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## WHO'S AFRAID OF GEORGE SAND?

INDIANA'S AUTHOR AS SEEN BY MARIA ILNICKA

**“I could only read** the books my grandma had meticulously browsed, finding pages glued or stitched together is some of the Dumas novels. No-one would even dare to mention a novel by Mrs. Sand, and I was dying of curiosity. Echoing the well-rooted opinion, the male youth would voice their position aloud: not a one of them would ever marry a maiden that had read a George Sand book!”. Such is Kamila Morzkowska-Laval’s<sup>1</sup> recollection of her reading experiences from the early 1870s; she was sixteen at the time. This quote precisely renders the scandalous climate which the public opinion was weaving around George Sand’s biography and output. What is astonishing, though, is that the afore-quoted words are by a daughter of Waleria Marrené, the critic who held Sand’s works in great esteem, and who at that very time published (in 1871) in the weekly *Przegląd Tygodniowy* a study on the authoress of *Lelia*. Sand’s novels were unknown to Polish literature, Marrené lamented, this having been the only reason why her name had become “an epitome of bugbear, synonymous to Satan, one before which they cross themselves with piety”<sup>2</sup>, while “the frightened mothers hastily take those books out from their daughters’ hands”.<sup>3</sup> Nonetheless, it was not Waleria that was tasked with bringing Kamila up: instead, the girl was bred by her grandmother Adela Malletska, née Krasińska, wife of an army general, who dwelled in Warsaw, in Szpitalna Street. Clearly, instead of the erudite opinion of her mother, Kamila’s reminiscences, written down in 1940, preserved the powerful populist stance that proved prevalent in the milieu of her conservative-inclined grandmothers and aunts. And it is this

<sup>1</sup> K. Morzkowska-Laval, ‘Nie tylko w Zbożenniu. Wspomnienia z Polski, Włoch i Francji’, in M. Rutkowska, Kamila Morzkowska-Laval, and A. Czaplińska, *Pani na Sycynie*. Part III: *Z dziejów rodziny*, ed. by K. Czapliński, Wrocław and Janowiec nad Wisłą 2005, p. 85.

<sup>2</sup> W. Marrené, ‘Pani Sand’, *Przegląd Tygodniowy* no. 36, 1871.

<sup>3</sup> W. Marrené, ‘Pani Sand’, *Przegląd Tygodniowy* no. 39, 1871.

stance, rather than any other opinion, that survives in the period's anecdotes related to George Sand.

Maria Ilnicka, novelist and extremely fertile literary critic, a long-standing editor of *Bluszcz*, the most popular women's weekly of its time, made a marked contribution to the scaring of young inexperienced maidens with George Sand as an author.

Based on Ilnicka's press critiques, she perceived Sand as a female icon of artistic creative power, a *sui generis* matrix she would compare a number of other female authors against. Interestingly, her view of this 'matrix' was negative (anti-pattern) and positive, in parallel—a thought-provoking ambivalence in one's perception of an author rejected as morally suspicious whilst at the same time admired for her great talent and defended against the charges expressed by the very same critic. With all her exquisite sense for literature and its artistic values, Ilnicka appears to have struggled with a moral blockade she had imposed on herself as she had, over the long years, been developing her views and ideas of literature, the role of the male/female author, woman, and emancipation. Seen by her as an author of genius, Sand found it pretty hard to overcome the blockade.

Ilnicka's favourite female author, a model of artist, writer, and human being was Narcyza Żmichowska, the subject-matter of several sketches she penned. The name of Sand appears as a counterbalance in almost every single text she wrote on Żmichowska. For Ilnicka, an essential category in evaluating an author was whether s/he could keep his/her homeliness or familiarity, not ever losing the sense of patriotism. She pointed that even during her sojourn in Paris, Żmichowska's thoughts and sentiments never ceased to be "ideally homely, [...] never growing alien through ideas contrary to our familial traditions". Żmichowska approaches things foreign with kindred interests, perceiving them as treasures of mankind, never however divesting herself of the 'tribal individuality'.<sup>4</sup> Yet another of her skills is the fact that she was not a suffragist. She never became one, Ilnicka emphasises, in spite of the great fame George Sand enjoyed at the time and the influence of Saint-Simonians during her days in France. Ilnicka seeks the root of Żmichowska's emancipative reflection in the novelist's own spirit and mind, rather than external influences of French female authors. Rejecting female inferiority or male superiority, Żmichowska believed that the position of the given human is founded upon his/her abilities, skills, and education; women and men alike can educate themselves to the extent their abilities allow. Yet, Ilnicka argues, this sense of equality has not been imbued by a sense of uniformity of sexes/genders as far as jobs, professions

<sup>4</sup> M. Ilnicka, 'Narcyza Żmichowska', *Bluszcz*, no. 6, 1877.

and positions were concerned. Żmichowska would never display her ambition to be everywhere a man could be, and to accept the male terms—the *Bluszcz* editor stressed, clearly driving at this point at George Sand's biography, as Żmichowska had resisted the delusion of its alien pattern.<sup>5</sup>

