138)

Parnassian Zuzanna Rabska

"I mentioned to you my obligations; week by week,
I have to write that wretched, cursed *"Drzewo" [The Tree]*.
All's good for nothing! Whatever I write is probably
worse than Zuzanna Rabska's work;
I don't know why that poor soul came to mind"
(Andrzejewski et al., 2014, pp. 92–93).

Zuzanna Rabska made her debut in 1902 with the short story "Dobre cierpienie" [Good suffering] published in the periodical *Biesiada Literacka* [A Literary Feast] (No. 29). Her subsequent novellas, collected in her first book *Zanim światła pogasną* [Before the lights go off] (1909), were received favourably by e.g., Eliza Orzeszkowa and Bolesław Prus, both friends of the Kraushar family. In the encouraging reviews, as Rościsław Skręt diplomatically put it, "the author's high literary culture and formal skill were highlighted. However, she was also criticised for being derivative, susceptible to trends, and having an excess of literary reminiscences in her novellas. Similar strengths and weaknesses were noted in Rabska's subsequent collections of short stories" (Skręt, 1986a, p. 558). Skręt's summary can also be applied to the tone of reviews for her poetry collections: *Miłość mówi* [Love speaks] (1913), *Warszawa w sonetach* [Warsaw in sonnets] (1916), *W płonącym lesie* [In a burning forest] (1918), *Magia książki* [The magic of a book] (1925/1935), *Marmur i słońce* [Marble and the sun] (1932), and *Wojna i książka* [The war and the book] (1947).

In his analysis of the reception of works by Felicjan Faleński, Wiktor Gomulicki, and Antoni Lange, dismissed by critics as Parnassians, Stefan Lichański points out the ambiguity of all "tributes paid to the impeccability of 'form' at a time when 'form' was essentially treated as a wafer meant to facilitate the swallowing of 'content'" (Lichański, 1967, p. 109). Lichański writes that "good manners and factual, scrupulously balanced 'objectivity' in the service of emotional residues sometimes have a peculiar resonance in literary criticism because the phrase about the "impeccability of form" was actually an attempt to dodge a substantive discussion of works whose real novelty and originality were either not noticed or deliberately ignored" (Lichański, 1967, p. 109).

I believe that the above words can also be applied to Rabska's poetry. The formula of 'cultural creativity,' used to describe both her literary and journalistic output (hinting here, again, at the phrase coined by Witold Gombrowicz, who called female newspaper reviewers 'cultural aunts'), suggests boredom and effectively discourages literary scholars from revisiting her works. To this day, Rościsław Skręt remains the author of the only comprehensive study of Rabska's biography and organisational activities. Information about her literary work, which includes poetry books, collections of novellas and novels, as well as translations, can also be found in dictionary entries,[1] while a detailed list of her cultural and literary journalism is provided in the Adam Bara Catalogue.[2]

Rabska was the granddaughter of Mathias Bersohn, a merchant and antiquities collector.[3] Her parents were Jadwiga neé Bersohn and Aleksander Kraushar, a lawyer, historian, and Varsavianist.[4] She was the niece of Hortensja Lewental, who was a co-owner of *Kurier Warszawski* (Landau, 1972, pp. 220–221). Rabska was also a poet and prose writer, an author of books for young people, a passionate reader, and an ex-libris collector. Additionally, she was one of the animators of the interwar and post-war bibliophile movement in Poland.

1 "Rabska Zuzanna," 1964, pp. 5–9; „Rabska Zuzanna," 2000, p. 89; B.M. [Marzęcka], 2001, pp. 7–9.

2 *Bibliography of the Literary Content of Polish Journals from the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries (up to 1939)* at the Institute of Literary Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw, Nowy Świat 72.

3 "He was a sincere lover of art, a passionate archaeologist, and a collector of antiquities. He dedicated all his free time, apart from his professional duties in industry and commerce, to public service – whether as a member of the board of the Warsaw Charitable Society, a member of the board of the Society for the Encouragement of Fine Arts, or as a participant and initiator of various social, artistic, and charitable endeavours. […] The rich collection of ancient objects that Bersohn amassed throughout his life became part of the collections of the National Museum in Warsaw, while all Judaica were donated by Bersohn during his lifetime to the Jewish Community, where in 1904 the Mathias Bersohn Museum of Jewish Antiquities was established" (Rabska, 1935, pp. 469–470).

4 "The salon of K. in late nineteenth century was one of the main centres of intellectual life in Warsaw. Politicians, scholars, writers, and artists gathered there. More than one scientific or literary initiative emerged from this salon" (Maternicki, 1970, p. 242).

Rabska inherited her literary interests from her mother and her passion for collecting from her father and grandfather. She believed that her emotional and intellectual growth, as well as her family and social life, were built on a strong foundation in the field of books. This is evident in the title of her memoir, *Moje życie z książką* [My Life with Books] (1959–1964), which not only paints a vivid picture of Warsaw's intellectual scene in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but also offers a fascinating self-portrait of a woman with intellectual and artistic aspirations.

Her family home was often a meeting place for writers, artists, and scholars. Throughout her childhood and later years, she had the opportunity to meet and interact with prominent figures such as Adam Asnyk, Deotyma (Jadwiga Łuszczewska), Adolf Dygasiński, Maria Konopnicka, Ignacy Maciejowski (Sewer), Eliza Orzeszkowa, Bolesław Prus, and Stanisław Wyspiański. She was taught by Stefania Sempołowska, attended the Zuzanna Morawska school, and later attended lectures at the Flying University in Warsaw, Jagiellonian University in Kraków, and the Sorbonne in Paris. She also worked at the reading rooms of the Warsaw Charity Society. Her passion for books was nurtured by her grandfather, father, and later by Jan Lorentowicz and Stanisław Piotr Koczorowski. She had one of the largest collections of ex-libris in the country, which unfortunately was destroyed during the Warsaw Uprising. Rabska attributed great importance to Jan Lorentowicz's influence on her intellectual development since 1909, particularly during a period in which she formed closer ties with this critic, who had recently returned from abroad. Like Ruskin and Morris, Lorentowicz actively promoted the revival of books and "fearlessly asserted his individuality as a critic and book reformer" (Rabska, 1964, p. 47). Rabska combined her passion for collecting books with her publicist and organisational activities, such as writing popular articles, attending Polish and European bibliophile congresses, and participating in the establishment of the Polish Bibliophile Society (1924) and the Polish PEN Club (1925). In 1906, she married Władysław Rabski, a well-known theatre critic, writer, and leading publicist of the National Democracy, associated with the Kurier Warszawski. Seventeen years her senior, Rabski passed away in 1925, and they had one daughter.

During the interwar period, Rabska collaborated with various daily and cultural magazines, but she became primarily associated with *Kurier Warszawski*, where she ran the "Kronika literacka" [The literary chronicle] after her husband's death (1925–1939). Due to her interest in books and her work

as a reviewer, Rabska received poems from most female poets of the interwar period. The collection she amassed was donated to the National Library after 1945, and it was incorporated into the standard catalogues rather than treated as a separate collection. Unfortunately, reconstructing the collection now, which could serve as valuable source material for researching women's poetry from 1918–1939, is practically impossible. The only evidence of its existence are the heartfelt dedications found on the first pages of the volumes currently held by the National Library.

Rabska defined her poetic interests, styles, genres, and themes (which she never surpassed) early on in her collection *Miłość mówi*. This volume shows the predominant use of sonnet genre and ekphrasis, and includes aesthetic impressions from her travels, tributes to prominent historical figures, artists, and writers, as well as translations of poems by European poets. The characteristics of this "elegantly published volume, adorned with a cover by E. Okuń" were listed by its most expressive reviewer, Wiesław Lubicz. These characteristics would be repeated in various configurations by reviewers of Rabska's subsequent volumes:

> The foundation from which everything in Rabska's poetry grows is sadness and reflection. […] The author's poetic reflection revolves around a series of notable figures, creating refined and melancholic sonnets. […] A high level of spiritual culture gives rise to discerning demands. The titles of the sonnets themselves mark the dignified path of Ms. Zuzanna Rabska's poetic contemplation: Mickiewicz, Leonardo, Michelangelo, etc. These figures serve as the focal points for her thoughts. Additionally, the presence of an ancient castle, a seaside emptiness, a statue, and monsters on an old cathedral provoke the weaving of her poetry and stir her heart (Lubicz, 1913, pp. 129–130).

The characteristics of Rabska's poems, catalogued by Lubicz, create an impression of their monolithic, static, and ahistorical nature. The subsequent volumes of her poetry seem like just another instalment of the same book, another episode of the same story. This suggests an interpretation through the lens of Parnassianism.

Aneta Mazur's introductory remarks in her book hint at this approach, stating that Parnassianism in Poland was present enigmatically and partially; we do not witness the birth, development, and decline of a phenomenon that would follow any logical sequence. […] It is impossible to establish a model of Parnassianism due to its heterogeneous nature, dominated by individual creative

personalities. Therefore, its coherent model can only be constructed through the arbitrary selection of characteristics" (Mazur, 1993, pp. 11–12). Mazur examined Polish poetic production only up to 1914 and identified a few women, like Zofia Trzeszczkowska, who wrote Parnassian poems and translations. Yet, the critic's detailed description, analysis, and interpretation were devoted primarily to the lyrical output of male poets at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This raises questions about the Polish female Parnassians. Did they exist at all? Did they exist but use Parnassianism for their own purposes? Did literary critics, who dismissed male Parnassians as well, instead of making an effort to understand them, labelled their works as 'cultural poetry,' thereby absolving themselves of the duty of its careful reading?

Rabska's name appears in Mazur's book only in the final list of volumes that constitute the source material for her study. She is mentioned as the author of just one work, the collection *Marmur i słońce* from 1933. This catalogue does not include Rabska's first volume *Miłość mówi* from 1913 or her last *Książka i wojna* from 1947. This makes it difficult to consider her work as an example of both Parnassianism and the movement's 'long duration,' postulated by the Mazur: "Contrary to formulated poetics, Parnassianism is present in the immanent poetics of many texts and authors. Of course, it is not a school or a poetic movement; it lacks a manifesto, leaders, programmatic works, and authors who engage with a programme" (Mazur, 1993, p. 114).

For the purposes of this chapter, I assume that Rabska's poems engage with the programme of Parnassianism. I am curious about the purpose for which she might have used Parnassianism. Rabska's subsequent collections vary greatly in terms of artistic quality, so analysing their contents in detail does not seem purposeful. Instead, it is more interesting and intellectually fruitful to highlight the dominant themes that connect her entire body of work. It is worth noting that many of the remarks made by Alina Kowalczykowa regarding the early poetry of Antoni Słonimski can also be applied to the description, analysis, interpretation, and evaluation of Rabska's work (see Kowalczykowa, 1967, pp. 5–57).

As a foundation of her work, Parnassianism connects Rabska with the Skamandrites and other classicising poets of the interwar period. Jarosław Marek Rymkiewicz wrote about the 'Great Five' in a way that could also be said of Rabska. He stated that "while modernist Parnassianism […] was directed against the lexical and imaginative excesses of the Symbolists" (Rymkiewicz, 1975b, p. 311), Skamander's Parnassianism was a continuation of the modernist

Parnassianism, and it stemmed from both a rebellion against and fascination with modernist sentimentality" (Rymkiewicz, 1975b, p. 310). However, Rabska distanced herself from Parnassianist displays of formal virtuosity.

As a literary-historical term, Parnassianism refers to a movement in late nineteenth-century French poetry that positioned itself between Romanticism and Symbolism, coinciding with literary Realism and Naturalism as well as scientific Positivism. The French Parnassians did not form a cohesive group, but notable creators of this movement include Théophile Gautier, José-María de Heredia, Leconte de Lisle, Théodore de Banville, Stéphane Mallarmé, Sully Prudhomme, and Paul Verlaine. Each of these poets dealt with themes that were central to their artistic imagination. Albert Thibaudet categorised these poets into three groups: the 'decorators' who followed Leconte de Lisle's model, the 'fantasy poets' who followed Banville, and the 'poets of intimate life' who imitated Baudelaire (Thibaudet, 1967, pp. 293–297). What united the Parnassians on an artistic level was their distance from the legacy of Romantic poetry and its tendency towards personal revelations. On a political level, this distance overshadowed the ideological crisis following the failure of the Springtime of Nations and the restoration of the Second Empire with its authoritarianism based on the military, police, administration, and the Catholic Church.

