

## 19<sup>TH</sup>-CENTURY POLISH WOMEN'S LITERATURE OF PERSONAL DOCUMENT – 21<sup>ST</sup>-CENTURY RECEPTION

Insofar as I live a literary life, I write this journal by living. There is no *literature* here. When writing – I am always in a hurry to put in as much as possible, to leave out as little as possible – I do not care about form, I crowd the facts on top of one another, I leave out reflections and effects. In this way, I try to achieve a certain immediacy, a certain freshness of life – which I value highly. (Zofia Nałkowska)<sup>1</sup>

Zofia Nałkowska (1884–1954) kept diaries for 55 years. Their editor, Hanna Kirchner, called them “a document of existing”<sup>2</sup>. They are a key component of the Polish feminine diaristic discourse – because of their refined form and because they are testimony of the transition from the nineteenth century into the twentieth. The diarist emphasises the inextricable link between the diary and existence, which the diaristic records are meant to capture as far away from experiencing it as possible. One's diary (by generalising, any autobiographical text) understood as a writing practice<sup>3</sup> is supposed to represent “happening” subjected to post factum reflection. The quotation indirectly introduces the issue of the work of memory, activated by and stored in writing. The feedback between the (re)remembered and the (re)written is important insofar as it makes the autobiographical text a prosthesis of memory, and memory – a prosthesis of autobiography, both in its individual and social dimension, and even by negation, or, more gently, by negotiation<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Zofia Nałkowska, *Dzienniki 1899–1905* [*Diaries 1899–1905*], vol. I. Edition, introduction and commentary by Hanna Kirchner, Warszawa, Czytelnik, 1975, p. 196. Unless otherwise stated, the quotations are translated into English by the author of this paper.

<sup>2</sup> Hanna Kirchner, “Wstęp” [“Introduction”], in Nałkowska, *Dzienniki 1899–1905*, p. 5.

<sup>3</sup> The concept was proposed by Philippe Lejeune. It was developed by Paweł Rodak in relation to domestic diaries. See Philippe Lejeune, “*Drogi zeszycie...*”, “*drogi ekranie...*”. *O dziennikach osobistych* [“*Dear notebook...*”, “*Dear screen...*”. *On Diaries*]. Transl. by Agnieszka Karpowicz, M. and P. Rodak, selection, introduction and edition by P. Rodak, Warszawa, WUW, 2010; Paweł Rodak, *Mędzy zapisem a literaturą. Dziennik polskiego pisarza w XX wieku* (Żeromski, Nałkowska, Dąbrowska, Gombrowicz, Herling-Grudziński) [*Between Written Practice of Everyday Life and Literature. Polish Writer's Diary in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (Żeromski, Nałkowska, Dąbrowska, Gombrowicz, Herling-Grudziński)], Warszawa, WUW, 2011.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Douwe Draaisma, *Machina metafor. Historia pamięci* [*The Mechanism of Metaphors. A History of Memory*, original title: *Metaphors of Memory: A History of Ideas about the Mind*]. Transl. by Robert Pucek, Warszawa, Aletheia, 2009; Maurice Halbwachs, *Spoleczne ramy pamięci* [*The Social Frameworks of Memory*]. Transl. and introduction by Marcin Król, Warszawa, PWN, 2008. Halbwachs emphasises the reconstructive nature of history and makes diaries and autobiographies its

Increasing knowledge of the mechanisms of memory work and how they condition the private and the public allows for a reconstruction of the past – and the past of Polish autobiographies, which mostly interests me – in which a feminocentric perspective is brought to the fore, rather than the androcentric one of so far.

This issue has already been mentioned by Danuta Dąbrowska, who combines a study of nineteenth-century women's autobiographies, especially those from the November and January uprisings, with records of women's political activity from the Solidarity in Poland in the 1980s – making us aware of the usefulness of nineteenth-century texts in diagnosing contemporaneity, pointing to present-day modifications of earlier perceptions of the nineteenth century. These modes of reading are linked by a renewed attempt to reconstruct tradition and women's history, emphasising the (self-)consciousness of its creators seen beyond a primarily male-centric mode of analysing and/or valuing<sup>5</sup>. The focus on the specificity of women's experience, while echoing a gesture made by second-wave feminist scholars, reminds us, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, of the need to revise findings once made, and at the same time warns not to consider critical feminist revisions as closing ones – they are a source of new research questions indeed. A similar point is made by Linda Anderson:

If connecting autobiography with testimony has the effect of foregrounding an ethical dimension, a political seriousness, it also has the effect of drawing attention to it as a mode of communication, an encounter which could involve and, indeed, surprise us. In this way autobiography could have much to teach us not only about others but also about what we have yet to know about ourselves<sup>6</sup>.

The combination of the mentioned elements in twenty-first-century readings has the effect of profiling women's autobiography not only as a document, a culturally modified genre, but also as a type of communication. Focusing on women's personal documentary literature from 1800–1900 from the perspective of already more than two decades of the twenty-first century is more than just a nostalgic return of retromania or another instalment of historical-literary research. It is such an important critical-feminist work, enabling us to find the great-great-grandmothers of contemporary women authors presenting their life stories, an intriguing opportunity to trace the formation of effective genealogical formulas and understand the creativity of native women writers.

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media – reinforcing the treatment of women's autobiography as a genre, cultural and identity construct.

<sup>5</sup> See Danuta Dąbrowska, *Udomowiony świat. O kobiecym doświadczeniu historii* [*Domesticated World: Women's Experience of History*], Szczecin, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Szczecińskiego, 2004, pp. 8–9.

<sup>6</sup> Linda Anderson, "Autobiography and the Feminist Subject", in Ellen Rooney (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Literary Theory*, New York and Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006, p. 132.

Nałkowska's diaristic notes close the 19<sup>th</sup> century of Polish women's autobiography, which was opened, among others, by Henrietta (Henryka), *née* Działyńska Błędowska (1764–1869)<sup>7</sup>. The texts of both authors, exposing the fluidity of boundaries – of epochs, worldviews, genres – set the framework for the present discussion. I will also consider texts by Helena Szymanowska Malewska (1811–1861), Zofia Szeptycka (1837–1924), Emilia Heurichowa (1804–1905) and her daughter Teodora Kiślańska (1844–1920), Eliza Orzeszkowa (1841–1910), Jadwiga Ostromecka (1862–1944), Narcyza Żmichowska (1819–1876), Helena Mickiewiczówna (1864–1896) and Zofia Trzuszczkowska (1847–1911)<sup>8</sup>. I juxtapose professional authors – Orzeszkowa, Żmichowska, Trzuszczkowska and Nałkowska, but also non-professional authors – Błędowska, Malewska, Ms Heurich, Ostromecka and Mickiewiczówna – which allows for a diversification of genological solutions and autobiographical strategies, as well as realising the assumptions of Stephen Greenblatt's cultural poetics enriched by Helen M. Buss with a feminist component. The latter researcher has warned against overlooking the meanings of autobiographical texts, which, for a long time, were considered to be materials of historical, not literary value, and against ignoring the gendered locations of female diarists and correspondents, by constantly bearing in mind the

<sup>7</sup> Also worth to remember: *Wspomnienia naocznego świadka* [Eyewitness Memoirs] by Anna z Tyszkiewiczów Potocka-Wąsowiczowa and *Dzieje moje własne i osób postronnych. Wiazanka spraw poważnych, ciekawych* [My Own Story and Those of Others: A Collection of Serious and Interesting Matters] by Wirydianna Fiszerowa.