In her extensive 1882 essay *Niś tradycji* ['The Thread of the Tradition'] one can find a definition of the difference between the model of suffragette embodied by George Sand and that of 'woman enthusiast' elaborated by Narcyza Żmichowska. In a rhetorically deft (though a little manipulative) manner does Ilnicka build the semantic field of the word 'suffragist' [Polish, *emancypantka*], based on the unceasing background of Sand the anti-pattern: "[The enthusiasts] thus took their obligations into account astringently [...]. This is what has rendered, and shall forever be rendering, them different from the suffragist, on the one hand, and from sentimental women, on the other. A suffragist determines her duties [...] for herself and with particular regard to herself, and proposes in reference to herself the old Latin moral-code principle of 'May the world perish, as long as justice is served' to let herself be governed by it. Whatever she finds to be of no obligation, the same becomes of no obligation to her. Of no obligation is for her, in particular, anything that opposes the laws she has acknowledged and anything she finds to be of an obstacle to the development of her essential self. May she sense within herself a proclivity, ability, and power toward something which, after all, lies outside the limits of her existing obligations: she judges herself to be eligible to shake them off herself, abandon them like a gown which tames the freedom of moving and therefore has to be cast amidst useless scraps. Whether it be, for instance, a higher capacity to learn, or a beneficial labour, a vocation, or some talent, one which expects for itself a wider action and favourable conditions for itself, then the earlier obligations become offered to it as an offering, and so they become named tight and narrow; in favour of the former, the home and the husband are abandoned, like the emancipated Aurora Dudevant (Sand) did in France, whereas at more-or-less the same time, our enthusiast, no less of genius and, because of the zeal of her heart, no less keen in her effusions—Narcyza Żmichowska ('Gabryella'), writes that a talent never releases one from his or her obligations: on the contrary, it still renders one obliged, and is merely a surplus in life. A suffragist repeatedly musters up her great sacrifice, and this only in view of reaching her purpose; beside this, though, she would never have the rigid obedience of spirit, the strong will in guarding oneself morally, the genuine, if not genial, emotional, amatory, and delicate considerateness, the one that has proved characteristic

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*.

of the enthusiasts, to the utmost degree. [...] the one who is bound by her obligations toward her husband and her family, has readily lost her right to the absolute boundlessness [...]. The laws of ethics tell us not to abandon one thing in order to absorb the other [...].<sup>6</sup>

Having read this text, the (female) reader of *Bluszcz* should have felt certain that she would rather not identify herself with a suffragist as this would mean neither more nor less than assuming an egoistic stance and abandoning family obligations. Albeit Ilnicka did not say it straight forward, the reader also ought to exactly know why George Sand's novels could be dangerous. The unambiguous presupposition suggests that they are emancipatory. This manipulation is agile as the name Sand appears in the text only once, yet it serves as a prime example of a life and output to which anything Ilnicka inserts in the semantic field of 'emancipation' refers. Hence, the name of Sand would only be remembered in this particular context and, possibly, in the historical context of sentimentalism which, according to the *Bluszcz* author, directly preceded the emancipation.<sup>7</sup>

Ilnicka, who popularised in her magazine the works and biographies of dozens of her contemporary female authors from all over the world, did not quite like French female authors as she associated them with George Sand and her school. Although she did appreciate its powerful influence, a "certain type of geniality" and a vast purview, she termed Sand a woman who only knows the religion of beauty. Since she perceived a literary school as the direction a genuine author points to, for the other minds to follow, she was afraid of this particular direction to be followed by Polish women-of-letters. She would often regret that Poles tended to draw the models from France, which was associated with a weird habituation to "the remains of the hegemony of the foremost nation in the world's culture".<sup>8</sup> Even the magnificent yield of the English, German, Italian, or Swedish literatures, so little known in Poland as they are, would reach the Polish reader mostly through their French translations, emphasised she. Therefore, through her own ac-

<sup>6</sup> M. Ilnicka, 'Nić tradycji', *Bluszcz* no. 12, 10<sup>th</sup> (22<sup>nd</sup>) March 1882.

<sup>7</sup> "This comes over to us from the West—from France, to be specific; it is a morbid symptom, a certain transitional form between the womanliness of yore and the budding idea of emancipation. The weakened concept of obligation of the woman working within the family and satisfied with the happiness born out of such familial labour gives rise to sentimentalism. It is, in parallel, a fashionable head-dress that women tend to wear; even those who are really devoted to their families avoid enjoying a sound happiness within it and quietly drinking from the spring of its sweet solaces and merriments." (Ilnicka, 'Nić tradycji').

<sup>8</sup> M. Ilnicka, 'Matylda Serao', *Bluszcz* no. 37, 1891.

tivities as a translator, she mainly brought into vogue English and German literature.

Ilnicka was afraid of seeing women—either as entrants or readers—entering the Sandian literary school also because she believed in the significance of sex and gender in the way literature was consumed. As she put it, “That our women read more than the men do, is a generally accepted fact; I just am not aware of whether paying attention to the fact that when done by a woman, reading affects her infinitely more powerfully compared to such capacity of the male mind; that a book is one of the strongest influences impacting the woman’s soul [from] the outside, is equally common”<sup>9</sup>. Ilnicka explains that a woman’s nature is more sensitive whilst women are limited in their upbringing to books, as combined with their household and social circle. Idealistic attitude is innate in women, and so they quite naturally strive for the higher values. Hence the importance of preventing them from yielding to the influence of light literature, such as, for example, the romantic novels by Balzac or Sand.