Parnassianism, as a product of the positivist era, drew inspiration from philosophical thought and scientific findings of this period. It proposed a model of poetry that was objective, intellectual, descriptive, and secular. The Parnassians drew on the fields of philology, ethnography, and the study of religions to shape their erudition, gaining a deeper insight into ancient culture and other civilisations considered exotic. Their fascination with the richness of artistic and intellectual forms from the past and their passion for reconstructing them led to accusations of 'antiquarianism.' This meant that the Parnassians were criticised for simply processing historical research findings, which made their poetry resemble the didactic lyricism of the eighteenth century or the discourse of scientific treatises. Albert Thibaudet's humorous disregard for the erudite dimension of Parnassianism, where he equates its products with artifacts, paradoxically reveals his intuition that antiquarian poetry can serve a narrative function in shaping identity, such as in the creation of national identity. For instance, Thibaudet writes about Heredia in the following manner:

> This artisan of art understood the sonnet like a book binding or a suit of armour: but a splendid binding for a trite text, an armour of rhymes as empty as those of Eviradnus, under the helmet of which a (library) rat nibbles. The historical Roman, Castilian, Japanese sonnets of *Les Trophées* lived; they dazzled the cultivated from 1880 to 1900 with their novelty. Later they took on for provincial youths […] the august and hollow shape of the emissaries of the state in the museums of their native towns (Thibaudet, 1967, p. 294).

However, beneath the mask of objectivity, the Parnassians concealed deep conflicts and smuggled in a tendentious vision of the world. For example, their version of Hellenic culture is one of harmony and lack of conflict, based on elements such as humanism, pantheism, and the triad of truth-goodness-beauty, among others. As Mazur writes:

> Even the less ambitious attempts cannot be reduced solely to an aesthetic gesture. Parnass desires the past not only with the voice of an aesthete and a scholar but also with the hunger of the heart; it desires it for its own sake. […] History and the exotic emphasised the fragility of existence, intensified melancholy, and the pain of transience, although, paradoxically, they also soothed it. Heredia […] distils moments of sublimity and beauty from the past. Leconte de Lisle feels disgust for the world of the living but respects one thing about it: the effort of the solitary individual, lost in the darkness of ignorance. […] Ultimately, they all fled to a time-space that was distant from the hated present (Mazur, 1993, p. 23).

The Parnassians regarded poetry as a craft. They cultivated the ideals of the sixteenth-century Pléiade, valued the sonic quality of words, and favoured refined yet understandable vocabulary that accurately named matter. They prioritised rhythm and rhyme, particularly alliterations and assonances, over versification experiments, and preferred the sonnet over other lyrical forms. They also continued the tradition of the "iconicity of poetry," which aims to stimulate the visual imagination and express "visible objects" (Mazur, 1992, p. 28), especially through images, frescoes, sculptures, architecture, and so on. The principle of *impassibilité*, or impassiveness, concealed strong emotions, existential dilemmas, and political disillusionment.

Almost every European literature had a national variation of Parnassianism. In Poland, its elements appeared as early as the positivist period in the works of Felicjan Faleński, but it became more visible only in the early phase of Young Poland, notably in the poetry of Antoni Lange. However, it was never truly

appreciated in Poland. As Jerzy Święch writes about the modernist translations of French Parnassian poems, "[d]espite the ideological, philosophical and socio-national implications that the doctrine of French Parnassus takes on in Poland, its reception was mainly a matter of aesthetic programs" (Święch, 1970, p. 206). In other words, everyone interpreted it according to their own conceptions, sometimes subjecting the language and ideas of the original to far-reaching changes, leading to a distortion of its ethical and aesthetic message.

Due to the partitions, the dynamics of the development of literature and science in the Polish lands was different, and their relationship with religion was less aggressive compared to France. In Poland, there was an emphasis on the methodological distinctness of science and poetry, although they shared the goal of understanding the mysteries of the universe (Mazur, 1993, p. 43). Polish modernists also had a different attitude towards Romanticism and its lyrical expressions of sentimentality, which is why "the phenomenon of impersonality (*impersonalité*) was absolutely unassimilable for us" (Mazur, 1993, p. 43). The influence of philological innovations on literature, particularly concerning the epics and mythology of ancient peoples, including non-European ones, was marginal in Poland (Olkusz, 1992, p. 12). On the other hand, Greco-Roman antiquity was primarily used to address national issues, following the example of Stanisław Wyspiański. Therefore, according to Mazur, the term "Polish antiquarianism" is problematic (Mazur, 1993, p. 44). It was only towards the end of the era that the periodical *Museion* (1911–1913) appeared with a programme approximating Parnassianism (Stala, 1980, p. 311), along with Fortunat Strowski's synthesis *Obraz literatury francuskiej w XIX wieku* [French literature in the nineteenth century] (1913), which clarified the essence of French Parnassianism.

Based on this research, Mazur concludes that in Poland, the opportunity for a poetry model created by Parnassus, limited in its creative ambitions but informed by scientific erudition, remained unexplored (Mazur, 1993, p. 44). One reason for this was the fact that Parnassianism was either seen as "too innovative or already outdated and, in truth, never fully understood" by the Poles (Mazur, 1993, p. 51). Antoni Potocki expressed a similar sentiment in 1911, stating that "we will never fully digest […] the plastic and synthetic minds of the French psyche," such as Gautier, de Banville, Mallarmé, Rimbaud, Leconte de Lisle, Baudelaire, and Verlaine. In his view, they remained an enigma to the Poles (Potocki, 1911, pp. 365–366). Ultimately, in Poland, French Parnassianism was primarily associated with formal virtuosity.

Rabska, like other Polish Parnassians, was familiar with the works of French Romantics, Symbolists, and Parnassians, as evident in her translations of their poems. Following the practice of the time, she first published her works in literary magazines and later reprinted them in her poetry collections. However, like other Parnassians, she selectively incorporated elements from foreign-language lyricists that aligned with her aesthetic concepts. These elements centred on descriptive poetry and were embodied in poems that adhered to the rules of ekphrasis and the sonnet versification schemes. Ekphrasis, a literary work that describes a piece of art, dominated Rabska's literary output, both in poetry and memoirs. Since my goal is not to provide a comprehensive analysis of Rabska's connections with the visual arts as proposed by Aneta Grodecka,[5] I will simply state that Rabska's focus is primarily on high culture, encompassing old buildings, applied art, paintings, and books. However, the subject matter of Rabska's ekphrases undergoes a significant change in independent Poland. While her early poetry collections, published at the end of the Young Poland period, predominantly feature descriptions of architectural and painting works, accompanied by memories of great creators of the past, her interwar poems revolve around rare books, manuscripts, incunabula, and early prints. Rabska also wrote *Ossolineum (1828–1928)* (1928), one of the few descriptive poems of the interwar period that follows the traditional form of ekphrasis accompanying a cultural event (see Juszczak, 2012), specifically the centenary celebrations of the Ossoliński Library. In this way, Rabska fulfils one of the currents of Parnassianism that was largely absent in Poland; one that, as pointed out by Aneta Mazur, was intertwined with national issues, particularly "antiquarianism."

I am of an opinion that Rabska's conscious choice of Parnassianism, antiquarianism, ekphrasis, and the sonnet can be explained in at least four ways. The first approach relates to the interconnected processes collectively referred to as the post-Enlightenment order or modernity, which includes the belief, still held by cultured individuals at the beginning of the twentieth century, that it is

5 "Many poets are still awaiting monographic studies that will reveal their connections with painting; they include Teofil Lenartowicz, Jan Kasprowicz, Zuzanna Rabska, Stefan Flukowski, Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz, Jan Lechoń, and Krzysztof Karasek, among others" (Grodecka, 2009, p. 24).

possible to separate the individual from their local and historical circumstances. In Rabska's case, this could involve aspects such as race, gender, and profession, specifically Jewishness, femininity, and authorship.

The Enlightenment gave rise to intellectuals and the idea of modern education, which involved reflections on culture and its preservation. In the eighteenth century, Johann Gottfried Herder viewed culture as a unifying force within society, similar to how blood animates and nourishes the body, distinguishing it from civilisation, which he associated with customs, laws, and technical knowledge. This concept of culture developed in two directions. The particularist direction, emphasising distinctiveness and difference, was embraced by German Romantics who, following Herder, saw culture as the spiritual force of a nation expressed through language, art, customs, beliefs, and social practices. On the other hand, the universalist direction was adopted by authors associated with the classics, who interpreted the term "culture" according to its Latin meaning, "cultivation," a careful and systematic process. Those who possess a significant amount of culture are those who have the leisure time, financial means, and ability to learn in order to gain insight into the vast heritage of the past. The goal of these modern humanists is to educate future generations of cultured individuals who will preserve and expand humanity's heritage. The universal concept of culture, treating humanity as a whole, was embraced by a significant portion of European, including Polish, artistic and literary criticism, viewing culture as a collective, transnational achievement of an educated global elite.

Modern intellectuals who conceptualise themselves in this way identify with 'high culture' because they believe that only high culture expresses the metaphysical longings of humanity. They recognise that we live in a "disenchanted" world, as Max Weber puts it, devoid of a transcendent dimension. Throughout the Enlightenment, 'high culture' has been juxtaposed with religion because it offers an ethical vision of human existence. It gives meaning to aspects of life that are deeply human and unchanging, such as the human body, erotic love, and family community. This vision serves as a protector of social bonds, identity, and belonging. It safeguards the social capital created by previous generations and ensures its continuation to future generations. For Rabska, who proudly continued her family's scientific, artistic, and collecting traditions, 'high culture' and the act of praising it, particularly through forms like Parnassianism and ekphrasis, served as a path to emancipation from her

Jewishness and Judaism. It allowed her to assimilate into Polish and European culture, while also leading a secular life grounded in culture and ethics.

It is important to note that Rabska's father, Aleksander Kraushar, lived and worked during a period of aesthetic revival in the Russian partition, and he was connected to the circles that initiated and fuelled it. Wiesław Olkusz writes that, for this generation, Józef Kremer provided "a systematic exposition of aesthetics as a distinct field of cultural development, and some of his concepts, such as the notion of creativity as contact with God, would resonate in the works of Konopnicka and the lyrics of other creators" (Olkusz, 1984, p. 8). In the Poznań region, the situation was different, as German reflections dominated the perception of art there: "engaging in art was not seen as a manly or respectable occupation, as it lacked financial benefits" (Grodecka, 2009, p. 85). However, in Warsaw, the aesthetic revival was supported by the development of ekphrasis. Numerous practitioners of ekphrasis gathered in publications like *Bluszcz*, edited by Maria Ilnicka, and in her salon on Tuesdays. Notable figures in this group include Gabriela Puzynina, whose aesthetic sensitivity was instrumental in the development of Polish ekphrasis" (Grodecka, 2009, p. 78) and Stanisław Krzemiński, who played a crucial role in artistic education as the editor of albums published under the title 'Muzeum sztuki europejskiej' [A museum of European art]" (Grodecka, 2009, pp. 84–85). When the poetess from Vilnius began publishing her poems in Warsaw magazines, she became the "unofficial muse of Maria Ilnicka's salon. […] Her presence brought a taste for aristocratic education, where drawing lessons and the ability to freely comment on art were part of the behavioural norms in the capital (Grodecka, 2009, pp. 81–82). Aleksander Kraushar held Maria Ilnicka, the editor of *Bluszcz*, in high regard and enjoyed visiting her. In a memoir article written toward the end of his life, he admitted that associating with Ilnicka's 'circle' had a significant impact on his thoughts about art (see Kraushar, 1929, pp. 71–109). During that time, he also wrote ekphrases, which were later published in the collection *Strofy Alkara* [Alkar's verses] (1925).

It should not come as a surprise, then, that Kraushar's daughter, who grew up in her parents' social circle, not only wrote descriptive poetry but also structured her memoirs as a series of ekphrases. Her memoir, titled *Moje życie z książką*, is a collection of descriptions of spaces: her grandfather's study and library, her father's study with its engravings, her aunt's salon and books, her own apartment with its collection of artworks and two specialised libraries. One library, filled

with poetry, belonged to the lady of the house, while the other, focused on theatre, belonged to the master of the house. Rabska also described the rare books she saw in Polish and foreign museums, some of which she purchased for her own collection. The Kraushar and Rabski families lived and worked in places surrounded by objects that symbolised high culture: books, paintings, engravings, sculptures, clocks, vases, and other knick-knacks. Let us consider, for example, the beginning of the second volume of Rabska's memoirs, which is particularly rich in meaning. This is because Rabska's memoir coincided with the beginning of a new stage in her life: her marriage to Władysław Rabski. In the memoir, this moment represents both joy and serious dilemmas, bordering on a family crisis, related to the choice of where the young couple would live. After considering many properties, each associated with significant historical events or important figures in Poland's history, the Kraushar family ultimately decided that the Rabskis should live "in the annex of the Krasiński Palace on Krakowskie Przedmieście":

> Only there should we establish our nest, nowhere else, but in the ancient building within whose venerable walls Marshal Małachowski worked on the draft of the Constitution of May 3rd, and where, from 1827 to 1830, Fryderyk Chopin lived before leaving Warsaw; it is a building where Zygmunt Krasiński meditated and created his literature, and where the well-stocked Ordynacja Library, rich in historical materials, was housed (Rabska, 1964, vol. 2, p. 7).