<sup>8</sup> Texts will be quoted from the following editions: Henrietta z Działyńskich Błędowska, *Pamiętka przeszłości. Wspomnienia z lat 1794–1832* [A Souvenir of the Past. Memoirs from 1794–1832]. Edition and introduction by Ksenia Kostenicz and Zofia Makowiecka, Warszawa, PIW, 1960; Helena Szymanowska-Malewska, *Dziennik (1827–1857)* [Diary (1827–1857)]. Edition, introduction and footnotes by Zbigniew Sudolski, consulting by Siemion S. Łanda, Warszawa, Wydawnictwo Ancher, 1990; Zofia z Fredrów Szeptycka, *Wspomnienia z lat ubiegłych* [Memoirs of Bygone Years]. Edition, introduction and footnotes by Bogdan Zakrzewski, Wrocław–Warszawa–Kraków, Zakład Narodowy Ossolińskich, 1967; *Wspomnienia Emilii ze Szvarców Heurichowej (1819–1905) i jej córki Teodory z Heurichów Kiślańskiej (1844–1920)* [Memoirs of Emilia ze Szvarców Heurichowa (1819–1905) and her daughter Teodora z Heurichów Kiślańska (1844–1920)]. Edition, comments and footnotes by Lidia Michalska-Bracha, Emil Noiński, Warszawa, DiG, 2023; Eliza Orzeszkowa, *O sobie...* [About Myself...]. Introduction by Julian Krzyżanowski, Warszawa, Czytelnik, 1974; Jadwiga Ostromecka, *Pamiętnik z lat 1862–1911* [Diary 1862–1911]. Edition by Anna Brus, Warszawa, DiG, 2004; *Narcyssa i Wanda. Listy Narcyzy Żmichowskiej do Wandy Grabowskiej (Żeleńskiej)* [Narcyssa and Wanda. Letters from Narcyza Żmichowska to Wanda Grabowska (Żeleńska)]. Edition and introduction by Tadeusz Żeleński (Boy), Warszawa, Dom Książki Polskiej Spółka Akcyjna, 1930; Teofil Lenartowicz, Helena Mickiewiczówna, *Korespondencja* [Correspondence]. Edition by Józef Fret, Lublin, Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL, 1997; Zofia Trzuszczkowska (Adam M-ski), *Listy do Zenona Przesmyckiego z lat 1887–1901* [Letters to Zenon Przesmycki 1887–1901]. Edition and introduction by Aleksandra Błasińska, Warszawa, IBL PAN, 2019; Nałkowska, *Dzienniki 1899–1905*, and of the same author *Dzienniki 1909–1917* [Dzienniki 1909–1917], vol. II. Edition and introduction by Hanna Kirchner, Warszawa, Czytelnik, 1976.

individual and social (e.g. class) positioning of women writers – *nota bene*, changing due to contexts<sup>9</sup> or selected methodologies.

The nineteenth century was extremely conducive to diaristics and epistolography, created on an ad hoc as well as on a long-term basis. From the perspective of the twenty-first century, in which autobiographical formulas are gaining new spaces every now and then (blogs, Facebook, Instagram, videoblogs, reels inherited from the twentieth century), and emerging interpretive and analytical tools (continuing concepts from the previous century, or proposing innovative modes of reading), nineteenth-century authors should be treated as fully-fledged creators of the literary field of Polish autobiography, an immanent part of the national – but also the Central European – personal document literature<sup>10</sup>. Autobiographical growth was linked to the development of Romanticism – which provided the substrate for autobiographical discourse<sup>11</sup> divided into sections including diaries, memoirs, diaries and autobiographies. Nineteenth-century understanding of autobiography accurately reflect, to this day, the nature of the genre (or perhaps, a distinct literary genre). In 1911 Georg Misch summarised it as follows:

Autobiography is not a literary genre like the others. Its boundaries are more fluid and less externally graspable and defined by form than those of lyric, epic or drama [...]. In

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<sup>9</sup> See Helen M. Buss, “A Feminist Revision of New Historicism to Give a Fuller Readings of Women’s Private Writings”, in Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (eds.), *Women, Autobiography, Theory. A Reader*, Madison, The University of Wisconsin Press, 1998, pp. 222–231. Buss urges us not to underestimate the fact that, for many female autobiographers, self-narration is not only metaphorically synonymous with survival, and her proposed strategy of “reading between the lines” (*Ibidem*, p. 229) – while retaining the directive of sensitivity and insight – is uniquely malleable.

<sup>10</sup> Urszula Górską asked about (re)constructing a Central European identity for women, signalling its complexity related to the complicated history of the region. See Urszula Górską, *Drogi wolności. Ruch emancypacyjny kobiet w monarchii habsburskiej na podstawie publicystyki i twórczości literackiej w latach 1867–1918* [*Paths to Freedom: The Women’s Emancipation Movement in the Habsburg Monarchy as Reflected in Journalism and Literature, 1867–1918*], Warszawa, IBL PAN, 2016, p. 15 and following.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Kufer Kasyldy, czyli wspomnienia z lat dziewczęcych [*Kasylda’s Trunk, or Memories from Girlhood*]. A selection from the diaries of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries made by Danuta Stępniewska and Barbara Walczyna, Warszawa, Nasza Księgarnia, 1974; Anna Pekaniec, *Czy jest kobieta w tej autobiografii. Kobięca literatura dokumentu osobistego od początku XIX wieku do wybuchu II wojny światowej* [*Is There a Woman in This Autobiography? Women’s Personal-Documentary Literature from the Early Nineteenth Century to the Outbreak of the Second World War*], Kraków, Księgarnia Akademicka, 2013 (further bibliography there); Anna Pekaniec, *Autobiografki. Szkice o literaturze dokumentu osobistego kobiet* [*Women Autobiographers: Essays on Women’s Personal-Documentary Literature*], Kraków, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2020 (further bibliography there); German Ritz, *Poeta romantyczny i nieromantyczne czasy. Juliusz Słowacki w drodze do Europy – pamiętniki polskie na tropach narodowej tożsamości* [*A Romantic Poet in Unromantic Times: Juliusz Słowacki on the Road to Europe – Polish Memoirs in Search of National Identity*]. Transl. by Małgorzata Łukasiewicz, Kraków, Universitas, 2011; Zbigniew Sudolski, *Polski list romantyczny* [*Polish Romantic Letters*], Kraków, Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1997.

its essence, it belongs to the newer formations of the higher stages of culture, and yet it is based on the most natural attitude, on the need to express oneself and to meet the interest of other people, which goes hand in hand with the human need for self-assertion in humanity (Selbstbehauptung); it is a certain life expression, not bound to any specific form<sup>12</sup>.