Ilnicka would likewise not accept the name of G. Sand in the area of children’s or youth’s literature. In her review of Kazimierz Władysław Wóycicki’s book *Życiorysy znakomitych krajowców XVIII i XIX wieku*<sup>10</sup>, describing the lives of some illustrious eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Poles, she remarked that a mention of Sand as part of the biography of Frédéric Chopin was ‘thoroughly non-educational’ as it “sheds a false light on that sad relationship and reduces the book’s space which is otherwise modest enough”.<sup>11</sup>

Ilnicka was embarrassed by the ‘non-educational’ biography of George Sand. She didn’t quite know what to do with some of Sand’s behaviours, such as wearing a male costume. When reviewing *Balzac et ses amies*<sup>12</sup>, a book by Gabriel Ferry, she presented all the featured women with whom Balzac was erotically fascinated. She however found G. Sand troublesome; as she commented, “His relation with Mrs. Sand were different: marked by a merry and somewhat hearty camaraderie, of which the author of *Indiana* was ashamed; in the silence of heart, though, she had to admit to herself that a man’s costume and name would have oftentimes positioned her as

<sup>9</sup> M. Ilnicka, ‘Kobieta i książka’, *Bluszcz* no. 38, 1867.

<sup>10</sup> The title is a cover one; the book is also known as *Z rodzinnej zagrody*. Vol. 2: *Życiorysy z XVIII i XIX wieku*, Warsaw 1881 (actually published in 1880).

<sup>11</sup> M. Ilnicka, ‘Książki dla dzieci i młodzieży’, *Bluszcz* no. 50, 15 December 1880.

<sup>12</sup> M. [M. Ilnicka], ‘Przyjaciółki Balzaka (Carraud, de Castries ks. D’Abrantès, Sand, Ewa Rzewuwska)’, *Bluszcz* no. 15, 11 April 1889 (a review of Gabriel Ferry’s *Balzac et ses amies*, Calmann Lévy, Paris 1888).

abnormal. Balzac spared no incentive or advice to the beginner novelist, and even if he happened at times to estrange or pique her with some coarse joke, then again he would dazzle with abundance of words and ideas—true, not infrequently in a tiring manner [...]”. Thus, Sand stood out amongst Balzac’s female friends in a fashion that, in Ilnicka’s view, renounced her right to the favours normally manifested towards women. Wearing a male costume and using a male penname should make Balzac adapt to her external appearance.

As a negative pattern, the name of Sand reappears in Ilnicka’s portrayals of foreign female authors. She rejected the intellectual, spiritual and artistic kinship otherwise noticed by critics between the author of *Lelia* and the Italian novelist Matilde Serao, who was commonly referred to as a ‘small George Sand’ (*la petite Sand italienne*). Ilnicka associated literary schools not only with specified artistic currents but also with national literatures, claiming that the spirit of verse or prose works should be sought for in the land of the artist’s forefathers. She argued that Serao’s singularity was not founded on a Sandian, tempestuous imagination, but rather on “maintaining the independence of her own talent in the purely Italian climate of the south of the country” and her contributions to the Naples school of writing.<sup>13</sup>

Based on selected sketches by Ilnicka, one might have thought that her opinion on Sand is thoroughly negative. But a detailed insight into the output of the *Bluszcz* editor gives one an idea of her ambivalent attitude.

To give an example, in her excellent 1874 article on the history of novel in England and the works of George Eliot<sup>14</sup>, Ilnicka describes the emergence of family novel, specifying what particular historical and civilisational purposes it addressed, and what were the new elements contributed by the genre to literature. This argument leads to a description of Eliot’s output; Ilnicka sees her as an exquisite painter of English rural environments and circles, a serious and unbiased author, characteristic of whom is an odd robustness of thought. She places an emphasis on Eliot’s unique talent, equal in its powerfulness only to those displayed by Narcyza Żmichowska and George Sand. Ilnicka’s another essay on George Eliot<sup>15</sup>, written a few years later, denies the statement whereby Eliot had assumed a male penname in honour of George Sand, as a token of the two novelists’

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>14</sup> M. Ilnicka, ‘Stanowisko Jerzego Eliot wobec kwestii kobiecej’, *Bluszcz* no. 52, 30 Dec. 1874.

<sup>15</sup> M. Ilnicka, ‘Marya Anna Cross (Jerzy Elliot [sic]) [cont’d]’, *Bluszcz* no. 6, 9 Feb. 1881.

spiritual brotherhood: "No, such brotherhood did not exist in anything, save perhaps for an equality in the talents of both women; but there is no such brotherhood whether in the sentiments, principles, views on life, nor in the living practice of the said life".<sup>16</sup> The *Bluszcz* author would demand from writers that their biographies kept up with the moral principles s/he would demand of his or her characters; any other model would she consider an instance of hypocrisy. This was the reason why she was concerned about Eliot. When one compares the rules depicted in her works with her personal life, a "painful discord between them" appears", leading to the question, "Was that woman hypocritical? Or, perhaps, she lacked the proud courage of Jerzy [i.e. George] Sand] that would let her openly own up to her convictions? Or, she just merely sought to be widely read and thus she had subjected her writing to the moral notions of the English society?"<sup>17</sup> As opposed to her sketches on Żmichowska, Sand is not used as a scarer for naive maidens or an icon of emancipation: now, she is one of the leading European female authors. Albeit her biography is immoral, she displays the courage to avoid hypocrisy related to keeping her life in hiding. Astonishingly, Ilnicka appreciates this attitude and doesn't term it recklessness. As a critic, she disliked autobiographical traces or features in novels, considering them a sort of literary adventurism, not becoming of a self-respecting female author. This right she would only ascribe to authors with a somewhat 'spoiled' reputation, George Sand among them. As she wrote an essay on the late Irish novelist Dinah Maria Craik<sup>18</sup>, in 1887, she challenged the opinion claiming that the novel *Lord Erlistoun* was a hidden autobiography of Craik, who otherwise was not a type of person that would have shown off before people. Ilnicka concluded her argument by observing that "whereas Sand could write novels out of her own life, Craik would have never done".