The choice of residence and its furnishing, where there is no room for accidental objects lacking historical legitimacy positions the Kraushars and the Rabskis among the 'cultivators' – the continuators, creators, and guardians of 'high culture' and of the universalist current of national tradition. Ferdynand Hoesick, who married Zofia Lewental, another granddaughter of Mathias Bersohn and the daughter of Hortensja Lewental (sister of Jadwiga Kraushar), described the significance of the place of residence and its appearance in similar terms. When he was looking for a wife, he chose the Lewental family because their home alone testified to their belonging to a "very cultured and refined environment." Hoesick writes, "It was enough to see [Hortensja's] apartment: truly princely, and a magnificent museum, with its collection of paintings, works of art, elegant furniture, bronzes, porcelains, old prints, and bindings from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, to be convinced that it was the most beautiful patrician house in Warsaw" (Hoesick, 1959, pp. 473–474).

The second aspect that explains Rabska's association with Parnassianism, which is connected to the first, relates to the condition of intellectual-artist women in the Polish territories at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. At this time, women with cultural and literary ambitions had two personal models – two points of reference in constructing their own creative biographies: Maria Konopnicka and Eliza Orzeszkowa. Rabska knew both, but she was closer to the model represented by Konopnicka. The latter writer was regarded as a woman fulfilled in motherhood, a national poet, an erudite who complemented her education through many travels abroad, and the author of ekphrases (see Olkusz, 1984) published, for instance, in her 1901 collection *Italia*. According to Aneta Grodecka, in Young Poland, "relationships with family and friendships with painters still determined the level of knowledge about the visual arts. However, among poets dealing with art, there appeared surprising cases of 'self-taught' individuals, such as Maria Konopnicka and Jan Kasprowicz. The poetess occupied a unique position in the poetic hierarchy of ekphrasis" (Grodecka, 2009, p. 93). Kraushar was intellectually close to Kasprowicz and also maintained an acquaintance with Konopnicka. Her poems about Italian Madonnas, especially in their educational dimension, were highly valued even in the interwar period, as mentioned by Jadwiga Petrażycka-Tomicka in her work *Słowo i obraz* [Word and image] (1921). Konopnicka's example was proof that a creative woman could integrate into the current of national culture and literature by applying, to use Grażyna Borkowska's phrasing, the "strategy of mimicry" (see G. Borkowska, 1996), that is, subordinating individual desires to higher ideals such as Culture or Nation.

Although poetic ekphrasis "entered a 'golden age' during the Young Poland period," it nevertheless "hardly received applause from literary critics who rarely reviewed such works, and if they undertook such a task, they did not spare poets their sarcasm. […] Young Poland reviewers considered poetic ekphrasis a form 'worse' than a painting" (Grodecka, 2009, p. 24). Still, and perhaps precisely because of this, descriptive poetry, particularly ekphrasis, is suitable for expressing praise for 'high culture' which encompasses the invisible, that is, all that transcends individual and tribal perspectives, unites the human community, and ensures its durability. It allows its members to care for each other and to communicate with past and future generations. Ekphrasis brings about the awareness of the most important issues of modernity. For example, after recognising that 'high culture' is the secular equivalent of religion, it

allows us to ask the question of what exactly we learn from studying art, literature, philosophy, history, and music: do we only memorise dates, names, and styles on a rational level, or do we gain another kind of knowledge on the level of existence? Ekphrasis provides a reply to that, too: we learn the virtue of appropriateness, that is, the knowledge of what to feel about a given object, on a given occasion, and to what extent. In this sense, the creator of ekphrases, Zuzanna Rabska in this case, follows in the footsteps of both her own father and Konopnicka, placing herself among the educators of successive generations and assuming the traditional, recognised role in Polish culture of a woman as a teacher, educator, and guardian of tradition. As such, she carves out a place for herself in national literature.

The third reason why Rabska connected herself with ekphrasis relates not so much to camouflaging as to abstracting from Rabska's own origins within her private, family, and public, social spaces. As Rościsław Skręt notes, Zuzanna's husband, Władysław Rabski, who used the initials 'WR' in *Kurier Warszawski*:

> commented on current events in the most widely read daily newspaper in the capital, and until the end of his life, and in line with the programme and tactics of this faction [the National Democracy], he consistently opposed all left-wing groups and movements. […] R. was equally ruthless in opposing new trends in art, attempting to discredit them using racial and political criteria, labelling them as Jewish and Bolshevik. He particularly consistently and stubbornly fought against the Skamander group (Skręt, 1986b, p. 563).

The Skamander poets did not remain silent in response; for example, Antoni Słonimski and Julian Tuwim made him one of the negative characters in the *First Warsaw Cabaret* in 1922:

> Jews, Jews everywhere…
> I scream, I roar, I shout,
> How to get rid of this abomination?
> Jews all around!
>
> […]
> Enemies everywhere! If only I could find
> some comfort in my family,
> But even there,
> I have a nice show:
> Jews, Jews everywhere… (Słonimski & Tuwim, 2013, p. 32).

Additionally, Tuwim, in the poem "Rodowód" [Genealogy], reminded Rabski of his wife's Jewish origins:

> Why do you rage, my Wuerz,
> Why do you call me a little Jew?
> Your *Kurier* reeks of Jewry,
> Your wife, sir, is also a Semite […]
> Where does this nobility begin,
> Where does the Wuerz family come from?
> And where do your own little Wuerz's
> maternal roots begin? (J. Tuwim, 1921/1958, p. 63).

The anti-Semitic statements made by Rabski during the interwar period, in line with a wider trend in public debate, led to constant press skirmishes about the origins of families like Rabska and the Lewentals. These families, like many others, made significant efforts towards assimilation, which involved loosening ties with their native culture and 'earning' acceptance into the culture they aspired to, including converting to Christianity, and adopting conservative views. However, they faced animosity from a segment of Polish society influenced by right-wing writer and publicist Adolf Nowaczyński. He held a "vision of Poland for Poles, where there was no place for Jewish co-citizens, co-creators of Polish civilisation and culture," a "model of a Pole whose patriotism was measured by the level of nationalist and anti-Semitic beliefs," defended a "homogeneous culture," and attacked those who, "regardless of self-identification and merits, were denied the right to Polishness" (Domagalska, 2004, p. 7).

One can only attempt to imagine how incredibly challenging – politically, socially, and existentially – the situation must have been for Rabska and others in her social circle. As Jerzy Maternicki writes, Aleksander Kraushar "held liberal beliefs. Initially, he was not associated with any political group, but later, at the beginning of the twentieth century, he became closer to the National Democracy. His connection with the Jewish community also increasingly loosened until, around 1903, he and his wife converted to Catholicism" (Maternicki, 1970, p. 242). Similarly, Irena Landau writes about the Lewental family: "In 1902, L. and his wife were baptised in Rome, with L. taking the names Franciszek Salezy" (Landau, 1972, p. 221). This event occurred a year after Ferdynand Hoesick's engagement to his daughter Zofia. Her father had promised to give her in marriage under the condition that the prospective son-in-law convert

from Protestantism to Catholicism: "I told him that I would gladly do so, and as quickly as possible, because my Protestantism had long been a thorn in my side as a Polish writer, and I had long considered converting to Catholicism, only waiting for an incentive in that direction" (Hoesick, 1959, p. 476). Thus, the interwar discussions on the so-called Jewish question reignited issues that seemed long resolved and buried in the Rabska family but turned out to be still open. As a result, she was fully accepted as 'one of their own' by either the "true" Poles (see Domagalska, 2004) or the circle of progressive intelligentsia, which identified with the circle of Skamander and *Wiadomości Literackie* (see Prokop-Janiec, 1992).

The constant immersion in art, such as living in an apartment resembling a hybrid of a museum and an antique shop, creating descriptive poetry, and working in bibliophile societies, can be seen as attempts to organise daily life in a way that allows for abstraction from local, historical, and racial conditions. According to Immanuel Kant, an aesthetic experience is akin to a mystical experience because it is disinterested. In other words, a work of art refers to both itself and a reality beyond the present moment; it is an end in itself, not a means to something else (see Kant, 1790/2000). Engaging with a work of art redeems an individual's existence from accidental determinations such as nationality, religion, or gender. However, this redemption does not require a traditional temple, as it occurs in a disinterested encounter with a useless object in a modern temple, such as a museum, gallery, concert hall, library, or private study.

Rabska's focus, along with that of many other bibliophiles in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, on manuscripts, rare books, antique prints, and ex-libris aligns with the process described by Ewa Bieńkowska. Since the Enlightenment, art, including the art of publishing, has operated in the same realm as religion. This is why art gained significance in the eighteenth century and in the nineteenth century, it became a salvific endeavour, with the artist, including the editor, taking the place of the prophet and priest (see Bieńkowska, 1999). The high value placed on aesthetic experience in the nineteenth century led to the transformation of individual philologies into academic disciplines, as advocated by John Ruskin, to the revival of the book (see Ruskin, 1865/2002). At universities, in cafes, and in salons, people began discussing not only the difference between good and bad art, literary canons, and curricula based on the masterful achievements of the past, but also talking about well and poorly published books. Bibliophile societies, private collections, and editors' congresses

also emerged. This Enlightenment-based, liberal, secular, individualistic trend that valued engagement with works of art (including literature in its material form – the book) as a salvific experience also emancipated Rabska from her Jewish roots, both privately and publicly. At the same time, however, the familial and personal devotion to the Book allowed her to maintain deep cultural ties with her ancestors.[6]

Furthermore, Parnassianism, understood broadly as both a way of life and a creative stance for Rabska, could be seen as her attempt to navigate the extensive debate on women's literature that lasted almost two decades. This debate occurred during a time of significant political and economic changes for women, as well as within an atmosphere of moral and artistic revolution. As a representative of an assimilated Jewish family, the wife of a nationalist writer, and an author of children's and youth literature, Rabska had to conform to the expectations of the conservative bourgeoisie, who dominated the publishing market in that segment. Given her family's long-standing efforts towards assimilation and the increasing anti-Semitic sentiments of the interwar period, she could not afford to write overly modern or avant-garde poetry, as she did not want to be associated with the trends her husband dismissed as Bolshevik or Jewish inventions. Parnassianism, influenced by the poetic experiences of Young Poland, became a suitable model for Rabska's poetry, as it was considered sufficiently 'neutral' in terms of worldview. This allowed her to practice and promote it in the pages of *Kurier Warszawski* without risking any doubts among the bourgeois readership.

Kurier Warszawski is the most well-known example of this trend in the interwar "'non-partisan press' unaligned with any established political group,"

6 "My first encounters with beautiful, artistic publications took place in my grandfather's study. My grandfather was a collector and connoisseur of antiquities. The charm of that study, overloaded with art objects from various eras and nations, was the books. They stood in neat rows on high shelves, gleaming with gold titles and names on their spines, enormous, majestic. My grandfather took great pleasure in collecting large-format editions, *in quarto* and *in folio*, and had them bound in crimson morocco with splendid ornaments in which the eighteenth century excelled. He loved books for their external beauty. I suspect that he even occasionally opened them and read them…" (Rabska, 1964, vol. 1, p. 29).

where "right-wing parties had strong support" (Paczkowski, 1980, p. 46). The newspaper was particularly popular among the Warsaw bourgeoisie, state officials (before the May Coup), and the intellectual circles with right-wing or centrist convictions. While its political stance aligned with that of the National People's Union and the church hierarchy, "in major political campaigns, *Kurier* distinguished itself from the ZLN papers with greater moderation, although it took a decisive part in propaganda games both after Narutowicz was elected president and on the eve of the May Coup" (Paczkowski, 1980, p. 48). The early 1920s saw changes in the leadership of *Kurier Warszawski* due to the departure of individuals who had shaped its programme and market strategy for many years. These changes included the passing of the paper's owner, Hortensja Lewental, in 1923, the Editor-in-Chief Konrad Olchowicz-senior in 1924, and Władysław Rabski, one of the leading political journalists and editor of the theatre section, in 1925. The new leadership included Konrad Olchowicz-junior and Ferdynand Hoesick as joint Editors-in-Chief, Adam Grzymała-Siedlecki as the new theatre section editor, and Zdzisław Dębicki, editor of *Tygodnik Ilustrowany,* contributing to the literature section of *Kurier Warszawski*. However, "the younger writers and journalists struggled to overcome the conservative tastes of those who determined the fate of the newspaper" (Paczkowski, 1980, p. 47). According to Paczkowski, "there was a certain professional stagnation, a preference for traditional journalistic genres such as articles, essays, and reviews, and a lack of more modern forms of expression such as interviews, surveys, and reportage" (Paczkowski, 1983, p. 8). The editors and publishers of *Kurier* may have feared "innovations that could alienate readers who were accustomed to the established way of organising each issue for many years, having inherited the habit of reading from their parents and grandparents" (Paczkowski, 1983, p. 8). *Kurier*, which had remained stable programmatically, editorially, and graphically under one family since the late nineteenth century, was described by Adam Grzymała-Siedlecki as more than just a periodical but also a public utility institution essential to the capital, like city lighting, water supply, or communication means (Grzymała-Siedlecki, 1974, p. 8).