Although Misch (and his intellectual heir Philippe Lejeune) focused on the male-centric autobiographical tradition, the above characterisation is applicable to women's autobiography – while it is necessary to supplement it with a critical-feminist, but also specifically native, element. I am referring to the historical aspect – the nineteenth century was a time when Poland formally disappeared from the map of Europe, parcelled out between the three partitioning states: Prussia, Russia and Austria. The restrictions and injunctions imposed by the partitioners' legislation influenced the lives of the authors of memoir texts, which themselves also protected Polish identity. The writers oscillated between the patriotic duty to preserve the memory of lost statehood and the hope of regaining it (i.e. the public), and the much-needed nurturing and appreciation of privacy, revealing an aspect of the times other than strictly national liberation<sup>13</sup>, from the decline of the Enlightenment, to the end of Young Poland (located here in 1918, Poland's independence closes the native nineteenth-century), also associated with the increasingly intense development of emancipation discourse. Nineteenth-century women's autobiography was strongly intertwined with pre-feminist and feminist, or at least emancipatory, tendencies – if understood as a striving for independence and self-determination (even on the smallest, domestic scale). For it realised one of the most essential functions of women's personal documentary literature, that is, the right to their own story, an individual narrative, although sometimes, as Carolyn Heilbrun rightly pointed out, the female authors, "having written the only autobiography possible for her"<sup>14</sup>, could otherwise be conservative, upholding the patriarchal rules of family and society<sup>15</sup>. Nevertheless, a twenty-first-century

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<sup>12</sup> Georg Misch, *O postaciach osobowości. Pojęcie i źródło autobiografii* [*On the Forms of Personality. The Concept and Source of Autobiography*]. Transl., edition, and afterword by Elżbieta Paczkowska-Łagowska, Kraków, Księgarnia Akademicka, 2020, p. 89. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the term "autobiography" began to appear with increasing frequency, although isolated references may be found in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. Cf. *Ibidem*, pp. 92-93. This term was used by Eliza Orzeszkowa and, earlier, by Narcyza Żmichowska, e.g., in a letter to Wanda Grabowska in November 1867: "Nor renounce our autobiography (sic!) [...]" (*Narcyssa i Wanda*, p. 156).

<sup>13</sup> See Ritz, *Poeta romantyczny...*, pp. 176-177.

<sup>14</sup> Carolyn Heilbrun, *Writing a Woman's Life*, New York, Ballantine Books, 1988, p. 14.

<sup>15</sup> See Ritz, *Poeta romantyczny...*, pp. 178-179. German Ritz explains the conservatism of some of the diaries written by Polish women authors in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by their focus on the family and their concern for the cultivation of the memory of their ancestors, treated as a concern for the preservation of national identity and class specificity (mainly nobility and aristocracy). He points out that a considerable number of diary writers linked their private lives with the public activities of their families, combining the personal with the social. Moreover, the writers always appeared as

perspective shows that even the conservative texts of the nineteenth century are testimonies to the autonomy of those who wrote them. The diction they chose, whether conservative or emancipatory, caused women to cease to be “storyless”<sup>16</sup> and gain an “own story”, i.e. a self-created representation in historical discourse, sometimes with a distinctly nostalgic trait, but also underpinned (and often masked as inappropriate for women by patriarchal society) by anger<sup>17</sup>, which resulted from the denial of their rights, including the right to create a story about themselves, beyond male-centric norms. The creative function of anger also contributes to the emergence of novelistic autobiographical schemes. The act of writing brings to life new autobiographical genres, sometimes based on familiar patterns<sup>18</sup> but modifying them according to individual needs or competences.

When interpreting women’s personal documentary literature from more than a century ago, it is worth treating it, following Janet Varner Gunn’s lead, not only as an act of writing but also an act of reading. Such an autobiographical situation makes it clear that writing about oneself also presupposes a reading of oneself – as a potential story and a real recorded one – by the authors, and a reading of autobiography by those interpret it<sup>19</sup>, which brings us back to the already signalled cultural determinant of autobiographical genres. I would point out that in contemporary thinking about women’s diaries or epistolography it is even necessary to define their specificity, and furthermore to connect them with the implications of the peasant or cultural turns, so important for Polish literature, which sensitise the class or metaphorical step on the social ladder from which the author speaks/writes. Following Celeste Schenck, Linda Anderson argues that the connection between genology and culture is so evident<sup>20</sup>, often seen as so obvious as to be invisible. The genres chosen by writers are not just a form of expression; they are also a testament to their competence, their reading, their writing flexibility manifested, among other things, in the combined features of two, sometimes three, genres. Hence, the conceptual term of autogynography – that is, women writing about themselves – proposed by Domna Stanton is a good solution, indicating the gender of the author of the text, making it clear that it differs from agender autobiography<sup>21</sup>. It activates the socio-cultural contexts related to the perception of

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representatives of families – daughters, wives, mothers, grandmothers, which automatically located them as people who first belonged to the domestic sphere.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 12.

<sup>17</sup> See *Ibidem*, pp. 15-17.

<sup>18</sup> See *Ibidem*, p. 37. This underlines the intertextual nature of women’s autobiography, using the mechanisms of self-storytelling known from fictional literature as well.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Janet Varner Gunn, “Sytuacja autobiograficzna” [“The Autobiographical Situation”]. Transl. by Jadwiga Węgorodzka, in Małgorzata Czermińska (ed.), *Autobiografia [Autobiography]*, Gdańsk, Słowo/obraz-terytoria, 2009, pp.150-151.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Linda Anderson, *Autobiography*, second edition, London and New York, Routledge, 2011, pp. 9-10.

<sup>21</sup> See *Ibidem*, pp. 81-82.

women, enables a closer view of a given text (or group of texts), but also implies the need to update contextual information and the analytical and interpretative tools depending on the publication (or manuscript) under consideration.

The nineteenth-century autobiographies of Polish women coincide with the intimist turn visible in the domestic literary field. Elżbieta Wichrowska characterises it as a progressive intimisation of the diaristic-memoiristic discourse (outlined as early as the last decades of the eighteenth century), signifying a focus on the personal and the emotional, not opposite but alongside the public and/or the political<sup>22</sup>. Wichrowska also gives examples of names of female diarists, e.g. Zofia Matuszewiczówna, Helena Massalska, Aniela Łubieńska, emphasising their diversity and oscillation between writing strictly about themselves and about what they witnessed<sup>23</sup>.