In her 1877 article portraying her contemporary Swedish women-of-letters<sup>19</sup>, Ilnicka compared George Sand against the women "of uncommon intelligence and talent"—namely, Fredrika Bremer and, once again, Narcyza Żmichowska. Her portrayal of yet another English novelist, Marie Louise de la Ramée (known under her penname of Ouïda)<sup>20</sup>, also features the name of G. Sand. Ilnicka affords Ouïda's works audacity, resourcefulness, and pride typical of a male author. Imagination, poetry, and zeal appear predominant in her novels. There is always an intense love in the background.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>18</sup> M. Ilnicka, 'Joanna Craik', *Bluszcz* no. 46, 16 Nov. 1887.

<sup>19</sup> M. Ilnicka, 'Kobieta w Szwecji', *Bluszcz* no. 27, 4 July 1877; 28, 11 July 1877.

<sup>20</sup> M. Ilnicka, 'Ludwika de la Ramée', *Bluszcz* nos. 32, 8 Aug. 1877; 33, 15 Aug. 1877.

There is also a religion of beauty, stemming not from a moral sense but from the repugnance experienced by high souls towards things low, common and foul. Ilnicka strongly dislikes the fact that Ouïda “seems to profess the independent morality whose limits, shifted liberally up to boundless love and unrestrained religion, are nowise hamstringing but nowise supportive of her characters, either. The notions of obligation, moral dignity, spiritual accountability prove non-existent in them; the passion against which no-one is fighting grasps them like a fatalism”.<sup>21</sup> And yet, she shuns from comparing de la Ramée to G. Sand all the same, since the latter, with a degree of moral laxity, has a sort of genius, broad-mindedness and broader ideals. For instance, fighting the idea of family, Sand basically accepted it; whereas Ouïda’s characters are not trammelled by family. Thus, Sand once again serves as a good example, and now, again, Ilnicka does not restrict herself to a somewhat enigmatic notion of ‘genius’ but affords her the characteristics she first and foremost valued about any writer—namely, wisdom and belief in ideals.

In the years 1884 and 1885, Ilnicka did something astonishing: in an extensive (spanning six consecutive issues of *Bluszcz*) study, she embarked on a thorough rehabilitation of George Sand<sup>22</sup>. The evidence testifying to a moral transformation that George Sand apparently experienced in her last days, was the six-volume edition (by Calmann-Lévy) of Sand’s correspondence, in particular her letters to her friends (in vols. V and VI).<sup>23</sup> The sketch came as a consistent and fair volte-face Ilnicka made as a literary critic—and indeed indispensable in view of completing and transforming the image of George Sand.

Ilnicka’s stance as a literary and art critic was interrelated to her editing of the *Bluszcz* magazine which had serious educational ambitions with respect to women. The reader ought to be informed by the moral beauty of literature, whereas luridness and ugliness should be removed from the latter, to the extent possible. A chance then appears for those bred on such books to be able to remove things evil from their own lives. The world of fiction is created by the writer, and it is him/her that is responsible for

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>22</sup> M. Ilnicka, ‘Posąg Jerzego Sand. Posąg – Protestactwa Akademii Paryskiej – Korrespondencji tom V i VI’, *Bluszcz* no. 40, 1 Sept. (1 Oct.) 1884; no. 41, 26 Sept. (8 Oct.) 1884; no. 42, 3 (15) Oct. 1884; *eadem*, ‘Korrespondencja Jerzego Sand (Tom VI)’, *Bluszcz* no. 2, 2 (14) Jan. 1885; no. 6, 30 Jan. (11 Feb.) 1885; no. 7, 6 (18) Feb 1885.

<sup>23</sup> G. Sand, *Correspondance*, ed. by M. Sand, Vols. 1-6, Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1882-4.



everything the characters do and think. Ilnicka stayed loyal to one absolute axiom of criticism: the requirement of moral chastity and purity on the part of the author of the work of art. "To write well, one has to feel and think in a noble manner", argued she.<sup>24</sup> In her analyses of the portrayed artists, she would apply diverse variants of the biographical-and-genetic method developed by Charles Augustine Sainte-Beuve. She sought to reveal the reasons behind the making of a piece, perceiving creative artistic activity as function of biography, with the breakthrough moments characteristic of the latter. Not only do her biographical sketches document the facts but they first and foremost create and construct entities according to the task of binding the life and the oeuvre, and checking how commensurable the biography and the works might have been. Her articles portraying the writers dealt with their biographies as much as with their outputs. This approach followed from the conviction that the artist's experience formed the substance of literature.<sup>25</sup> Ilnicka expected from artists a concord between his/her personal beliefs, his/her model of familial and social life, and what s/he represented or claimed in his/her works. Rather than merely a form of entertainment, literature is a creative act that should serve to make life better. Consequently, the artist has to be subject to social control—be it one pursued by the critic who is capable of detecting the incoherencies between how one lives and how s/he writes. Ilnicka as if blurs the border between the author and the literary character, for she perceives analysis of the biography and the plot equally interesting. This is why she repeatedly uses in her sketches the personal document literature, notably private correspondence, which she extensively used in her discourse on G. Sand.