At first glance, Rabska's situation in this almost family-run enterprise might seem favourable. Her relatives and the community of people ideologically aligned with the National Democracy (Endecja), including Rabski, ensured that the widow had gainful employment appropriate to her position. Moreover, according to historical studies and memoirists of the era, *Kurier Warszawski* paid decent

fees. However, a closer look at what Rabska wrote about in her literary chronicle reveals that she dealt with topics that were marginal from the perspective of the 'canonical' or 'high-modernist' history of Polish literature. Writing about those who are now considered part of the canon, or on the verge of it, was primarily the domain of male critics, particularly Grzymała-Siedlecki and Dębicki. In his memoirs, prefaced by Grzymała, the editor of the paper at the time, Olchowicz-junior devoted only one page to the women and female collaborators of the newspaper. I will quote it in full here, as it clearly demonstrates the ambivalent attitudes of conservatives towards women and their activity in the public sphere, particularly in the arts. It is this ambivalence, I believe, that also determined Rabska's position as a reviewer for *Kurier Warszawski*:

> In the long list of journalists mentioned so far, representatives of the gender alternately and not always accurately referred to as the "fair" or "weaker" sex, are noticeably absent. According to a famous saying attributed to Roman Dmowski, women are divided into two types: those who know nothing and those who know everything (often referred to as witches). Furthermore, according to a possibly unreliable source, a woman's pen should serve not for writing, but for adorning a hat. However, the reason I have not mentioned a single woman here is not because I embrace the content of these aphorisms or because I am an anti-feminist. Not at all. The simple reason is that the publishing house did not permanently employ women in the editorial office. Women appeared on the pages of *Kurier* as poets, short story writers, or novelists, with Maria Konopnicka, Eliza Orzeszkowa, and Gabriela Zapolska at the forefront. *Kurier* also frequently opened its doors to female journalists, most notably Iza Moszczyńska [sic!] and Irena Pannenkowa.
>
> However, the first permanent female collaborator of the editorial team was Deputy Zofia Zaleska, the head of the "Women's Chronicle," a bold and passionate activist, and a journalist with a lively temperament and strong social instincts. Later, Zuzanna Rabska, the widow of Władysław Grabski, a refined poet, short story writer, and avid bibliophile, started a literary chronicle. In this series, she discussed books that only received short reviews by Dębicki or, later, Grzymała. It is also important to mention Pelagia Michalska, a skilled stenographer and permanent collaborator, who dealt with the torrent of telephone reports from *Kurier* correspondents in European capitals on a daily basis. Both women, who were closely related, tackled topics of great interest to the female readers. Elżbieta Kiewnarska, the mother, addressed household matters, while the daughter, Jadwiga Ewertowa, revealed the secrets of fashion (Olchowicz, 1974, p. 81).

Rabska's perspective on the "women question" was as follows:

> After my husband's death in 1925, the editorial team of Kurier Warszawski entrusted me with the "Literary Chronicle," which was to appear in the Saturday edition of the paper. This marked the end of blissful symposia with books. I had to read indiscriminately whatever needed to be reviewed.
>
> At that time, the literary column was managed by Zdzisław Dębicki, and after his death, by Grzymała-Siedlecki. I was left to assess original and translated novels, as well as collections of poetry. Publishing houses like "Gebethner and Wolff," "Michał Arct," "Jakub Mortkowicz," "Przeworski, Cukrowski, Hoesick, Niklewicz, and Perzyński," as well as "Rój," sent me huge packages of books. These were not books, but disasters. I had to skim through them, glance at the titles at least, and ah! unfortunately, read them – the worst part of it all.
>
> Read them!
>
> Reading was no longer that pleasant interaction with a book in the course of which I would form a mystical bond with the author whom I got closer to as I delved into his thoughts, anxieties, doubts, and sorrows that are an integral part of the book's text. Reading became a torment, creating confusion in my mind and emptiness in my heart (Rabska, 1964, vol. 2, p. 149).

> I dealt with the most dangerous species of writers – the graphomaniacs. Even worse were the female graphomaniacs, who came with flowers and tears, like those untalented actresses who once tormented my husband, complaining about the theatre management. I became convinced that it was easier to reach an understanding with a cannibal than with a talentless female writer. They pleaded, 'You may write the worst possible review of my book, as long as it gets a mention, preferably in a long one.' The dedications on the poetry collections of debuting authors, both male and female, were flowery and filled with praise for my 'just judgment,' my 'subtle literary taste,' and my 'creative finesse.' The things written in those dedications! Sometimes, these pathetic books were accompanied by roses, bunches of violets, or branches of mimosa. I love flowers, but these 'courtesy' flowers brought no joy, and I would have gladly thrown them out the window along with their givers (Rabska, 1964, vol. 2, pp. 152–153).

Assigning Rabska to the most thankless reviewing work, that is, discussing average works which nonetheless made up the majority of the literary production of the era, and simultaneously creating an impression that she was being done a favour, was not unique to the editorial team of *Kurier Warszawski*. This pattern was evident in most daily newspapers and weeklies during the interwar period. A woman who was focused on earning a living and had literary ambitions found

herself buried under packages containing various books – weak original and translated novels, volumes of outdated poetry, albums of historical monuments, monographic studies on horse riding or hunting, household guides, cookbooks, and Christmas publications for children and youth. With all these responsibilities, she had little time to cultivate her own taste and develop her poetic and critical skills through engaging with high-artistic works, which were mostly reviewed by male critics. It is difficult, of course, to say whether Rabska's Parnassian model of poetry would have changed under if she had more opportunities to engage with avant-guard literary achievements and debate them in the press.

However, her literary chronicles show that she was well-versed in both Polish and foreign poetry, from Romanticism [7] to the avant-garde.[8] Nevertheless the

7 Rabska refers to trends, creators, and works almost casually, which has a dual effect. On one hand, she assumes their universal familiarity, flattering the readers of *Kurier Warszawski*. On the other hand, she educates them about contemporary poetry while simultaneously inoculating them against novelties. Here are a few examples from the "Literary Chronicle" published in *Kurier Warszawski* in 1926. On the volume *Okulary* [Glasses] by Julian Wołoszynowski, she writes, "He has a very exuberant poetic imagination and vivid verbal imagery; however, what is troubling in his poems is the clear disregard for rhymes, that ultra-fashionable and extremely tiresome assonance which he decidedly overuses, imitating G. Apollinaire's favoured form (used in, for instance, the beautiful "Loreley")" (No. 16, p. 10). On the volume *Serce słupów telegraficznych* by Alina Butrymowiczówna, she writes that her "futurism" is a "distant echo of Marinetti's 'Città nuova'" (No. 112, p. 7). On the volume *Godzina ciszy* [An hour of silence] by Zofia Mrozowicka, she states, "the 'spiritual mother' of her poetry was Konopnicka, perhaps she also subconsciously echoed the 'chords of love and poverty' of Ada Negri" (No. 119, p. 8). *Pocałunki* by Maria Pawlikowska are commented on by Rabska in the following way: "her simplicity has all the appearances of sophistication. Researchers of the latest poetry currents have called this new genre 'simplicism.' […] It is about writing as one speaks (and, of course, one does not say what one thinks)"; "this is modern poetry that happens 'between the lines' rather than 'in the verse'" (No. 159, p. 7). On the volume *Obrazy imion wróżebne* [The ill-fated images of names] by Kazimiera Iłłakowiczówna, Rabska said, "It is a simplicity that deviates from the naive visions of Italian primitives, but instead strangely resembles the unmotivated contours and colours of ultramodernist painters" (No. 194, p. 7).

8 Futurism represented, for Rabska, an example of the most extreme 'distortion,' as it operated not only on all levels of the poetic work but also transformed the book as

trajectory of her work suggests that she didn't so much modify her views on poetry or her artistic approach, but rather transitioned away from writing poetry[9] and focused more on literature for children and youth, sometimes in verse form.

Another underappreciated yet extremely useful aspect of Rabska's reviewing ordeal was the fact that she belonged to a small group of people who were most knowledgeable about the entire publishing output of interwar Poland.

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a material object. In 1926, the "Literary Chronicle" from *Kurier Warszawski* she wrote, among other things, about the poems of Alina Butrymowiczówna: "They are enclosed in a booklet whose dreadful cover defies all principles of print aesthetics. Poetry, which is indeed the expression of beauty and harmony, should certainly not be published in the style of sensational pamphlets" (No. 112, p. 7). Regarding Bruno Jasieński's *Słowo o Jakubie Szeli* [A word on Jakub Szela], she said, "It is regrettable that in these difficult publishing times, books are not created as old palimpsests once were. For if *Słowo o Jakubie Szeli* had been grandly published, it would not have gone to waste, but rather another text could have been printed on the chemically erased original, one more closely connected to the logic of thought, the beauty of imagery, and the aesthetics of the Polish language" (No. 333, p. 12).

9 In her 1926 review of *Trzy wieńce* [Three wreaths] by Władysław Jan Grabski, published in the "Literary Chronicle" in *Kurier Warszawski,* Rabska likely expressed the hopes and longings regarding her own work: "The art of form and word is fading so much among the youngest generation of poets. They so diligently avoid any trace of 'Parnassianism,' which, to them, seems slightly antiquated, that any effort to revive the beauty of this form and word should be welcomed with sincere recognition, as a herald of the 'great poetry' that must one day again blaze in the sky of Polish literature" (No. 215, p. 6). Among the younger poets, she initially appreciated Emil Zegadłowicz, who won her over with his *Krąg* [Circle]: "Among the dozen or so publications undertaken to commemorate the second congress of Polish bibliophiles in Warsaw, Zegadłowicz's volume of poetry stands out for the aesthetics of its external appearance, as well as the refinement of its content" (No. 340, p. 8).

Coda: Motherhood in Interwar Women's Poetry

Motherhood was not a popular theme between 1918 and 1939; the poetesses who were considered the most outstanding during that period did not frequently explore it. However, it did find expression in the works of female authors, often referred to as 'cultural' poets.[1] These poetesses adhered to regular syllabic-tonic verse and correct rhyming, which led to them being associated, somewhat superficially, with the Skamander model. This chapter will focus on these 'cultural' poets for three reasons. Firstly, secondary authors typically constitute an overlooked poetic context and backdrop against which the stars of poetry's first magnitude shine. Restoring their memory helps to "trace the lost female presences and giving them a voice, at the same time filling in the gaps in our historical knowledge and composing anew a cultural canon that embraces not one gender but two" (Ritz, 2002, p. 10). Secondly, the secondary status of these authors provides a critical impetus as a record of history that marginalises women and "a reproduction of the criteria of canon construction and the literary conventions and tastes" that contribute to this marginalisation (Iwasiów, 2004, p. 43). Thirdly, from the perspective of the cultural sociology of literature, average literature can be read not only as attempts to meet the demands placed on creators and texts in the high-artistic circulation. Such texts appear to their readers also as gestures of contestation against societal values, providing a window into the social processes and diagnose the real problems of ordinary people (Kunz, 2012, pp. 434–435). Unlike high-artistic women's creativity, which "revolves not so much around autobiography or self-expression, but rather around the tension between the private and the public, the challenging intersection of the female 'I' with the world, the complex boundaries of personal freedom, the possibilities of comprehension and creativity, and the right to happiness" (Borkowska, Czermińska, Philips,

1 The criteria for evaluating the interwar poetry are discussed in more detail in: Zawiszewska, 2014, pp. 206–209.

2000, p. 6), secondary creativity is focused precisely on autobiography and self-expression.

For the purposes of this chapter, I have excluded from consideration highly artistic works and religious texts, as the individualism of the former works and the didacticism of the latter distort the image of motherhood portrayed in the majority of 'average' women's poetic production from 1918 to 1939. I believe that both of these omitted literary areas deserve separate study. The source base for this planned research consists on a corpus of approximately fifty biographical entries and 150 volumes, compiled from interwar documents and contemporary bio-bibliographical compendia.[2]

General Overview. Both non-professional readers and scholars of interwar literature often do not associate women's poetry from this period with traditional female roles such as daughter, wife, and mother. Instead, they tend to associate it with the figure of the lover and romantic turmoil, or with the artistic expression model popularised by Maria Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska. There are several reasons for this perception. The most obvious and well-documented reason is the significant political, economic, and social changes that took place in Poland after regaining independence. In 1918, women not only regained national sovereignty but also obtained full citizenship rights. During the interwar period, women's emancipation was completed and popularised, allowing them to pursue education, professional work, artistic creativity, and politics. However, this period also drew attention to everyday life and social norms, where the last bastion to be conquered was sexual freedom (see Górnicka-Boratyńska, 2001; Gawin, 2015). Similarly to women's prose production between 1918 and 1939, most female-authored poems dealing with male-female relationships documented the formation of a modern relationship model referred to by the contemporary sociologist as a 'pure relationship' (see Giddens, 1991, 1992). This bond, established by partners on their own terms, emancipates them from societal obligations related to nation, race, class, or religion. This represented the democratization of the private sphere, complementing democracy in the public sphere. Interwar women's poetry focused on realising this model and

2 See the annex at the end of this book.

its emotional, social, economic, and biological consequences became the most important themes of interwar women's poetry. Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska, both a woman and an artist, became a leading figure in this movement. Her poetry encompassed themes such as "the struggle for 'equality in love', animosity towards the laws of nature, with the right – and obligation – of motherhood at the forefront, and the problem of aging" (Kwiatkowski, 1998, p. IX). The style of her poetry emphasised "realism in representation, psychological depth, miniaturization of form, and condensation of expressive means" (Legeżyńska, 2009, p. 22).