Wichrowska demonstrates the increasing confessional nature of nineteenth-century personal documentary literature, meaning the disclosure of secrets, weaknesses, traits considered shameful, besides several enumerations of family collations, familial alliances and conflicts, journeys, illnesses, joys interspersed with sorrows of bereavement, disappointments mixed with successes. Such a heterogeneous amalgam is *Pamiętka przeszłości* by Henrietta née Działyńska Błędowska (*secundo voto* Rottermundowa). The text, compiled in the 1960s and covering the years 1794–1832, is a combination of autobiography and diary. From the narrative point of view, it resembles a dynamic autobiographical novel merging features of the three attitudes forming an autobiographical triangle<sup>24</sup>. The first one – the testimony – is seen in Działyńska's remarks about family connections, events in the lives of neighbours or acquaintances, domestic and foreign travels<sup>25</sup>, comments on the beginning and the course of the November Uprising<sup>26</sup>. Her husband, Aleksander Błędowski, died of cholera in 1831 in Krzeszowice, where he arrived after being wounded (and having had his leg amputated) during the battle near Wawer (now a district of Warsaw). The marriage was a misalliance: she was aristocratic, and he was a soldier, but Henrietta's mother, Szczęсна Działyńska,

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Elżbieta Wichrowska, *Twoja śmierć. Początki dziennika intymnego w Polsce na przełomie XVIII i XIX wieku* [*Your Death. The Beginnings of the Intimate Diary in Poland at the Turn of 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries*], Warszawa, Spectrum Press, 2012, pp. 15–47.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. *Ibidem*, pp. 48–58.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Małgorzata Czerwińska, *Autobiograficzny trójkąt. Świadectwo, wyznanie, wyzwania* [*The Autobiographical Triangle: Testimony, Confession, Challenges*], revised edition no. 2, Kraków, Universitas, 2020, pp. 25–32.

<sup>25</sup> The recapitulation of her stay in Paris is interesting because the author, while not shying away from reconstructing a picture of the city, focuses most on her own impressions: “to myself only I return”. (Błędowska, *Pamiętka przeszłości*, p. 100). She declares that the places she visited are already described, and she wants to break the impasse of progressive forgetting: “True to form, these distant events have crushed to dust in my memory, and I am left with slivers that I hasten to put on the page, like students wishing to dispose of the calligraphy they have been tasked with”. (*Ibidem*, p. 103).

<sup>26</sup> Błędowska's memoirs are part of Danuta Dąbrowska's reflections on the specificity of women's historical experience. See Dąbrowska, *Udomowiony świat*.

agreed to their relationship, although the wedding was discreet. The second attitude – the confession – characteristic mostly of diaries, although not unfamiliar in other autobiographical genres – manifests itself in the author's focus on reconstructing feelings, revealing secrets, talking fearlessly about joyful moments, but also about unpleasant situations, disappointments, traumas (the deaths of her children, the departure of her mother – described with one of the few daily dates in the text, emphasising the painful turning point it represented), emotional wounds. Although Działyńska focused on the qualities of her family members (particularly on the women who were important to her, her two grandmothers and her mother – they raised her, taking care of her education at the convent school of the Vienna Visitation Nuns<sup>27</sup>), she did not overlook the faults or annoyances experienced by her loved ones. Thus, she breaks one of the unwritten rules of women's autobiography – one should speak about one's family only in superlatives. The third attitude – the challenge – can be detected in the auto-thematic remarks, scattered throughout the text, addressed to the inspirer of the autobiographical commitment:

It is a little late for me to start writing my memoirs, because I am sixty; but this is what my dear and only Wicia demands and it is impossible to refuse her, even though I feel that my memory is not working well anymore and I do not have the ability to convey the feelings and impressions I have experienced accurately. But since it is only for you that I am writing, my dear, I will endeavour to collect my scattered thoughts and, although in disorder, describe the greater and lesser incidents of my life<sup>28</sup>.

Well, I also digress, assuming only to describe facts, not being able to express my thoughts and feelings in a good way. Moreover – I have never learnt Polish grammar or spelling, so any mistakes you find in the composition of phrases should be forgiven, as I am an unskilled person<sup>29</sup>.

They began to write down the past (regardless of their genre qualification) at the request of the daughter or as a gift for her, in a duet with the mother (like the already mentioned Teodora and Emilia Heurich, or the poets Maryla Wolska and Beata Obertyńska, or Maria *née* Łubieńska Górka and her daughter Pia – the mother kept a diary, while the daughter, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, chose a collage of essay and autobiography), or for the mother (not infrequently as a posthumous gift, a kind of autobiographical epitaph), constitutes another important rule of women's autobiography<sup>30</sup>.

There is a matrilineal lineage of family narrative traditions, activating relationality and dialogicity – on the mother-daughter line. One can also see a

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Błędowska, *Pamiętka przeszłości*, pp. 21-23.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 17.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 18.

<sup>30</sup> See Pekaniec, *Czy w tej autobiografii...*, pp. 63-64, and Helen M. Buss, *Repossessing the World Reading Memoirs by Contemporary Women*, Waterloo, Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2002, pp. 85-119.



strategy of self-deprecation, of explaining one's faults, of apologising for shortcomings – another recurring motif in women's autobiographies, largely rhetorical in nature, meant not to actually expiate, but to dismiss the suspicion that they want to focus attention on themselves. With a clear caesura, Błędowska separates the memories of her childhood and youth, written "with pleasure, though without order"<sup>31</sup>, from the accounts of her marriage and widowhood, when she looked at reality not so freely, but with greater maturity. For today's readers, the author of *Pamiętka przeszłości* has left behind an excellent story of a dynamic woman who was as independent as possible (her mother not only took care of her education, but also taught her how to embroider and sew – including dresses and corsets. Henrietta was proud of the cattle she kept, the apiary she tended and the manor farms she managed). Raised in an aristocratic household by strong women, she became one herself.

Helena Szymanowska-Malewska (daughter of the famous pianist Maria Szymanowska) showed herself to be less independent in her daily life, but much freer in her private narratives. Her diary, kept over several decades – from 1827 onwards – has been compiled by Zbigniew Sudolski and described by him as a "unique document"<sup>32</sup>, providing a source of information for historians studying the history of Polish Romanticism or nineteenth-century customs. In his introduction to Malewska's notes, the editor<sup>33</sup> stressed the fact that without contextual information and set in the biography of her husband – that is, Franciszek Malewski, a friend of Adam Mickiewicz<sup>34</sup> – the notes could give the impression of a "dull register"<sup>35</sup>, as if Helena's life, her sorrows, joys, remarks about her loved ones, were irrelevant. Thus, a contradiction can be seen – on the one hand, Malewska's diary is considered valuable, while on the other hand, what determines its idiomaticity, i.e. the record of a woman's private experiences in the first decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, is treated as triviality. Valuing the everyday life of women (from different classes) is a task for contemporaries interpreting autobiographies from earlier centuries.

Szymanowska-Malewska's diary is part of an ever-complete catalogue of nineteenth-century female diary writing, and analytical and historical issues connected with it were presented by Philippe Lejeune<sup>36</sup>. The teenage diarist opens

<sup>31</sup> Błędowska, *Pamiętka przeszłości*, p. 165.

<sup>32</sup> See Szymanowska-Malewska, *Dziennik*, p. 10.

<sup>33</sup> He also compiled the letters of Eliza née Branicka Krasieńska, wife of Zygmunt Krasieński, and the correspondence of the Lviv family of booksellers Karol and Leonia Wild. Suffering from tuberculosis, Leonia was a friend of Zofia Romanowiczówna, a Lviv teacher and activist. Her diaries, covering the years 1842–1930, were also published by Sudolski.

<sup>34</sup> *Nota bene*, the poet's son, Władysław, married the Malewskis' daughter, Maria. It was she who received the diary after her mother's death, and the correspondence of Helena, their daughter, will be referred to in the article.