Since Ilnicka would perceive Sand as an author of genius, she felt pretty uncomfortable about lacking the other inherent aspect of a brilliant writer, that is, untainted morality. Without it, the image of Sand seemed not only an incomplete or unfinished project but a risky one too. Once Ilnicka found in Sand's letters some facts that corresponded with her ethical ideas, she finally could admit that she was right about regarding the *Lelia's* author as a genius.

At the beginning of her study, Ilnicka calls Aurora Dudevant a "splendid author of *Consuelo*", but does not support the writer in her dispute with the French Academy which had refused to send their deputation to the ceremony of unveiling the Sand monument (funded from voluntary contributions)

<sup>24</sup> M. Ilnicka, 'Czytanie', *Bluszcz* no. 45, 1885.

<sup>25</sup> See *eadem*, 'Narcyza Żmichowska', *Bluszcz* no. 8, 1877.

in the small town of La Châtre, Province of Berry, not far from Nohant, on 18 August 1884.<sup>26</sup> As she wrote,

The Academy excused itself from this participation in the celebration of Jerzy [i.e. George] Sand, for the moral idea of this authoress' writings as well as her life did not represent the ethical ideal that has to prevail wherever such an honour is bestowed upon a human personage. Sand has already had a laurel: she has taken it herself by the power and law of her high talent, but she was denied a dearer and more beautiful wreath—the oak leaf, and there was high equity to that, for it befits that it only be laid on foreheads so chaste that they are not bent by any discomfiting [...].<sup>27</sup>

She immediately added that the statue was finally unveiled, which was however preceded by numerous strivings of Sand's friends, on which Ilnicka comments:

[...] her high significancy in the fact that excuses appeared because of that statue, and the one to whom it was erected was being excused—her memory was being purified in a sort of public confession carried out on her behalf before the public opinion. Her elder age rehabilitated the past of her tempestuous youth; the sunset was pretty and serene, casting a pure glow which has prevailed over the shadows and highlighted the innate beauty of this female soul, misfortunately hurled by the accidents of life, whereas it always remained, deep inside, solemn and worthy—as was spoken and written about; those excuses coming from the circle of her friends and admirers comprise not only a homage given to the moral laws against which the woman of genius sinned, but there is also penance, as it were, toward the after-life content of her spirit, overlapping with her memory—an apologetic bow, humiliation in the very apotheosis: expiation of the sins, the purgatory through which the great woman was bound to pass so that that honours deserved by a genius might be bestowed upon her.<sup>28</sup>

Following this introductory section, Ilnicka herself joins the circle that hastened to purify Sand of her sins, and she performs, on Sand's behalf, an

<sup>26</sup> This monument, by Aimé Millet, has been standing in La Châtre ever since, the street it is situated by is presently named after George Sand. The official description on the French Ministry of Culture's website goes as follows: "George Sand est représentée dans la cinquantaine, en 'Dame de Nohant' reconnue, assise les jambes croisées sur un rocher entouré de végétation, le buste penché, le visage légèrement tourné vers sa gauche et vêtue de la gandourah, longue robe de chambre qu'elle revêtait pour écrire. Elle tient une plume dans la main droite et un livre entrouvert dans l'autre main"; <https://www.pop.culture.gouv.fr/notice/palissy/IM36002951> [accessed 14.10.2023].

<sup>27</sup> M. Ilnicka, 'Posąg', *Bluszcz* no. 40, 19 Sept. (1 Oct.) 1884.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibidem*.

unusual confession with use of a biographical document—namely, the letters Aurora's wrote in her last days to her friends.

The phrase "a homage given to the moral laws against which the woman of genius sinned" excellently renders Ilnicka's ambivalence with respect to Sand as visible in almost every single article the French author's name was mentioned. A genius lacking an ethical sense: such is the image of Sand when compared, for instance, to Narcyza Żmichowska, a genius furnished with a moral sense, in Ilnicka's view. "There is, therefore, something that exceeds genius and brilliance, any talent, and any artistry... there is a virtue confronted with which everything diminishes and has to feel inferior to it when it comes to summing up the reckonings of life!", she remarked.<sup>29</sup>