Another reason for the image of interwar female poets was sociobiological. Many of these poets, such as Hanna Mortkowicz and Wanda Melcer, were young women naturally enjoyed life and embraced both the ecstatic poetry style of Julian Tuwim and Kazimierz Wierzyński, and the futuristic experiments of Jerzy Jankowski and Bruno Jasieński. They confessed to their struggles of school life, provided poetic accounts of social gatherings, experienced their first emotional dilemmas and erotic fascinations. They also took pleasure in urban strolls, observing the world and reflecting on themselves through the eyes of passersby and shop windows. These young poets were well-read, translated foreign-language lyric poetry into Polish, and travelled extensively. It's worth noting that most interwar female writers came from intellectual, artistic, and bourgeois families (Kirchner, 2000, pp. 243–253; Kraskowska, 2012a, pp. 199–216). Initially living 'with their parents' and later 'with their husbands,' they were wealthy enough to finance their domestic and international travels. Travel served as another way to exercise their newfound freedom and showcase the intellectual advancement of women after 1918. Therefore, in young women entering literature in the 1920s and experiencing their own versions of "the joy of a regained garbage dump" (Kaden-Bandrowski, 1923/2024, p. 33), there was neither emotional nor intellectual space for motherhood. It only emerged as a theme in the 1930s as a result of their later experiences. Meanwhile, mature poets who emerged during the Young Poland era were already accomplished as mothers. As a result, close family relationships were not the central focus of their artistic interests.

Another reason for this shift in focus is the cultural energy generated by exceptional interwar women poets who remained childless. The reasons behind

their decision to forgo motherhood should be explored in biographical studies,[3] particularly psychobiography, which analyses life histories within the context of historical processes, social changes, and the values of the family they come from and the family they enter through marriage. Additionally, it considers the norms they independently create in conscious and unconscious dialogue with these conditions (see McKinley Runyan, 1982/1984). To shed light on these biographical threads, access to private documents is necessary. Unfortunately, due to wartime destruction, these documents have mostly survived within the families of writers who were already considered extraordinary during the interwar period. Some biographies, such as those of Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska (Nasiłowska, 2010) and Irena Tuwim (Augustyniak, 2016), have explored these threads. The correspondence of Kazimiera Iłłakowiczówna (2014, ed. Lucyna Marzec) and the experiences of emigrants like Halina Konopacka (Rotkiewicz, 2011, pp. 188–124), who left the country after 1939, are also worth examining. Although women's individual choices regarding fertility are deeply personal, in the case of exceptional women, they also have supra-individual artistic and social consequences. During the interwar period, forgoing motherhood required great courage, as it was widely believed that the destiny of women and men was to live together within the institution of marriage, which provided legal, economic, and existential protection for partners and their legitimate children (Kraft, 2004, p. 317). The primary role that confirmed a woman's identity was that of a mother (Kałwa, 2001, pp. 51–63). One can only speculate how women's poetry would have evolved if Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska, Irena Tuwim, or Iłłakowiczówna had become mothers and explored that experience through their talents.

The fourth reason why women identified more with the lover figure rather than that of mother or wife during the interwar period is the situation within the literary field itself, particularly in so-called women's literature, which had already become a distinct sociological and aesthetic category. According to research by feminist critics (Kraskowska, 1999, pp. 13–37; A. Araszkiewicz, 2014; Krajewska, 2014), women who wrote and read during the first decade of Poland's independence were already aware of the characteristics that new women's

3 See e.g., Sławiński, 1975, pp. 9–24; Labuda, 1975, pp. 104–116; Makowiecki, 1980, pp. 11–45; Poprzędzka, 1995.

literature should possess. Articles published in women's magazines in the 1920s, such as *Bluszcz* or *Kobieta Współczesna*, encouraged readers to abandon the "slavish copying" of male models and instead "write in their own way and perhaps also testify" (Grossek-Korycka, 1928, p. 19) about everything "that truly interests them and that they genuinely experience, but in the way that women experience it." They urged women to "sincerely express their long-suppressed feelings," and so on (Podhorska-Okołów, 1927, p. 8). Paradoxically, the same feminist critics reinforced traditional gender divisions by associating feminine writing with an artistic expression of emotions, particularly those related to love for men, children, and animals, deep religiosity, and sensitivity to the injustices suffered by marginalised groups. This belief was consistent throughout the interwar period, with many considering the novel as the genre most suited to "women's narrative abilities and inclinations," while the "other forms of poetry (created by men to express their psychological life)" significantly "restricted the female psyche" (Zylberowa, 1928, p. 6). Women writers themselves found the most interesting developments in contemporary literature to be happening in prose, rather than lyrical poetry, which is why they rarely commented on the latter. Irena Krzywicka, a supporter of Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska, and Zuzanna Rabska were notable exceptions, with Rabska commenting on women's creative work in the literary chronicle of Kurier Warszawski (Zylberowa, 1928, p. 7).

It is important to remember that the only interwar literary debate among women writers focused on prose, particularly works that aimed to express "long--suppressed feelings" and presented a new, ambivalent, and somatic portrayal of motherhood. Kuncewiczowa's collection of short stories, *Przymierze z dzieckiem*, published in 1927, generated significant interest, especially around the title story. This interest led to a split within the editorial board of the magazine *Bluszcz* and the creation of a new publication called *Kobieta Współczesna* (Kuncewiczowa, 1986, p. 5). Kuncewiczowa, associated with Bluszcz, which promoted a traditional concept of femininity, faced criticism for her assault on the "sanctity of motherhood," as it was perceived as a betrayal of shared ideals. The literary conventions and social customs inherited from Poland's partitions required that reproduction, the female equivalent of male 'action,' be treated with pathos. However, Kuncewiczowa's innovative expressionist style and imagery in *Przymierze z dzieckiem* placed the mother-child relationship within a naturalist imaginary of the struggle for existence (Kraskowska, 1999, pp. 151–152). Unfortunately, Kuncewiczowa's hopes for the circles to artistic milieu, "better

attuned to the storms and currents of the generation, which in the West was called 'lost,' but in Poland deserved to be called 'finders,' because they found the courage to protest against hypocrisy" (Kraskowska, 1999, pp. 5–6) to understand her artistic project were in vain. Although Stefan Napierski, a leading critic of contemporary lyricism in the influential *Wiadomości Literackie*, reviewed Kuncewiczowa's stories enthusiastically, he perpetuated stereotypes about the non-intellectual, emotional, and corporeal nature of women's creativity (Napierski, 1927b, p. 4). Krzywicka also criticised Kuncewiczowa, accusing her of an overly metaphorical style, although she appreciated the act of breaking the taboo of motherhood and valued all forms of unmasking in literature, including the "sickly adoration of parents, monotonous patriotic exaltation, and hysterical attitudes towards love" (Krzywicka, 1928a, p. 2). The discussion also covered other important topics for the development of critical systems and creative practices during the interwar period. These topics included women's literature itself, expressionist and classicist trends, and the construction and role of metaphor (Zawiszewska, 2015, pp. 122–144). However, less bold writers than Kuncewiczowa learned a valuable lesson from her experience: it was not worth it to write 'in a new way.'

Texts. In 1929, the response to Kuncewiczowa's short stories came in the form of *Pamiętnik młodej matki* [A young mother's diary] by Maria Czeska-Mączyńska, published by Towarzystwo Wydawnicze Bluszcz. Representing interwar Catholic literature, *Pamiętnik młodej matki* is an autobiographical account of the emotions, thoughts, and bodily experiences that accompany the longing for motherhood, pregnancy, and the care of a newborn. The tone of the book is joyful, affirming the anticipation of a child and highlighting the role of motherhood as constitutive of a woman's identity. In Kuncewiczowa's text, the mother and child are depicted as separate beings, divided by the traumatic process of birth and conflicting needs; "the reluctant and wronged" mother refers to the child as a "screaming banshee" and an "eternal source of spasm" (Kuncewiczowa, 1986, p. 99) "with death in her soul, she parades the hateful splendour of her body around the world" (Kuncewiczowa, 1986, p. 101), laments the degradation of her "beautiful breasts" that had been "so desired by the eyes and lips of a man, so carefree;" yet, after childbirth, they became "someone else's property, an object of coarse utility; they became the prey of a sucker" (Kuncewiczowa, 1986, p. 101). In contrast, Czeska-Mączyńska's text presents a loving symbiosis between

mother and child, symbolised by breastfeeding and accompanied by physical closeness and silent communication expressed through cuddling and looking into each other's eyes. Although in one of the final entries, *Pamiętnik młodej matki* briefly mentions the traditional definition of maternal love as "full of sacrifice and renunciation," it does not elaborate on the specific forms of this 'sacrifice and renunciation': "I feed my little one, and the elder child cuddles up to me. This is my world! Two human souls entrusted to me by God. Motherhood is the greatest and most lasting happiness because a mother's love is full of sacrifice and renunciation, giving without wanting anything in return, happy that it can give" (Czeska-Mączyńska, 1929, p. 32).

In 1932, Czeska-Mączyńska published *Macierzyństwo i wiersze różne* [Motherhood and other poems] dedicated to her "beloved husband Mieczysław Mączyński," whom she married in 1918 after the death of Česky. With Mączyński, she had her second son, Marian, who is the subject of *Pamiętnik młodej matki*. Her cycle "Macierzyństwo" [Motherhood] serves as both a continuation of Bronisława Ostrowska's cycle under the same title from the 1913 volume *Aniołom dźwięku* [To the angels of sound] (Ostrowska, 1913, pp. 67–73), and a poetic version of *Pamiętnik młodej matki*, exploring the same emotions, situations, and motifs, using similar expressions. In this collection, pregnancy is seen as a sign of the work of the Holy Spirit, with the woman's womb described as a "sanctuary" ("Macierzyństwo I," in Czeska-Mączyńska, 1932, p. 7). The lyrical subject confesses the inability to articulate the "strange feeling" caused by the "first movement of the child in the womb," resorting to describing the physical symptoms instead: "the heart rages, the temples pulse […]: Oh, how difficult it is to put such a feeling into words!" ("Macierzyństwo II," in Czeska-Mączyńska, 1932, p. 8). The lyrical subject reveals ambivalence in emotions. For example, the joy of anticipating childbirth, accompanied by the mundane task of arranging baby clothes, is interwoven with fear for the child's future ("Macierzyństwo IV," in Czeska-Mączyńska, 1932, p. 8). She also contemplates whether it would prefer to have a son or a daughter and is surprised by the differing daily rhythms of itself and the future child: he becomes active when she feels sleepy ("Macierzyństwo V," in Czeska-Mączyńska, 1932, p. 9). Amidst the emotional exaltation and the pathos of the entire cycle, the passage about the hardships of childbirth stands out for its succinctness: "Oh God! / What pain… / Perhaps the earth suffers like this, shaken by storms as it gives birth to fruit" ("Macierzyństwo VII," in Czeska-Mączyńska, 1932, p. 10). The cycle ends

with an ecstatic poem beginning with the words "Give him to me! Let me cuddle him, caress him…" ("Macierzyństwo VIII," in Czeska-Mączyńska, 1932, p. 11). The religious language (the child as a gift from God, the womb as a 'sanctuary'), archaic expressions, and mythological imagery (Mother Earth giving birth to fruit) place the individual experiences of the lyrical subject, particularly bodily suffering, within a universal natural cycle of fertility. This ennobles, moralises, and aestheticises them. Other works dedicated to motherhood from the volume *Macierzyństwo i wiersze różne* complement this repertoire of maternal emotions. They include the fear during the child's illness and the prayers of thanksgiving for its recovery ("Noc u kołyski," in Czeska-Mączyńska, 1932, p. 14), as well as the mourning for the death of the "unborn child" who "now sleeps in a white coffin / and sees heaven in his sleep" ("Janeczkowi", in in Czeska-Mączyńska, 1932, p. 16). There is also surprise at the alienation of an adult son who does not remember "how his mother held him in her arms, / how she lulled him to sleep with a song. […] how she folded his little hands in prayer […] taught him to walk and talk," "because otherwise, you couldn't possibly / look into your mother's eyes so coldly" ("Czy pamiętasz. Tym, którzy nie pamiętają", in Czeska-Mączyńska, 1932, p. 20). The 'maternal' poetic repertoire of Czeska-Mączyńska also includes poems written during the Great War, which were part of her earlier volume, *Na różnych strunach* [Different cords] from 1918. Among these, "Kołysanka" [Lullaby] written for Henryk, her son from her first marriage, stands out. This poem, dated 1915, contains a recurring motif found in many other women's poems: that of the solitary mother trembling for the life of her soldier husband and the uncertain future of her offspring:

> Quiet… my dear,
> Daddy's coming back from the war, […]
> Son! Son… it's the wind that whizzes,
> moans, sighs and howls…
> And in my soul my despair whispers,
> Is he still alive?!
> (Czeska-Mączyńska, 1918, p. 18).