<sup>35</sup> Błędowska, *Pamiętka przeszłości*, p. 10.

<sup>36</sup> See Lejeune, "Drogi zeszyte...", pp. 186–222. The French researcher recalled that in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the diaries of girls and young women – if not kept secret – could be a disciplinary tool (read

her story with a note about a journey which began in Warsaw and ended in Moscow. In addition to a list of towns and villages passed by or in which stops were made, Helena comments on her mother and marvels at nature. The daily notes – a dozen or so, sometimes one-sentence long, taken down not as written but as spoken – quickly reveal her sympathies and antipathies. They are a diaristic account of her friendship with “dearest Natalia”<sup>37</sup>, turning the author’s life into a barrage of waiting for and writing back letters – later, those from her fiancé. Malewska writes down her meetings with her future husband, the strong emotions accompanying them, the most intimate issues written down in a cipher or in French. The cipher will be maintained, but will change its use, masking annoyances or disappointments (e.g. her husband’s behaviour or his dislike of her children). As a fiancée, she wrote quite openly, enthusiastically, about erotic experiences; after her marriage, she begins to note the number of marital intercourse meetings – which has an almost revolutionary value; daring to write about one’s sexuality was not a regular feature of women’s autobiography, quite the contrary. The body was usually recorded here in a malady, rather than erotic, context. Surprisingly, Malewska wrote almost nothing about her pregnancies until the birth of her next children. As the years go by, the husband disappears from the pages of the diary, which becomes a list of guest visits, revisits, balls, illnesses in the family, meetings, everyday life. The diaristic subject turns into an accountant of reality, and only occasionally does a person who feels lonely, even among loved ones, emerge from the notes. It was rather common for nineteenth-century women’s autobiography to be a medium for coping with feelings of separation or isolation.

The above is perfectly evident in *Wspomnienia* [*Memoirs*], written by Zofia née Fredro Szeptycka, a daughter of the famous comedy writer Aleksander Fredro, a painter, landowner but also a writer. Her collected texts were compiled posthumously, in 1906, by Stanisław Tarnowski<sup>38</sup>. In terms of genre, the text is a combination of autobiography and memoir, and was sometimes referred to as a storytelling<sup>39</sup> – probably because of its connotations of the nobleman’s storytelling, which here give way to a dialogical quality resulting from the purpose of the text. Szeptycka addressed her memoirs (written down in 1902–1903) to children, but also to future readers (the source for the reconstruction of the past was her own

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by mothers, governesses or teachers at boarding schools). Often, when the writers get married they stop writing their diaries, sometimes giving the notes to their fiancé or husband to read. Szymanowska-Malewska’s diary was intended only for herself; she treated it as a confidant and a personal chronicle.

<sup>37</sup> Szymanowska-Malewska, *Dziennik*, p. 36

<sup>38</sup> Not only can you read them, but you can also see reproductions (including a self-portrait) of Szeptycka attached to the publication. See Zofia z Fredrów Szeptycka, *Pisma* [*Writings*], vol. I. Edition and Preface by Stanisław Tarnowski, Kraków, Drukarnia „Czasu”, 1906, [https://kpbcr.umk.pl/Content/257946/Magazyn\\_351\\_09.pdf](https://kpbcr.umk.pl/Content/257946/Magazyn_351_09.pdf). Accessed November, 2024.

<sup>39</sup> z Fredrów Szeptycka, *Wspomnienia*, p. 16.

memory and preserved family correspondence), giving them an educational value. And it is not so much the historical dimension (the painter's testimonies were for a long time treated mainly as a source of knowledge about her famous father), but the remarks scattered in the course of the narrative about how one should not be strict with children, how one should not curb their enthusiasm or extinguish their joy at little things. Zofia's mother, although she supported her artistic aspirations by, for example, accompanying her daughter to study painting in Paris<sup>40</sup> and enabling her to go to London<sup>41</sup>, was a demanding parent. Years later, Szeptycka notes:

There were times when I had the feeling that Mother didn't like me at all, that she did without me, but she loved me very much still. From the vague dawn of childhood, a relationship of strange love and friendship between us emerged over time. Having grown up with her heart, I have understood with my own – all its treasures, guessed its sufferings, loved its weaknesses<sup>42</sup>.

The relationship with her mother with its constant balancing act between love and rejection, contrasted only slightly with the relationship with her father, who was warm-hearted to his daughter, took care of her health, and they went on horse rides together out of town, where Sophie trotted and galloped to her heart's content without being exposed to comments about the young girl's inappropriate riding style. A great support to her was her Swiss governess, Adela Defforel, softening the emotional times inflicted on her by her relatives. Women's autobiography from the nineteenth century provides a wealth of information to write a cultural history of the Polish family, beyond the context of the figure of the Polish Mother<sup>43</sup>, the protector of family and national identity, beyond the treatment of blood ties as an inviolable monolith. Returning to Szeptycka, she, like Błędowska, belittled the importance of her writing by calling it "idle scribbling"<sup>44</sup> or by arguing for its irrelevance: "I write all these little things basically without any interest to anyone, because from the point of view of a silly child or a juvenile, all this talk is not worth a hoot [...]"<sup>45</sup>. At the same time, seemingly despite herself, she continued to write, meticulously reproducing not so much what she remembered as "what I see in my mind"<sup>46</sup>. The painter's memoirs undoubtedly also have a therapeutic value, giving her the opportunity for much less restrained expression, allowing Sophie,

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<sup>40</sup> See *Ibidem*, pp. 152-238.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 210-214.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 42.

<sup>43</sup> I refer to Aneta Bołdyrew's monograph entitled *Matka i dziecko w rodzinie polskiej. Ewolucja modelu życia rodzinnego w latach 1795–1918* [*Mother and Child in the Polish Family: The Evolution of the Family Life Model in 1795–1918*], Warszawa, Wydawnictwo Neriton, 2008.

<sup>44</sup> z Fredrów Szeptycka, *Wspomnienia*, p. 238.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 217.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 218.

curious about the world and endowed with a considerable appetite for life, to speak.

Extremely vivid and dynamic are the autobiographical notes of mother and daughter Emilia *née* Szwarc Heurichowa and Teodora<sup>47</sup> *née* Heurich Kiślańska. The whole family (besides Teodora, there were other three sisters, Emilia, the namesake of her mother, Julia and Helena) took an active part in the conspiracy of the January Uprising<sup>48</sup>, and their Warsaw flat on Widok Street was often searched. Both mother and daughters were arrested and imprisoned in the Cytadela and the Pawiak prison, among other places. Emilia hid from the tsarist authorities near Poznań, while her daughters also stayed outside the capital<sup>49</sup>. *Z pamiętnika* of Emilia Heurichowa begins with a characteristic recapitulation of the family genealogy, indicating patriotism and a readiness to serve the homeland. The involvement of women, not in direct combat but in activities punishable from the point of view of the invaders, was seen as a matter of priority by Emilia and her daughter. Gender was not an obstacle for them, but it was so for the insurgents. Teodora points out that efforts were made to question their usefulness not only on the basis of their gender, but also their age; it was thought that “[...] we, so young, do not provide sufficient guarantee of silence in case everything is discovered. Others demanded an oath. [...] Some were also annoyed by the continued presence of the nine-year-old Helen”<sup>50</sup>. The youth aroused distrust – “What do you mean, such a kid!”<sup>51</sup>, a fear that girls, when captured, might betray the conspirators. Even incarcerated in cells, they did not snitch on anyone, showing considerable fortitude. It is hard to resist the impression that Teodora’s memoirs resemble a morality-

<sup>47</sup> In her introduction, dated 1918, Emilia notes that she is writing at her mother’s express request, being the last of her surviving daughters: “so to honour her memory and the memory of my sisters I have undertaken this work” (*Wspomnienia Emilii*, p. 25). Kiślańska adds that she incorporates into her story excerpts from her mother’s records as a “direct participant” (*Ibidem*). The symbiosis of the two women’s narratives reinforces the message.