Ilnicka proposes the statement that a clear moral revolution occurred in the spirit of George Sand—after all, the author of *Lelia* and *Indiana*—in her last days. The main reason behind this revolution, its trigger, is identified by Ilnicka in the sphere of physiology (however possibly funny, this is quite natural to the Polish commentator). Sand is believed by Ilnicka to have noticed that duties and obligations are part of life as well—but only when "the passions that must have flared in her [...] were muffled in her with age, and when, having risen above them, she looked back into her past and sensed what philosophy actually required—the moral law, along with the social law: a virtue! And then, she was a different being whilst parting with the people than once she had come amongst them".<sup>30</sup> Menopause favours moral revival: thus one might summarise Ilnicka's reasoning. She found the posthumous confession made in the French press by Sand's friends on her behalf somehow weird ("in spite of all her deviations and guilts, her sins—the merciless treading of two hearts so worthy: the one of Musset and that of Szopen [i.e. Chopin]") but supported it as a means of restoring the writer of 'genius' in accord with Ilnicka's own vision of art and artists. Ilnicka finds that what we can read in volumes V and VI of Sand's letters, particularly those to Armand Barbès and Gustav Flaubert, confirms that Sand's noble soul assumed in her late years peaces liberated from passionate thrills. Aurora loves her son Maurice (volume V begins in the year 1864, the date she bequested Nohant to Maurice), his wife and granddaughters (whom she teaches), is a fantastic grandmother (though she used to be a deplorable wife), has friendly relationships, writes letters (Ilnicka sees in them "the former power and beauty of style"), never complaining that she has to make a living by writing in her old age. She proudly confesses she had not fallen into debt, though she always spent her money the way she wanted. Ilnicka

<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>30</sup> *Ibidem.*

emphasises that Sand never evokes recollections from her youth years and never tends to explain herself in those late letters. Whereas not regretting her youth, she resented it; Ilnicka interprets those things left unsaid as a hidden melancholy of the soul, thus seeking the grounds for a 'confession' on Sand's behalf.

Ilnicka focused on volumes V and VI of the correspondence edition as they contained letters written by a mature woman speaking of old age and quietening down in a period when more and more friends around her were dying and it became difficult to "get over the tribulations". She is evidently impressed by Sand's strivings to keep a life balance, for all that. "It is with a bravery of spirit that she has accepted distress as a constituent of human existence"<sup>31</sup>, Ilnicka emphasised, and selected such quotes from Sand's letters which displayed her strength. Ilnicka's favourite word 'duty'/obligation' appears here as well: in a valiant struggle against suffering, Sand sees a moral obligation of humans. This direction of change is one Ilnicka accepts. Having theretofore no sense of duty whatsoever, Sand is now regaining the 'appropriate' moral stance. Ilnicka moreover examines, just in case, her attitude toward God and finds to her satisfaction that Sand has not yielded to nihilism, and believes "in a simple catechismal sense"; God, and thoughts of existence of human soul in the supramundane world, are extensively represented in her late correspondence. To prove this, she quotes the letter to Marie-Théodore Desplanches of 15 May 1866 in its entirety: Sand argues in it that God is not an abstract entity, yet since he is undefinable and his existence unprovable, it is faith that remains.<sup>32</sup> Faith, according to Sand, stands for 'I hope' rather than 'I know'. While not forcibly looking for deviations of the ecclesial dogmas in Sand's convictions, she coincidentally discovers one of them and, surprisingly enough, does not condemn it, finding for it instead a natural place in Sand's idealistic world. Her belief in God was sweet, Ilnicka concludes, for she only believed in God's love after death while denying eternal condemnation: the foundation on her religion was the conviction that God must be good.

Ilnicka eulogises over Sand's personality from the late years of her life. A mature author envies another mature author that she can experience her old age in a serene and fulfilled manner. To quote the former,

The decline of the life was indeed for that magnificent female character the hour of the most fabulous reflections and tones of light. The passing years have

<sup>31</sup> M. Ilnicka, 'Posąg', *Bluszcz* no. 41, 26 Sept. (8 Oct.) 1884.

<sup>32</sup> G. Sand, *Correspondance 1812-1876*, tome 5: 1864-1870, Paris: Calmann Levy, 1883, pp. 113-6.

ennobled her and taught her things: she is floating up above what she has been though, for she has judged her past as the robes fallen down of her, and as she is looking forward, it is upwards that she is looking. She has investigated a lot, but her spirit is strong and its strength has not expired, and so it has not lied down to take a lazy respite, and it does have the curiosity of sublime beings [...]. When reading the history of this senility and comparing it to the plentitude of senilities of other people for whom there is nothing else left, and who do not grow involved by anything—what Sand wrote to Flaubert becomes true: namely, that people without an ideal and taste are the most miserable in the world; Sand terms them ‘chilled’.<sup>33</sup>

As can be seen based on the letters and as noticed by Ilnicka, in her old age Sand established for herself a new ideal of love and friendship, her sentiment toward her old friends gained in sustainability and became a need of life. Ilnicka appreciated that Sand, then aged over sixty, an age fit for indulging in quiet household pleasures, believed that one cannot live large according to one’s own likings. As she wrote in a 1872 letter to Flaubert: “If misfortune should be of any service, it should defend us against being egoistic (getting enclosed in the circle of one’s own needs and pleasures); hence, as one had better refrain from cursing the life, and scorning it, similarly one cannot use it according to his or her willingness—in an arbitrary fashion!”<sup>34</sup> This meticulously picked fragment well suits Ilnicka’s hypothesis claiming that Sand had rejected her egoistic attitude toward family and the world. It forms another point on the path leading to the absolution of the French author. Ilnicka described Sand’s last years with delight: “Whatever needs to be charged against [her] life, its decline is serene and beautiful. She knew how to grow old; you can never sense in her letters a regret for life, and for seeing it—whilst never would she summon death, this, in most cases, being another form of grief for life. She is departing the ground smoothly and judiciously.”<sup>35</sup> Rather, however, than satisfying herself with this objective ascertainment, Ilnicka adds a strongly evaluative opinion to support the ‘saving’ of Sand’s repute. Sand namely confesses to Flaubert that she is repeatedly crying covertly, “concealing [...] my tears like a cat when facing death”. Ilnicka thus comments the confession: “who knows what sort of tears were they: whether she would grieve the faults of her youth, of a life she might have made different: more elevated and beau-

<sup>33</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>34</sup> Quoted after: M. Ilnicka, ‘Korespondencja Jerzego Sand (Tom VI)’, *Bluszcz* no. 7 1885, 6 (18) Feb. 1885.