The loss of her first husband did not change the poet's perception of the war, which, like the majority of Polish society, she viewed as a necessary and justified sacrifice made on the altar of the homeland. Even in the poem "Synaczku mój" [My son] addressed to her son Henryk, born after Poland regained independence,

she urged him to "defend your country's illusions" (Czeska-Mączyńska, 1932, p. 18)

In the collections *Na różnych strunach* and *Macierzyństwo i wiersze różne*, Czeska-Mączyńska explored most of the themes (emotions, attitudes, and situations) that other interwar women poets also addressed when dedicating their work to motherhood. Notably, these themes were not only present in individual poems but were often the central focus of entire collections or cycles. Some noteworthy examples include Maria Różycka's *Do mojego synka* [For my son] (1923), Melania Kierczyńska's *Amulety* [Talismans] (1924), Maria Znatowicz-Szczepańska's *Wiosna i lato* [Spring and summer] (1930), Marta Reszczyńska-Stypińska's *Echa i cienie* [Echoes and shadows] (1933), and Halina Stawarska's cycle "Do mojego dziecka" [For my child] from the volume *Z dni trosk i ciszy* [From the days of worry and silence] (1929). These collections, along with others such as Zofia Maria Bessażanka's *Słoneczne loty* [Sun flights] (1933), Lesława Urbańska's *Morze i ziemia* [The earth and the sea] (1934), and Kazimiera Fiweger-Szpunarowa's *Na ojczystej niwie* [On the homeland's soil] (1936), saw the return of motifs that were absent in women's poetry in the first decade of Poland's independence. These motifs included the mother appealing to other mothers to instil a patriotic model of education in their children, as well as the concept of the "Mother the Pole" ("Matka Polka") raising sons to be conscious defenders of the homeland.

The longing for motherhood was expressed in various ways by the aforementioned poets. One approach was to depict a woman's psychophysical reaction to the presence of someone else's child, as seen in Czeska-Mączyńska's poem "Dziecię" [Child] written in 1913 (published in 1932):

> They bring to me a fair-haired child,
> Its little arms entwined around my neck, […]
> And such longing surged in my heart,
> And such sorrow tugged deep within my soul,
> That this golden head is not mine […]
> That these bright eyes are not mine…
> That it is not mine… not mine… not my own! (Czeska-Mączyńska, 1918, p. 86).

Another approach was to provide intellectual reflections on unfulfilled motherhood, as seen in poems like Konopacka's "Do dziecka nieurodzonego" [For the unborn child] or "Sen" [Dream]:

There is a longing,
That is called a woman's longing for a child. […]
It appears in the fullness of life, […]
when the spring of the first years has slowly passed away. […]
At a time when the burden of difficult duties weighs heavy
and is like a harbinger of sadness,
like the standard-bearer of death,
who carries the memories
of years already gone by (Konopacka, 1932, p. 9).

Yet another poetic approach to motherhood was to depict the mourning after the loss of a child and the vision of oneself as a mother, as seen in Jadwiga Gamska-Łempicka's poem "Grób dziecinny" [A child's grave]. In this poem, Gamska-Łempicka uses the literary trope of a careless death-gardener cutting down young plants and refers to the child as "an unopened flower," "unripen grain," "an undeveloped leaf," and "a bud withered in spring":

What shall I place on your grave
On All Saints' morning? […]
A word left unspoken,
a thought killed in my heart
and my youthful happiness (Gamska-Łempicka, 1938, p. 27).

In Konopacka's poem, the "unborn child" is described as a "fruit woven from the mists of longing," an "echo of unexperienced joy," and the "most essential and profound content" (Konopacka, 1932, pp. 8–9). The realization of the "idea of happiness" through motherhood is presented as the most natural choice for a woman, providing her with a deep fulfilment that no other existential choice could offer. In the poem "Sen," we read: "I dreamed that I had a little son, / […] I saw before me a smooth path of life, / along which I walked with my child, as if in the moonlight" (Konopacka, 1932, p. 9). The dream experience of physical and emotional closeness, the satisfaction of caring and belonging, is contrasted with the loneliness and coldness of real life. However, the lyrical subject prefers intellectual development and helping those in need over having children, defining herself as a modern woman who longs for knowledge. Ultimately, her dream of having a child is described as orchards in bloom, enticing with their fragrance but draped in crepe (Konopacka, 1932, p. 10). In the poem "Nie wiem"

[I don't know], Konopacka confesses: "I would like to rise to the heights in the work of the spirit […] / And bring the word of truth to suffering humanity," so that "the poor" would abandon darkness and "carry a paean / Of Happiness and the Liberation from material constraints (Konopacka, 1932, pp. 11–12).

The universality of the longing for motherhood and the uniqueness of the relationship existing between mother and child are also emphasised in the few animal-themed poems such as those by Jadwiga Gizowska and Stanisława Sznaperówna. In Gizowska's poem "Matka" [Mother], part of her broader collection of works on rural themes, being a mother broadens the human perspective to include the suffering of animals and to acknowledge their dignity:

> It howls… they ordered
> to take all her children away […]
> the caretaker took them away […]
> carried them to where the pond's treacherous depths glisten […]
> The mother's sob seems to soar to the heavens,
> And the pain of a mother, human or beast, is equally sacred… […]
> But no one remembers that her puppies were taken in the morning,
> No one hears the mother's lament in that howling… (Gizowska, 1937, p. 31).

In contrast, Sznaperówna's poem "Sierotka" [Orphan] takes a different perspective:

> Warm, moist, trembling,
> Taken from its mother's breast,
> Squinting, trembling with its little chin,
> It laps up milk […]
> It has […]
> A few fleas in its grey fur
> A bit of milk in a sardine can
> But it has nobody's love. […]
> And every evening, slipping into the folds of a sack,
> Purring, it searches for its mother's breast (Sznaperówna, 1935, p. 11).

Many poets, including Kierczyńska and Znatowicz-Szczepańska, express the belief that motherhood is the essence of femininity, a biological instinct, the deepest emotional need, and a divine miracle. Kierczyńska writes in poems like "W nocy" [At night] and "Tyś ze mną bezustannie" [You are with me ceaselessly]:

"I carry in my soul a joyful tumult. / A shrine, in which, instead of God, I have you" (Kierczyńska, 1924, p. 10), "most holy, the only one. / […] / a living source of miraculous power / […] / an incomprehensible grace, / wondrously bestowed upon me" (Kierczyńska, 1924, p. 38). Znatowicz-Szczepańska writes in poems like "Dziecko" [Child] and "Moja i nie moja" [Mine and not mine]: "Caught treacherously in the net of the senses, lonely beauty, no one's, God's miracle: Child!" (Znatowicz-Szczepańska, 1930, p. 37); "You are mine… and yet sometimes so foreign!… But above all, I love you as God's beauty" (Znatowicz--Szczepańska, 1930, p. 44). This conviction is accompanied by a sense of satisfaction and relief that the child belongs exclusively to the mother. In Kierczyńska's poem "Wczoraj" [Yesterday] we read: "That one, only, dreamed of, wished for, such a small, own little child" (Kierczyńska, 1924, p. 11). The lyrical subject in Czeska-Mączyńska's poem "Szczęście matki" [Mother's happiness] confesses: "I suddenly have a purpose in life and the bread of the heart, / and you, dearest, my very own little son" (Czeska-Mączyńska, 1932, p. 13). Similarly, in Reszczyńska-Stypińska's poems "Wśród kwiatów" [Among flowers] and "Dziecko," we find: "In my little garden among the flowers, / the flower of my heart blooms…" (Reszczyńska, 1933, p. 93) and "How to express in the simplest and most soaring words […], / That you are the purpose of my happiness and the essence of my love? […] / Oh, my little, little one, oh, my dear, dear one / My love! " (Reszczyńska, 1933, p. 99).

These feelings are mainly revealed in poems about newborns and toddlers. In poems about growing children, they give way to the fears of the children leaving home, foreshadowing the sadness of an empty nest. The greater the love for the child, the greater the fear of their departure, as reflected in the poems by Różycka ("Jak prędko synek mój maleńki rośnie" [How fast my son grows]) and Wacława Grodzicka-Czechowska ("Do dziecka" [To the child]). In the first poem, we read, "And as I cuddle the shorn head, I sometimes long for the first chirp. For the chick in down and for the golden curls" (Różycka, 1923, p. 19), whereas in the second, "You will break free from my arms, you will want to use your wings. And you will fly away from me – on a new, your own path!" (Grodzicka-Czechowska, 1923, p. 79). Similarly, in Znatowicz-Szczepańska's poem "Zwierzenia" dedicated, like her several other poems in the collection *Wiosna i lato*, to her twelve-year-old daughter ("Anger at the world… headache… the bodice presses on her breasts…"; Znatowicz-Szczepańska, 1930, p. 43), we read:

My little, sweet girl, […]
Until now, you were in my power, but now
the time is near when you will go on your own way
alone… with your pain… with your struggle… with your longing…
(Znatowicz-Szczepańska, 1930, p. 41).

Images of relationships between mothers and adult children are rare in Polish women's interwar poetry. When they do appear, they are often found in intellectual poems depicting rural life, revealing both the different realities of life in the countryside, which becomes a source of generational conflicts, as well as the different expectations mothers in peasant families have for their offspring. For example, Helena Platta's poem "W sądzie" [A court] is an anecdote that begins like a report: "She came to court for her son (he stole wood from a neighbour's forest) / No one in her family had ever been convicted." It also includes elements of an interview with the mother, who complains: "My son is a thief and steals, not out of hunger – for money, / he wanted to buy Maryśka some beads so she would love him more," only to judge her son's choice of partner as a woman unfit to be a good housewife, mother, and daughter-in-law: "This girl will lose Antek's land for those clothes, / She won't take care of the children, she'll throw the mother out of the house: / 'You're old, go beg, we're not rich anymore!'" (Platta, 1937, p. 15). Similarly, Gizowska's poem "Po wojnie" [After the war] is a record of a conversation between a peasant mother and her son returning from the war:

I'm old – I don't need much to live,
But when you go out to the field with the reapers,
You'll already earn me a piece of bread. Your young hands are capable of work!
[…]
Give me a hug! What's this? My heart is breaking with sorrow,
Jesus!!! The sleeves of your shirt are empty,
Where are your hands?
– Mother – they were cut off in the hospital… (Gizowska, 1937, pp. 57–58).

The anticipated drama of loneliness, as if expected by mothers of growing children, arises from the image of the autarkic, loving dyad of mother and child embedded in most poems about motherhood, where there is no place for a man as a husband, father, or other male guardian. Against this backdrop, the poems "Myślę o Tobie" [I am thinking of you] by Stawarska, "My troje" [The

three of us] by Stypińska, and "To trzecie" [The third one] stand out. In the first of these poems, the relationship with the child is as strong as with the partner, to whom the lyrical subject confesses: "And yet I long, I long so unconsciously, / Even when I think of my little child" (Stawarska, 1929, p. 60). The arrival of offspring changes the relationship between spouses who abandon the roles of lovers for those of parents, as Czeska-Mączyńska writes: "in the service of the little tyrant, / we suddenly grew into people, / to whom a soul has been given" (Czeska-Mączyńska, 1932). It also redefines the couple's relationship with time and the outside world, creating a significant shift in their history and shielding them from external influences. Reszczyńska, captures this by saying, "You, I, it. We don't need other people […]. / The entire past is a bygone date, / the goal of the future binds us most closely. / We form a united whole / we three: You, I, it" (Reszczyńska, 1933, p. 89).