<sup>48</sup> A priceless monograph on the January Uprising was published in 1933 by Maria Bruchnalska, Lviv historian and publicist. *Ciche bohaterki. Udział kobiet w powstaniu styczniowym* [*Silent Heroines. The Participation of Women in the January Uprising*] is a combination of historical reconstruction, a series of micro-biographies, and reports of interviews with veteran women. The publication is available online at: <https://polona.pl/preview/454fd617-b966-4ad9-9141-137b45e63647>. Accessed November 20, 2025. See also Anna Pekaniec, “Uczestniczki, obserwatorki, komentatorki. Powstanie styczniowe w autobiografiach kobiet” [“Participants, Observers, Commentators. The January Uprising in Women’s Autobiographies”], in *Autobiografki*, pp. 99-122. Further bibliography and guidance there.

<sup>49</sup> Thus, avoiding deportation deep into Russia, which became the fate of Jadwiga Ostromecka’s family – befriended by Eliza Orzeszkowa and sharing her aspirations for women’s independence and economic self-sufficiency. In a diary written at the end of her life in the 1940s recording “shreds of memories” (Ostromecka, *Pamiętnik*, p. 27) in wartime Warsaw, Ostromecka reconstructs the backstage of life in exile – the author’s father was sentenced to exile in the Tomsk gubernia, and the girl’s mother and children followed him.

<sup>50</sup> *Wspomnienia Emilii*, p. 86.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 107.

suspense novel, firmly rooted in historical realities, proving that crossing the boundaries between domestic and social involvement was not as rare for women as it may seem.

The closer we get to the end of the nineteenth century, the more numerous the autobiographies of professional women writers. Their character also changes, showing considerable ingenuity in creating idiomatic genre formulas. This ingenuity, combined with reflection on the essence of autobiography, can be seen in the short personal texts written by Eliza Orzeszkowa, who was encouraged by friendly journalists to do so. *Pamiętnik*, *Wspomnienia*, *Autobiografia w listach* and *Zwierzenia* are four different, precisely constructed micro-autobiographies. The first begins with a truly Mickiewiczian description of the family manor in Milkowszczyzna, followed by a presentation of the family – with emphasis on the figure of the deceased father, whose library provided great intellectual support for the future writer; the mother – her daughter's reluctant supporter of literary aspirations; and her sister Klementyna, who died as a child, the first such significant loss in Eliza's life. The entire *Pamiętnik* is continued up to the girl's marriage, shortly after she leaves her boarding school. In the elegant narrative, one can see the strategy of silence so characteristic of the author of *Nad Niemnem*, e.g. "circumstances about which I decided never to speak"<sup>52</sup>. The sparing distribution of facts organises the poetics of *Zwierzenia*, in which the statement of the obligation to autobiographically reconstruct experiences is juxtaposed with the proviso that she cannot write about certain issues because "my heart and conscience disagree"<sup>53</sup>. Treating the act of reminiscing as a verbal stroll through a cemetery where loved ones are buried, but also focusing on important emotions for her<sup>54</sup>, Orzeszkowa creates the text according to her own rules: "It will not be an autobiography strictly linked to dates, names, so-called circumstances. It will be a handful of images and confessions [...]"<sup>55</sup>. These images are meant to be testimonies of participation and an indication of the emotional and intellectual dispositions that made her a writer. Nevertheless, she juxtaposes them in such a way as to say a lot without saying too much. This is done, among other things, by means of another strategy, that of retardation, of splitting the mainstream of narration into smaller strands in which she diverts attention away from herself. She uses yet another tactic in *Autobiografia w listach*. Already combining two autobiographical genres in the title, she intertwines the detail and person-directedness of the author, with the indispensable non-direction, to the "you" of the addressee, which is problematic for Orzeszkowa insofar as it evokes a sense of embarrassment or shame, and a desire to protect her most precious memories or to hide traumatic experiences. In a hybrid personal narrative, the author focuses on

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<sup>52</sup> Orzeszkowa, *O sobie...*, p. 21

<sup>53</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 52.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. *Ibidem*, p. 51.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 53.

recreating her path to professional writing, monitoring her own progress, finding joy in creating: “In writing, I feel that I am transforming reality, adding, capturing, inventing [...]”<sup>56</sup>. In *Zwierzenia* the focus is shifted to the meaning and motivation of the title activity. It is supposed to be more appropriate for younger people, to maintain contact and exchange experiences, which has a communal aspect. Nevertheless, these qualities are treated with suspicion by Orzeszkowa as a threat of excessive – in her view – exposure to ridicule. Again, there is self-limitation combined with retardations – in this case, melancholic descriptions of interiors, landscapes, rare moments of unobvious happiness. The writer’s undeveloped private narratives are not only a space for testing poetics, but they also show what emotional costs and ethical complications are caused by recreating one’s own past, always intertwined, after all, with the past of others.

The self-limitation of diaristic expression was rather unknown to Zofia Nałkowska<sup>57</sup>, an author who used 19<sup>th</sup> century models (an important reference was the diaries of Maria Baszkircew, a painter who died young of tuberculosis). By transcending the unwritten injunction, evident, for example, in Orzeszkowa’s work, not to focus on oneself even when recounting one’s own life, the author opens a new chapter in domestic women’s diaries. At first, the diary is strictly intimate, intended only for Zofia, who sometimes even resents the fact that she writes a lot about herself and little about the surrounding reality<sup>58</sup>: “I am indeed writing only for myself. This diary has no purpose, it only has a reason – a desire to say what I normally don’t tell people, what I can’t write down in poems, and what I have no hope of saying in novellas”<sup>59</sup>. At the same time, the future author of *Granica* (*Boundary*) consciously places herself at the centre of the diary narrative, not only in accordance with the genre specificity of the text, but also with the context of the diary as a whole, closely linked to the recording of life. She masks a certain non-concreteness of the aim of writing the diary with a desire to freeze the passing moments – “I want this life of mine to be frozen”<sup>60</sup>, she notes in 1902. In the following years, she finds that the intensity of everyday life, and her developing literary career, distract her from writing, which she regrets. The obstacles faced by

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<sup>56</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 108

<sup>57</sup> An inspiring interpretation of Nałkowska’s diaries is Magdalena Marszałek’s book “*Życie i papier*”. *Autobiograficzny projekt Zofii Nałkowskiej: “Dzienniki” 1899–1954* [“*Life and Paper*”. *The Autobiographical Project of Zofia Nałkowska. “Diaries” 1899–1954*] (introduction by German Ritz, Kraków, Towarzystwo Autorów i Wydawców Prac Naukowych Universitas, 2004), an insightful reading considering the findings of critical-feminist theories of autobiography, e.g. Leigh Gilmore and Sidonie Smith.