<sup>35</sup> M. Ilnicka, ‘Korespondencja’ (as above).

tiful? But as far as her senectitude is concerned, she has saved for it whatever she could.”<sup>36</sup>

Ilnicka’s portrait of the ageing Sand is permeated with the notion of idealism. Sand believes in progress and in betterment of mankind; she moreover believes that finally God will be cognised by man and the latter’s belief will turn into knowledge. This attitude is described by Ilnicka as ‘rational idealism’; she explains that Sand was too intelligent to become blinded by any idea:

[...] she proves to be too reflective and too perceptive a person to be biased—blinded by an idea she professes, and hence she can see a very painful thing: she can namely see that there is no progress in France and that the young generation is nowise superior to the old one, just conversely: it has made a retrograde step, being overwhelmed by materialism which captivating the spirit and its related poetry of emotion, the lust for higher moral ideals.<sup>37</sup>

Ilnicka considers that gripes concerning young people have not ensued from anile acrimony or solitude. For „Sand, in literary terms, has not descended from her throne”, and in such an elevated position, one’s mind never grows bitter. Complaining at the cult of money among the young generation stems, Ilnicka believes, exclusively from Sand’s belief in love, art, and the ideal. Such knowing idealism enabled Sand to remain indifferent toward the tinsel of Napoleon and to have no illusion as to France’s actual powerfulness in Europe. Sand has a permanent sense of guilt; in the latter half of the sixties, she oftentimes gets troubled by the lack of ideals in her country, which in Ilnicka’s perception makes her quite a politically far-sighted person: after all, the war with Prussia resulted from the country’s material demoralization, she ascertains.

Ilnicka eventually finds in Sand an opinion on the role of woman, much in line with her own views:

She loved her son Maurycy [i.e. Maurice] very much since his earliest years; her affection for her daughter was much weaker, though also in this case she always endeavoured to fulfil her duties as a mother: after all, the facts of her life demonstrate that her consideration of these obligations never advised her against being what she wanted to be. Now, however, her comprehension of this particular aspect is different: she sees in matrimony a commitment imposed on the woman’s steps of life, and because of Edwarda de Pompéry’s book in the subject of duties and predestinations of the woman, she writes to its author thus [...]: “Those who maintain that one can be a deputy and breed their children at the same time, apparently have never tended to the children by themselves, as they would have other-

<sup>36</sup> *Ibidem.*

<sup>37</sup> M. Ilnicka, ‘Posąg’ no. 42, 3 (15) Oct. 1884.

wise known that this is utterly impossible. A number of respectful women, exquisite mothers, are forced, owing to the work they do, to entrust their midgets to alien hands; but, this is a flaw of our social condition which denies nature, every now and then, and argues with it. A woman may, at a given moment, play some political or social role, in the heat of inspiration, but she cannot perform an office that would tear her away from her natural mission: the love for family. I have repeatedly been told that I am diehard the ideal of progress [...]. [...] I see woman as remaining in the bondage of her heart for ever.<sup>38</sup>

Ilnicka did an impressive analytical work on the two volumes of Sand's letters in order to prove her theory of moral ripening of the author of *Lélia*. She did highly respect and admiration for Sand and believed in sincerity of her confessions; she even quotes a few of them in the form of gnomes, which to her mind are watchwords or mottos worthy of dissemination (for instance, "I can now live very well outside myself; this would not have happened in my earlier days"; "Good in one's life is only what opposes life: the day we start thinking merely of saving the life is the day life is not worthy of living anymore"). As Ilnicka stresses, "Never ever was she inclined toward declamation or words for bragging; there were frantic bursts of flames, there were rapid and passionate sophisms, there were philosophical falsehoods, yet without falsities, offered to people in the way she is now writing about herself, with no falsity, to her friends who have loyally seen it through till her old years". Ilnicka moreover gets sentimental over Sand's goodness and simpleness ("This woman of genius would herself teach the servants").<sup>39</sup>

Ilnicka selects fragments from Sand's correspondence that testify to the moral vigilance and sensitivity which emerged in the French writer in her old age. For example, she discovers sincere hope that any civilisational change, war included, leads to some new order. She tries to identify in Sand a different author than the one focusing on passions and rebellion; than the one who has parted with her husband and then broke the hearts of several artists. She quotes an excerpt from Sand's letter to Flaubert, dated 15 August 1870: "Is it, perhaps, the final turn, coming to a fulfilment, towards the wanderings of the old world? The distinct and clear principles that we presently have with respect to everything, should be expected to re-emerge here from the whirlwind going on. If nothing goes in vain in the order of the material world, the moral world cannot be excluded from this

<sup>38</sup> George Sand to Édouard de Pompéry, letter of 23 December 1864, Paris, in G. Sand, *Correspondance 1812-1876*, tome 5: 1864-1870, Paris 1883, pp. 69-70; quoted after M. Ilnicka, 'Posąg' no. 42, 3 (15) Oct. 1884.