In the interwar cultural context, the responsibility of childcare was primarily assigned to women. This belief is reflected in Polish women's poetry, where care for the health, life, and future of their children becomes a recurring theme. Reszczyńska and Stawarska explicitly namethis care, with Reszczyńska describing it as "a silent, elusive shadow" and "a silent, elusive enemy" (Reszczyńska, 1933, p. 94), while Stawarska compares it to a black bird tapping at her window, wanting to mark her child's head with a mourning sign (Stawarska, 1929, p. 13). Czeska-Mączyńska (1932) sums up the sentiment by stating that their children are both their care and their pride. The only effective antidote to these maternal fears seems to be faith in God, sought not only by representatives of the conservative trend like Grodzicka-Czechowska. In her poem "Dzieci" [Children], the lyrical subject prays: "I do not come alone on this holy day under Your cross / […] / I have brought my children with me to You!" She believes that not only "today are they safe under Your sign", but also in the future, when "they lift their innocent eyes / they will meet Your gaze, Your hand, Christ" (Grodzicka-Czechowska, 1932, p. 99). In the poem "Ucieczko nasza" [Our refuge] the lyrical subject is standing under the cross, expressing hope that her children will inherit her faith, believing that "Your forehead crowned with thorns is their model, / And their refuge – the foot of the cross" (Grodzicka-Czechowska, 1932, p. 100). The lyrical subject of the poem "**Gdybym wierzyła" [If I were a believer] by Kierczyńska also prays to God, although here God is not identifiable as the Christian one, but rather as an abstract symbol of some transcendent order. The title of her collection, *Amulety*, refers to the attempts to find magical objects

and spells that would protect her daughter from the evils of the world. These attempts are summarised with the reflection: "For sometimes it seems to me that I am powerless, / that my great love can do nothing, / that there is only one infallible way: / to pray for you… to pray humbly…" (Kierczyńska, 1924, p. 24).

The multitude of emotions felt and situations experienced by mothers, both as individuals and as members of a community marked by painful historical events, is reflected in the diversity of theme and tone in the interwar lullabies. Among them, cheerful melodic rhymes dominate, making it easier for children to fall asleep. The titles simply reflect the genre, representing the most typical and utilitarian realizations (Jeziorkowska-Polakowska, 2010, pp. 21, 35). Sometimes, the archetypal image of a mother lulling her child to sleep is enriched with sensitivity to objects important to the child and from the child's perspective. This is the case with Reszczyńska's poem "Lalka" [Doll], which draws on a long iconographic tradition of illustrating the relationship between adult and child through the image of a child and a doll (Leszczyński, 2006, pp. 48–52):

> The child sleeps. The night moves the hands of the clock […]
> two little stockings hang very sleepily on the chair,
> a small shoe, having tipped over, is asleep…
> Koko sleeps beside the teddy bear, the whole world has long been asleep.
> Only the doll, lying in the child's arms,
> stares into the distance with wide-open eyes –
> stares, stares… […]
> What is this doll thinking about that it cannot fall asleep?
> (Reszczyńska, 1933, p. 96).

Few of the women's lullabies are written in a dark tone. One of them is Czerkawska's poem "Kołysanka," which combines the style of a children's counting rhyme with the motif of death as eternal sleep:

> Sleep walks around the windows
> tangled in its own steps.
> It has embraced mountains, forests, the village –
> but to this lowly hut
> it dares not enter.
> Already someone else with the wave of a hand
> has lulled this tiny,

tiny one to sleep.
Sleep walks around the windows–
The glow of the candle's blood-red claw
tears at the darkness–
Sleep walks (Czekawska, 1956, p. 77).

Kazimiera Alberti's poem "Kołysanka Ewy" [Eve's lullaby] expresses a bitter awareness, universalised and elevated by attributing it to the biblical Eve, that the hopes of parents to ensure eternal care and a better future for their children are in vain:

God banished us from paradise,
but it will be better for you,
you will create a new paradise on earth, you will conquer a new paradise! […]
And we keep walking through the desert deaf and blind,
Our hands torn open, our feet pierced,
None of us has created a new paradise–
Oh Lord! Oh God! (Alberti, 1935, p. 77).

The lullabies also bear the imprint of the dramas from the time of the Great War. Examples include the poems by Bessażanka, Wanda Dobaczewska, and Maria Paruszewska. Paruszewska dedicated her first collection, *Odgłosy wojenne* [War sounds] in 1917, to her "sons at war: Michał, Alfred, Jan, and Józef" (Paruszewska, 1917, p. 1). In her later collection, *Moje pieśni* [My songs], she included the lullaby "Kołysanka Lulusiowi" [A lullaby for Luluś], in which the lyrical subject promises: "Don't cry, Luluś, Daddy will return, God watches over him at war, […] / And a time of peace will come, And then a thousand caresses / From Daddy will come to us" (Paruszewsa, 1934, p. 12). This poem expresses hope for the survival and return of the husband and father, in contrast to Dobaczewska's "Kołysanka," which mourns the deceased. Dobaczewska's poem includes the lines "Sleep, my son […] / And Daddy listens from the grave, / As I sing you to sleep" (Paruszewsa, 1934, p. 12). Meanwhile, Bessażanka's "Kołysanka (Grobowiec Nieznanego Żołnierza)" [Lullaby (Tomb of the Unknown Soldier)] reminds us that every 'unknown soldier' has a mother who misses him. The poem is performed to the tune of a Carpathian lament-song and begins with the lines "Son, where did you lay your head, / You dearest child in the world […] / To eternal sleep – after the battle, my God!" (Bessażanka, 1933, p. 5). It expresses the

need to find the remains and create a grave as a place of remembrance, ending with the assurance "Son – dearest, beloved son, / You are the unknown soldier of the homeland… / Son – dearest, beloved son, / You are mine! You are not the unknown soldier!" (Bessażanka, 1933, p. 8).

Conclusions. The interwar poetry by Polish women tends to portray motherhood more as an institution than an experience (see Rich, 1976/1995), and as a social construct upheld by the dominant discourses of the time. This institution promoted a model of motherhood that required women to prioritise the needs of their children, husbands, and families over their own. The poetry in question lacks representations of alternative, individual ways of experiencing parenthood and does not challenge or contradict the accepted model. According to contemporary literary studies, this traditional image of the mother and her relationship with her child persisted in Polish literature until the late 20th century (Brzóstowicz, 1999; K. Budrowska, 2000) and only began to change and become more realistic in the current century (Gawron, 2016). As a result, the motherhood depicted in the Polish interwar poetry collections, poetic cycles, and individual poems does not represent a "turning point" (B. Budrowska, 2000, p. 9) in the lives of the poetic mothers. These women are portrayed as well-prepared for childbirth and motherhood, experiencing these events actively. Having children does not radically alter their way of life but rather complements it, affirming more than disrupting their feminine identity.

Most poems dedicated to motherhood can be described as descriptive poetry of the child's room, as this is the space where most of these women's poetic narratives 'take place.' Despite the omnipresent concern for their children's lives, health, and future, the voice of the maternal lyrical subject in most of these works is optimistic, sentimental, and exalted, sometimes even ecstatic. This tone stems from the fact that poets experience motherhood as a process from pregnancy to childbirth, a rite of passage to a new life, to daily interaction with the child, is treated as an achievement and confirmation of femininity, especially when a son is born (it is worth noting that the majority of the 'maternal' poems were written by mothers of sons). But it also results from motherhood being realised within a socially accepted legal context, namely within the bounds of legal marriage (many of these poets also dedicated their collections to their husbands). Extramarital, problematic, unhappy motherhood struggling with poverty is essentially not represented in this poetry. There is no space for

unwanted motherhood. It is only seen in Dobaczewska's ballad "Wiedźma" [The witch], which follows the Mickiewiczian-Leśmianian convention of revealing the hidden side of reality. In this poem, the "drowned children," referred to as "little ghosts" and "blue corpses" (Dobaczewska, 1932, p. 25), are cared for by the titular witch. They long for their mothers and haunt them at night as nightmares and pangs of conscience.

The time shared between mother and child, during which activities like nursing infants, playing with toddlers, or teaching growing children take place, is undoubtedly joyful and intense. However, it lacks sensory impressions beyond visual and tactile experiences. Notably, the poem does not mention sounds and smells, which are crucial for a child's communication and a source of information for parents during early stages of life. One might question whether this absence results from the intellectual nature of the majority of the discussed poems (where basic caregiving activities are performed by someone other than the mother, who solely cuddles and nurses a clean and changed child) or from a deliberate avoidance of physiological activities that do not fit the lofty and spiritual poetic narrative about motherhood. It's important to note that, in these poems, the mothers' gaze is exceptionally attentive, suggesting the influence of New Education ideals during the interwar period in Poland, especially among the intelligentsia. This group in particular viewed the child not as a miniature adult, but as a being that develops over time, with different sensitivities and imagination. The child is seen as a separate world filled with significant objects and people (Sierakowska, 2003, pp. 108–133). Consequently, the child depicted in women's poetry is simply a child, not a symbolic key as seen in Young Poland poetry, where children were used to evoke values and concepts such as innocence, unconsciousness, new beginnings, or messianic hopes (Czabanowska-Wróbel, 2003, p. 19). The traditional image of a mother as the natural and most important role for a woman is reflected in the traditionalism of poetic forms used by these women poets. This traditionalism stems from both a fear of literary criticism and a lack of mastery in craftsmanship. The analysed women poets rarely experiment with versification or stanza forms, seldom using free verse, interesting metaphors, or surprising conclusions. They primarily create sentimental confessions and anecdotal poems. Their work lacks distance from language and its constructs, lacking humor, comedy elements, irony, or grotesque elements. Unlike the high-artistic register, there was no poetic revolution in secondary women's poetry.

Annex: Poetry Collections by Women Poets in Interwar Poland

Alberti, Kazimiera (1898–1962)

Bunt lawin (1927). Warszawa: F. Hoesick.

Mój film (1927). Warszawa: F. Hoesick.

Pochwała życia i śmierci (1930). Poznań: Księgarnia św. Wojciecha.

Godzina kalinowa (1935). Kraków: Gebethner i Wolff.

Usta Italii (1936). Warszawa: Dom Książki Polskiej.

Więcierz w głębinie (1937). Warszawa: F. Hoesick.

Serce zwierzęce (1939). Bielsko: Tow. Ochrony Zwierząt w Bielsku i Zw. Opieki nad Zwierzętami w Białej.

Arnsztajnowa, Franciszka Hanna (1865–1944)

Poezye (1895). Warszawa: Gebethner i Wolff.

Poezye (1899). Kraków: Gebethner i Sp.

Poezye (1911). Kraków: Gebethner i Wolff.

Archanioł jutra (1924). Lublin: Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza „Placówka Lubelska".

Odloty (1932). Lublin: Zw. Literatów w Lublinie.

Stare kamienie [co-written with Józef Czechowicz] (1934). Introduction by L. Zalewski. Lublin: Drukarnia Państwowa [Biblioteczka Lubelskiego Towarzystwa Miłośników Książki nr 5].

Barthel-Weidenthal, Chrzanowska Helena (?–?)

Skalista wyspa. Poemat osnuty na tle wydarzeń wielkiej wszechświatowej wojny (1934). Warszawa: Księgarnia Eugeniusza Kuthana.

Bessażanka, Zofia Maria (?–?)

Słoneczne loty (1933). Kołomyja: (n. p.).

Brodowska, Halina (1912–1998)

Madonna z Portofino (1935). Poznań: I. Dippel [Biblioteka „Promu" vol. 50.

Brzeska, Wanda Emilia (1893–1978)

Mitropa. Poezje z włóczęgi (1935). Poznań: Rolnicza Drukarnia i Księgarnia Nakładowa. [pseud. Zbigniew Topór].

U strądu (1936). Warszawa: Gebethner i Wolff.

Brzostowska, Janina (1907–1986)

Szczęście w cudzym mieście (1924). Warszawa-Kraków: "Czartak" Drukarnia Krajowa.

O ziemi i mej miłości (1925). Warszawa: "Czartak" Drukarnia Krajowa.

Erotyki (1926). Warszawa: "Czartak" Drukarnia Krajowa.

Najpiękniejsza z przygód (1929). Warszawa: F. Hoesick.

Naszyjnik wieczności (1939). Warszawa: Skawa.

Żywioł i śpiew (1939). Warszawa: F. Hoesick.

Butrymowiczówna, Alina (1899–1978)

Serce słupów telegraficznych (1925). Toruń: Pomorska Drukarnia Rolnicza.

Serce słupów telegraficznych (1925). Warszawa: Gebethner i Wolff.

Ciechanowska, Elżbieta (?–?)

Wiersze niemodne. Z Wilna (Vol. 1). (1935). Kraków: Powściągliwość i Praca.

Czekańska-Heymanowa, Róża (1887–1968)

We mgle i słońcu (1921). Warszawa: Ponowa

Miedzą i gościńcem. Poezyj książka druga (1923). Warszawa: (n. p.).

Miedzą i gościńcem. Poezyj książka druga (1924). Warszawa: Ignis.

Czerkawska, Maria (1881–1973)

Poezye (1908). Warszawa: Gebethner i Wolff.

Poezje z 1914–1915 roku (1915). Kraków-Bezmiechowa: L. Fommer.

Zielony cień (1928). Kraków: Krakowska Spółka Wydawnicza.

Sieci na wietrze (1931). Kraków: Krakowska Spółka Wydawnicza.

Ludzie i liście (1935). Kraków: W.L. Anczyc i Sp.

Malowanka na szkle (1939). Lwów: W.L. Anczyc i Sp.