<sup>58</sup> This predicament would return in 1909, when, after a hiatus caused by her marriage, Nałkowska again started to keep a diary, promising to focus on facts: “life apart from me” (Nałkowska, *Dzienniki 1909–1917*, p. 68).

<sup>59</sup> Nałkowska, *Dzienniki 1899–1905*, p. 304.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 195.

the novelist and those that are problematic for the diarist turn out to be identical – she enumerates them:

It is already the case that out of the multitude of things that could be written, one chooses, out of necessity and also out of desire, an infinitesimally small part. It is not enough to write the truth about something: the second new truth is that someone has written it, the third is that someone has written this and not that, something immediately nearby – or far away. Here I avoid things not only from the world of the least important, but also from the world of the most important [...]<sup>61</sup>.

The quote reveals the inevitably melancholic nature of any diary – the result of selection, of seeing that what is written is not necessarily what one had planned to record. The diary is a kind of distillate of life – one possible version of what it could have been. As a diarist, Nałkowska shows that a diary is the sum of choices, with no pretensions to holistic approaches – the most important thing is the I in the world. For those writing a hundred years earlier, the WORLD generally dominated over the I. Both approaches can coexist – this can be seen in Nałkowska's diaristic notes from World War I, in which the severity of wartime realities is juxtaposed with deep introspection. Tracing the trajectory of the formation of autobiographical strategies chosen by female authors of the nineteenth century – professional or amateur writers – reveals the diversity and, above all, the creativity of those who chose to turn their lives into texts.

A parallel trend to autobiography is that of epistolography. Letter writing by women makes it possible to create a colourful constellation. In her monograph dedicated to the letter as a borderline genre performing pragmatic functions as well as passing into the realm of literature (e.g. when collected into volumes of correspondence)<sup>62</sup>, Stefania Skwarczyńska emphasises the indispensability of the addressee. Most important, however, is the emphasis on the performative aspect of correspondence: "The letter flows from and serves the needs of life. It is comprehensible against the background of life; it is a fragmentary reflection of it"<sup>63</sup>. Writing, sending, reading, responding to a letter evoke real changes in the world of the correspondents. They are a report on everyday activities, a dialogue with people who are absent at a given moment. This can be seen in the correspondence of Narcyza Żmichowska and Wanda Grabowska (future Żeleńska, mother of Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński, known for his modernist essays and pioneering translations of French literature), which is a testimony to their friendship and an expert-pupil relationship, too. Żmichowska upheld the thesis that letters were more

<sup>61</sup> Nałkowska, *Dzienniki 1909–1917*, p. 211.

<sup>62</sup> An issue that demands attention is the editing of 19<sup>th</sup>-century collections of women's correspondence, how they should be published, and on what grounds the selection of material should be made (if at all). See Pekaniec, *Czy w tej autobiografii*, pp. 189–191.

<sup>63</sup> Stefania Skwarczyńska, *Teoria listu [The Theory of the Letter]*, Lwów, Archiwum Towarzystwa Naukowego, 1937, p. 75. Written more than 80 years ago, Skwarczyńska's monograph still offers effective analytical and interpretative tools.

than a report<sup>64</sup>, they were close to a chat or conversation, a space of freedom for women<sup>65</sup>. The author of *Poganka* often referred to letter writing as embroidering, sewing on canvas<sup>66</sup>, a contemporary reference to Nancy K. Miller's arachnology<sup>67</sup>, but also to the artistic dimension of correspondence. The exchange of letters between the poet Teofil Lenartowicz and Helena Mickiewiczówna, granddaughter of Helena Szymanowska-Malewska, was not of this nature. Lenartowicz provided her with parochial support; being someone unrelated, he became the young woman's confidant, with a distinctly introverted disposition:

I cannot tell you what delight, what help you have given me with your heartfelt words. Unfortunately, I am not able to conform to worldly requirements; by going beyond conventions, I irritate [!] and put people off. People think of me as original or hold me in high esteem, but I am not pleasant to them. How unspeakably grateful I am that beneath this unhappy shell of mine, you have found a human being needing warmth, being liked<sup>68</sup>.

Mickiewiczówna treats her letters as a space for self-therapy, for unfettered expression, in which she can speak of herself as a woman who does not fulfil the standard social expectations (no husband, no children, she also does not want to be constantly seen through the prism of her grandfather's fame)<sup>69</sup>, while at the same time being forced into them against her will. Overwhelmed by the demands, it is in her letters that she protests them.

A Young Poland poet and translator, Zofia Trzszczkowska, like Mickiewiczówna, finds refuge in letters. She hides in them literally – under a male nickname. The correspondence with Zenon Przesmycki, conducted between 1887 and 1901, is Trzszczkowska's consistent use of masculine generic endings (in Polish) and the use of a strategy of silence (like Orzeszkowa):

[...] by giving me a hand, you are saving a truly dying human being. I shall never touch more closely in our chats on these personal matters, but know that for some years now I have been experiencing terrible hours capable of confounding the mind. These are not the storms of the present moment, too old for that, but echoes of storms of the past, which can neither be defended, nor the consequences avoided<sup>70</sup>.

Aleksandra Błasińska, who compiled the letters, tries to prove that Przesmycki knew the true identity of the correspondent<sup>71</sup>, and also points out that the poet,

<sup>64</sup> V. *Narcyssa i Wanda*, p. 6.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 93.

<sup>66</sup> See *Ibidem*, pp. 61, 142, 284.

<sup>67</sup> See Kazimiera Szczuka, *Kopciuszek, Frankstein i inne. Feminizm wobec mitu [Cinderella, Frankenstein, and Others: Feminism Facing the Myth]*, Kraków, eFka, 2001.

<sup>68</sup> Lenartowicz, Mickiewiczówna, *Korespondencja*, pp. 209-210.

<sup>69</sup> See Ewa K. Kossak, *Rodzina M. [The Family M.]*, Warszawa, Czytelnik, 1991, pp. 400-420.

<sup>70</sup> Trzszczkowska, *Listy*, p. 223. These "storms" were most likely the divorce proceedings between 1889 and 1891 and the perturbations that ensued.

<sup>71</sup> See *Ibidem*, pp. 16-18.



hiding behind a pseudonym, made use of the prerogatives afforded by the strategy of mimicry – as a “brother” she was free to speak and act, also in the field of translations<sup>72</sup>. It should be remembered that she used this strategy when creating poetry in which the lyrical subject is often incoherent, moving between identifications. Mystification is Trzszczkowska's (Adam M-ski's) *modus operandi* in her letters, lyrical works, translation activity and everyday life. Mateusz Skucha described its varieties in detail in the text “‘Jako cień byłam i jak cień odchodzę’. Poetyckie maskarady Zofi i Trzszczkowskiej” [“‘I Was a Shadow and Leave Like a Shadow’. The Lyrical Masquerades of Zofia Trzszczkowska”]<sup>73</sup>, pointing out that mimicry in her work takes the form of disorientation, forcing one to be extremely careful not to get lost in contradictory constructions<sup>74</sup>. I think that in the correspondence with Przesmycki the male costume was also needed to inspire confidence in the addressee, to bridge the distance, as well as to exercise control over the shape of the correspondence, which was crucial for Trzszczkowska.

Just three examples of women's correspondence mentioned above show how wide its spectrum is. It also includes the family correspondence of Eliza née Branicka Krasińska, the private and professional correspondence of Eliza Orzeszkowa or Maria Konopnicka, and the friendship of Dioniza Poniatowska (with the poet Józef Bogdan Zaleski). Leaving aside the informational dimension and the (now historical) connection to the needs of life at a given time, the correspondence of women, writers and amateurs, appears as a multi-voiced cultural biography of nineteenth-century women. The same is true of autobiography. An in-depth reading of autobiographical texts not only provides a more detailed understanding of nineteenth-century history. It becomes an impulse to revise stereotypical ideas about women being located only in the domestic sphere, reminding us that nineteenth-century autobiographers and epistolographers are the ones enabling their twenty-first-century heiresses to conduct research that contributes to increasing the visibility of women's participation in history – in this case, the history of the literature of personal document.

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<sup>72</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 18-19.

<sup>73</sup> See Mateusz Skucha, “‘Jako cień byłam i jak cień odchodzę’. Poetyckie maskarady Zofi i Trzszczkowskiej” [“‘I Was a Shadow and Leave Like a Shadow’. The Lyrical Masquerades of Zofia Trzszczkowska”], in *Niesytość pragnienia. W kręgu młodopolskiej liryki kobiet* [*Hunger for Desire. In the Circle of Polish Modernist Feminine Poetry*], Kraków, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2016, pp. 71-87.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. *Ibidem*, p. 240.

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# 19<sup>TH</sup>-CENTURY POLISH WOMEN'S LITERATURE OF PERSONAL DOCUMENT – 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY RECEPTION (Abstract)

The aim of this article is to present a contemporary view of memoirs, diaries, letters, and autobiographies of nineteenth-century Polish women authors, seen from the perspective of feminist literary criticism. It draws on feminist-profiled theories of autobiography, cultural theory of literature including gendered readings, in this case taking into account the social, political, moral, historical contexts that shaped women's perception in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Central and Eastern Europe. The corpus of the article is composed of texts by Henrietta Błędowska, née Działyńska, Helena Szymanowska-Malewska, Zofia Szeptycka, née Fredro, Emilia Heurich, née Szwarc and her daughter Teodora, Eliza Orzeszkowa, Helena Mickiewiczówna, Jadwiga Ostromecka and Zofia Nałkowska. The wide chronological spectrum (Błędowska closes the 18<sup>th</sup> century and opens the 19<sup>th</sup>, Orzeszkowa symbolically closes the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and Nałkowska shows how 19<sup>th</sup>-century diarism begins to turn into 20<sup>th</sup>-century, modernist writing), the genealogical diversity of texts, the juxtaposition of professional women authors and those for whom autobiographical (epistolary) narratives were the only form of literary activity, enable the demonstration trajectory of women's emancipation in Poland under the partitions. Moreover, this study illustrates the way nineteenth-century autobiography builds and complements history in its broad sense, the history of development of genres belonging to women's literature of personal document, the way it becomes a component of individual and collective biographies, and, above all, the way it can contribute to changing the hitherto optics (e.g. seeing women's autobiography only as factography and not as a separate literary genre). The 19<sup>th</sup> century was favourable to diaristics and epistolography authored by both men and by women (frequently being the only form of female expression), and from the perspective of the twenty-first century, with an increasing number of interpretative and analytical tools, nineteenth-century female authors are seen as fully-fledged creators of the literary field of Polish autobiography, which is part of the current national, but also Central European, literature.

**Keywords:** women's autobiography, literature of personal document, epistolography, feminist literary criticism, nineteenth-century Poland.

SCRIERILE PERSONALE ALE FEMEILOR POLONEZE DIN SECOLUL AL XIX-LEA – PERSPECTIVE DE RECEPTARE ÎN SECOLUL AL XXI-LEA  
(Rezumat)

Scopul articolului este de a revizita memoriile, jurnalele, scrisorile și autobiografiile autoarelor poloneze din secolul al XIX-lea din perspectiva criticii literare feministe contemporane. Studiul valorifică teorii feministe ale autobiografiei și studii de teorie critică, în special, cele centrate pe analize de gen, pe care le contextualizează social, politic, moral și istoric în funcție de modul în care secolul al XIX-lea a modelat definirea de sine a femeilor și percepția asupra lor în Europa Centrală și de Est. Corpusul de texte este alcătuit din scrieri ale autoarelor Henrietta Błędowska, născută Działyńska, Helena Szymanowska-Malewska, Zofia Szeptycka, născută Fredro, Emilia Heurich, născută Szwarc, și fiica ei Teodora, Eliza Orzeszkowa, Helena Mickiewiczówna, Jadwiga Ostromecka și Zofia Nałkowska. Acoperirea cronologică amplă (Błędowska încheie secolul al XVIII-lea și deschide secolul al XIX-lea, Orzeszkowa încheie simbolic secolul al XIX-lea, iar Nałkowska arată cum diaristica secolului al XIX-lea începe să se transforme sub influența literaturii moderniste a secolului al XX-lea), diversitatea de gen a textelor, precum și juxtapunerea autoarelor profesioniste cu acelea pentru care narațiunile autobiografice (epistolare) au reprezentat singura formă de activitate literară permit urmărirea traiectoriei emancipării feminine în Polonia (împărțită între mai multe imperii pe parcursul secolului al XIX-lea). Mai mult, acest studiu ilustrează modul în care autobiografia secolului al XIX-lea construiește și completează reprezentarea istoriei generale a epocii, dar și istoria dezvoltării genurilor care aparțin literaturii feminine confesive, urmărind modul în care aceasta devine o componentă a biografiilor individuale și colective și, mai ales, modul în care ea poate contribui la schimbarea opticii tradiționale despre autoare (de exemplu, perceperea autobiografiei feminine doar ca „factografie” și nu ca gen literar distinct). Secolul al XIX-lea a favorizat dezvoltarea diaristicii și a corespondenței, forme literare practicate atât de bărbați, cât și de femei (pentru care au constituit adesea singurele forme de exprimare). Abordate din perspectiva secolului al XXI-lea, care prilejuiește apariția unui număr tot mai mare de perspective interpretative și analitice, autoarele secolului al XIX-lea ajung să fie considerate creatoare pe deplin legitime ale câmpului literar al autobiografiei poloneze ca parte integrantă a literaturii naționale actuale, dar și a celei central-europene.

*Cuvinte-cheie:* autobiografii scrise de femei, literatura scrierilor personale, corespondență, critică literară feministă, Polonia secolului al XIX-lea.