Czerny, Anna Ludwika (1891–1968)

Uwrocie (1929). Lwów: Ateneum.

Testament Adama (1931). Warszawa: F. Hoesick.

Czeska-Mączyńska, Maria (1883–1944)

Na różnych strunach (1918). Poznań: Księgarnia św. Wojciecha.

Macierzyństwo i wiersze różne (1932). Poznań: Księgarnia św. Wojciecha [self-published].

Daukszta, Olga (1893–1956)

Dźwina o *zmierzchu* (1930). Dyneburg: Księgarnia B. Juchniewicza

Błękitne inicjały (1933). Dyneburg: (n. p.).

Walet kierowy (1937). Chełm: Biblioteka "Kameny".

Dickstein-Wieleżyńska, Julia (1880–1943)

Na duszy mej palecie (1919). Warszawa: S. Orgelbrand.

Okiść (1928). Warszawa: F. Hoesick.

Przed jego wielkim światłem… (1935). Warszawa: Drukarnia Gospodarcza.

Dobaczewska-Niedziałkowska, Wanda (1892–1980)

Na chwałę słońca (1920). Poznań: Wielkopolska Księgarnia Nakładowa.

Wilno (1922). Wilno: L. Chomiński.

Wilno. Tryptyk (1926). Wilno: L. Chomiński.

Nasza dola (1932). Wilno: L. Chomiński.

Eker, Anda (1912–1936)

Na cienkiej strunie (1935). Lwów: Księgarnia Lwowska.

Melodia chwili (1937). Lwów: Księgarnia A. Krawczyński.

Fiweger-Szpunarowa, Kazimiera (1893–1970)

Na ojczystej niwie. Zbiorek poezji dla młodzieży (1936). Leszno: Drukarnia Leszczyńska.

Pod obcem i swojskiem niebem (1936). Leszno: Drukarnia Leszczyńska.

Rozmowy z ziemią (1937). Leszno: Drukarnia Leszczyńska.

Gajzlerówna, Nela (?–?)

Głosy (1930). Warszawa: F. Hoesick.

Szare wiersze (1934). Warszawa: F. Hoesick.

Chałupnicy (1939). Warszawa: F. Hoesick.

Gamska-Łempicka, Jadwiga Maria (1903–1956)

Przechodniom (1927). Lwów: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich.

Między niebem a ziemią (1934). Lwów: Księgarnia Gubrynowicz.

Okno na ogród (1938). Lwów: Księgarnia A. Krawczyński.

Gerlecka, Regina (1913–1983)

Człowiek sentymentalny (1934). Warszawa: Epoka.

Ginczanka, Zuzanna (1917–1944)

O centaurach (1936). Warszawa: J. Przeworski.

Gizowska, Jadwiga (?–1955)

Na swojską nutę (1937). Lwów: Tygodnik „Rolnik".

Golcówna, Józefa (?–?)

Bohaterom w hołdzie. Ku czci poległych bohaterów z Łękawicy (1934). Tarnów: Komitet Budowy Pomnika, J. Pisz.

Górska, Zofia (przed wojną Lipkowska, 1904–1966)

Z podlaskich nastrojów (1926). Lwów: Pierwsza Związkowa Drukarnia.

Grodzicka-Czechowska, Wacława (1885–1950)

Poezye (1913). Warszawa: Gebethner i Wolff.

Poezye (1920). Warszawa: Gebethner i Wolff.

Poezye (1923). Warszawa: Stow. Polskich Pracowników Księgarskich.

Poezye (1927). Warszawa: Gebethner i Wolff.

Poezye (1932). Warszawa: Dom Książki Polskiej.

Grodzieńska-Łucznikowa, Wanda (1906–1966)

Promyki (1927). Pułtusk: (n. p.).

Grossek-Korycka, Maria (1864–1926)

Poezye (1904). Warszawa: S. Demby.

Niedziela palem (1919). Warszawa: W. Łazarski.

Wieszczka (1929). Warszawa: Kasper Wojnar.

Hełm-Pirgo, Janina (1898–1940)

Kolorowa sonata (1928). Warszawa: F. Hoesick.

Hoesick-Hendrichowa, Jadwiga (1905–1968)

Łkania i pieszczoty (1930). Warszawa: F. Hoesick.

Różowe migdały (1934). Warszawa: F. Hoesick.

Iłłakowicz, Kazimiera (1892–1983)

Trzy struny (1917). Petrograd: Księgarnia Polska.

Trzy struny (1919). Warszawa: Towarzystwo Wydawnicze [2nd ed., updated].

Śmierć Feniksa (1922). Toruń: Ignis.

Obrazy imion wróżebne (1926). Warszawa: F. Hoesick.

Połów (1926). Warszawa: J. Mortkowicz.

Złoty wianek. Opowieść o moskiewskim męczeństwie (1927). Warszawa: „Rola" J. Burian.

Płaczący ptak (1927). Warszawa: F. Hoesick.

Z głębi serca (1928). Warszawa: Gebethner i Wolf.

Zwierciadło nocy (1928). Warszawa: J. Mortkowicz.

Czarodziejskie zwierciadełka. 58 wróżb wierszem (1928). Poznań: Księgarnia św. Wojciecha

Czarodziejskie zwierciadełka. 58 wróżb wierszem (1929). Poznań: Księgarnia św. Wojciecha [2nd ed., updated].

Popiół i perły (1930). Warszawa: F. Hoesick.

Ballady bohaterskie (1934). Lwów: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich.

Słowik litewski (1936). Warszawa: Gebethner i Wolff.

Wiersze o Marszałku Piłsudskim. 1912–1935 (1936). Warszawa: Główna Księgarnia Wojskowa.

Ścieżka obok drogi (1939).Warszawa: Rój [3 editions].

Iwańska, Alicja (1918–1996)

Wielokąty (1938). Warszawa: F. Hoesick.

Iwańska, Stanisława (z d. Miłkowska, matka Alicji Iwańskiej; 1897–1944)

Pocałunki i śnieg (1920). Poznań: (n. p.).

Siódma godzina (1921). Poznań: Skład Gł. M. Arct.

Jabłońska-Erdmanowa, Zofia (1897–1998)

U twoich wrót, Ojczyzno! (1917). Petrograd: Księgarnia Polska.

Kosówka i kaktus (1932). Łódź: Dom Książki Polskiej.

Janowska, Eugenia (?–?)

Z wydartych kart (1903). Warszawa: J. Fiszer.

Miłość (1921). Warszawa: Gebethner i Wolff.

Pierwszemu Marszałkowi Polski Józefowi Piłsudskiemu w dniu imienin 19.III.1928 (1928). Warszawa: Z.G.P.D.

Do widzenia (1929). Warszawa: Zakłady Graficzne Pracowników Drukarskich.

Januszewska, Hanna (1905–1980)

Poezje (1924). Warszawa: Gebethner i Wolff.

Dom na wyspie (1930). Warszawa: F. Hoesick.

Exodus (Księga Wyjścia). (1933). Warszawa: Bluszcz.

Jaworska, Stanisława (1910–?)

Na estradzie życia (1934). Trembowla: J. Gelles.

Kalińska, Zofia (?–?)

Punkty (1932). Warszawa: F. Hoesick.

Kanfer, Irma (1920–?)

Dwa akordy (1936). Kraków: Gebethner i Wolff.

W mleczną drogę (1937). Warszawa: Gebethner i Wolff.

Kasterska, Maria (1894–1969)

Poezje (1922). Kraków: Gebethner i Wolff.

9/10 przeciw 1/10. Poezje (1927). Warszawa: F. Hoesick.

Kernowa, Zofia (przed 1939 Zawiszanka) (1889–1971)

Głos wśród burzy (1918). Lwów: Wydawnictwo Polskie [pseud. Anna Wiśniowiecka].

Kierczyńska, Melania (1888–1962)

Amulety (1924). Warszawa: (n. p.) [signed Melania Cukier].

Knoll-Wittigowa, Tekla (1886–1941)

Poezje (1920). Warszawa: Praca.

Kobylińska-Masiejewska, Eugenia (1894–1974)

Druskienniki (1930). Warszawa: F. Hoesick.

Błękitne piłki (1931). Warszawa: L. Chomiński.

Jesienna miłość (1932). Wilno: L. Chomiński.

W cieniu modrzewia (1932). Wilno: L. Chomiński.

Opowieści świerkowe (Wspomnienie z Jaszun). (1936). Wilno: Księgarnia św. Wojciecha.

Moja matka (1937). Wilno: Księgarnia św. Wojciecha.

Szare kamienie śpiewają (1939). Wilno: Zw. Literatów w Wilnie.

Kokosińska, Helena (?–?)

Okazja robi złodzieja, miłość rodzi natchnienie (1934). Warszawa: Drukarnia Artystyczna.

Komorowska-Kasimirowa, Zofia (?–?)

Pyłki (1933). Warszawa: Polskie Towarzystwo Wydawnicze „IKS".

Konarska-Łosiowa, Krystyna (1910–2002)

W szklanej kuli (1935). Warszawa: Verbum.

Oczy w słońcu (1936). Warszawa: Prabucki i Płocha.

Konopacka, Halina (1900–1989)

Któregoś dnia (1929). Warszawa: F. Hoesick.

Konopacka, Irena (?–?)

Niezżęte kłosy (1932). Warszawa: Dom Książki Polskiej.

Korczakowska, Jadwiga (1906–1994)

Krokusy (1936). Warszawa: Bluszcz.

Kowalska, Ewa (?–?)

Wiersze nienawiści (1933). Warszawa: F. Hoesick.

Kragen, Wanda (1893–1982)

Poza rzeczywistością (1931). Warszawa: F. Hoesick.

Krasicka, Elżbieta (1895–1976)

Okruchy (1936). Lida: Księgarnia św. Wojciecha.

Kruszewska, Felicja (1887–1943)

Przedwiośnie (1923). Wilno: L. Chomiński.

Stąd dotąd. A medley (Vol. 1). (1925). Wilno: L. Chomiński.

Stąd dotąd. Owoce (Vol. 2). (1925). Wilno: L. Chomiński.

Stąd dotąd. Piosenki biedactwa (Vol. 3). (1925). Wilno: L. Chomiński.

Siano (1927). Warszawa: Bluszcz.

Twarzą na zachód. Najpierw słońce zajść musi, potem przychodzi nowy dzień (1932). Warszawa: Instytut Literacki.

Kumaniecka, Bronisława (?–?)

Akordy (1936). Kraków: Drukarnia Orbis.

Śpiew muezzina (1938). Kraków: Drukarnia Orbis.

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Summary

This monograph focuses on Polish female poets whose low-quality artistic output has resulted in their names being either relegated to the margins of Polish bibliographies, literary encyclopaedias, and university course books, or eliminated from these sources altogether.

The inspiration for the analysis comes from two sources. One is the essay by Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (1929), while the other is the work of Polish researchers and feminist critics who study female poets of the interwar period, including Grażyna Borkowska, Małgorzata Czermińska, Michał Głowiński, Inga Iwasiów, Krystyna Kłosińska, Joanna Krajewska, Ewa Kraskowska, Anna Legeżyńska, Lucyna Marzec, Ursula Phillips, and Janusz Sławiński.

Research on female lyric poetry from 1918 to 1939 has been conducted through the lens of modern feminist criticism. This perspective highlights that the effort to uncover gaps in the history of literature and to reclaim the names and works of forgotten women writers does not necessarily result in the discovery of new territories or geniuses. Furthermore, it does not have to culminate in the construction of a new canon intended to compete with the existing one. It aims to broaden, deepen, and nuance the understanding of the social roots of literature, the mechanisms that govern literary life, the dynamics of reception, and the processes of creating a canon. Therefore, the approach to female poetry presented in this book can be situated within the cultural sociology of literature, which connects traditional theories of reception and influence with a modern perspective on the literary text. This perspective views the literary text as a keystone in the processes and relationships between institutions, economic operators, material and symbolic capital, and communities, including literary academies, festivals, printing houses, literary salons, and the social relations between writers, critics, and consumers of culture.

Primary sources originate from the most significant compendia of Polish literary studies, inter-war poetry anthologies, and literary periodicals. The corpus of collected biographical notes and texts comprises approximately 50 female poets and 150 small volumes of poetry. Considering the calculations of inter-war poetry researchers, who indicate that around 100 small volumes were

published annually, with about 10 percent authored by women, one can assume that this corpus is representative.

The book is divided into eight chapters, each of which can be treated as a separate synthesis of the following topics: the history of the concept of women's literature (Chapter I: Literature by Women – Women's Literature), the political and social context of literature written by women in the first decades of the 20th century (Chapter II: Women and Literature in Interwar Poland), and the ways female poets functioned in collective works, including anthologies (Chapter III: Women Poets in Anthologies) and in poetry collections (Chapters IV–VII). The last chapter, a coda, discusses the theme of motherhood in interwar poetry written by women.

Translated by Joanna Witkowska