<sup>39</sup> M. Ilnicka, 'Posąg' no. 42, 3 (15) Oct. 1884.

law. The evil delivers the good for us.”<sup>40</sup> As volume VI of the correspondence edition starts in the year of the Franco-Prussian War, Ilnicka dwells at length on Sand’s attitude to the ongoing developments; albeit the writer unceasingly ponders on the condition of her country and on political affairs, she cannot understand the ongoing war in a moral sense, calling it a *boucherie humaine* (‘human abattoir’) and deplores that she cannot revive her once-patriotism. It is Sand’s attitude towards the political events of the year 1870 that she identifies the clearest sign of her great inner change:

Given her passionate character and strong convictions, the fairness of her rational opinions appears striking: she admits she is part of the Republican faction but keenly points out their errors and bad acts toward France, which pushed Napoleon III’s Government to a disastrous direction. Humanity and homeland, in her view, are virtuously elevated above any biasedness; there is not a hint of triumphant satisfaction that those with whom she was not together in the days of prosperity now have become crushed by the avalanche of their own faults. Her entire correspondence from the time of the war bears the noble character that wins respect for her higher reason and, to say so, magnificent spirit. Her anger towards the perpetrators of misfortune is short-lived, and she would not foment it in her heart [...].<sup>41</sup>

Sand did not suffer during the 1870 war, and even could not see any in her home area; however, like everybody else, she felt engendered from time to time. As Ilnicka emphasises, even then Sand retained her willpower. When, in the latter half of 1870, it became clear who is to win the war, and when thousands of criminals were released from Paris prisons as the Prussians were approaching the city, which posed a threat of attacks in the provinces, Sand did not leave France all the same. Ilnicka quotes excerpts from letters in which Sand confesses that she finds it hard to live a quiet and happy life, aware that Paris may be looted. She stresses that Sand’s letters from that time are filled with noble sapient statements in face of the misfortune; she delights in the following passage from a letter to Juliette Adam: “[...] rather than having nerves now, one had better subdue his imagination [...]. This is not a moment for one to let his powers collapse, it calls upon you, Dear Lady, to be strong. The present-day life is hard for men, and women owe to them not to add up anything on their part to their worries and trepidations”.<sup>42</sup> Also, she quotes a fragment of Sand’s letter to Flaubert,

<sup>40</sup> G. Sand to G. Flaubert, letter of 15 August 1870, Nohant, in Sand, *Correspondance*, tome 6, *op. cit.*, p. 13; quoted after: M. Ilnicka, ‘Korrespondencja’, *Bluszcz* no. 2, 2 (14) Jan. 1885.

<sup>41</sup> M. Ilnicka, ‘Korrespondencja’ (as above).

<sup>42</sup> G. Sand to E. Adam, letter of 22 February 1871, Nohant, in G. Sand, *Correspon-*



featuring her most liked word 'obligation'—this time, with respect to the native country: "Obligation is presently our lord of the lords, it is the Zeus of our time [...]. I am not a philosopher, for I am a servant of that Zeus who takes off a half of the soul of a slave but leaves it integral and intact in the audacious"<sup>43</sup>. Ilnicka comments on this quotation in a significant way, posing as a priest absolving Sand: "Nobody else has ejected out of himself more savorous and worthier a sentence of wisdom in the face of misfortunes of his country; to this woman, the words of the Gospel may apply whereby much shall be forgiven her, for she loved much".<sup>44</sup>

What Ilnicka finds in the Sand of the war period is merely a magnitude of mind, nobleness, and no resentments whatsoever. She is now a different person to that dangerous writer who used to create in her novels strange characters disastrous to a female mind—the one Ilnicka warned *Bluszcz* readers against.

Insofar as Sand knew how to be strong in face of the war, she is "despondent, her heart heavily torn" as the Commune of Paris emerged: "all her social beliefs, all [...] her ideals and hopes are falling, shattered into dust".<sup>45</sup> Sand admits her severe disappointment with respect to the people she so had strongly believed in. She deplores over the sea of human consciences fallen in the mud, and confesses to Flaubert that when Paris was taken over by the Prussians, her regret was not as strong. "We have bred these people as they are, we have sown in their breasts a grain that has yielded a bitter fruit: without a noble ideal, one so evanishes, always"<sup>46</sup>, Sand wrote in one of her letters to the author of *Madame Bovary*, confessing that she has temporarily lost her ability to work. Ilnicka needs to trace down Sand's attitude toward the Commune in order to show that Sand loves France and any notional cosmopolitanism is alien to her thoughts—and, primarily, to prove that this writer, "so permissive, outright excessively, to a number of human defectiveness and errors", remains stark and strict when it comes to civic virtue: she considers the latter "a duty and judges everything that concerns her in a Spartan manner", regarding moral degradation a defeat more severe for France than the war against Prussia. Relative to the moral hangover among the French after the Commune, Ilnicka resumes her considerations on Sand's idealism: the French author gradually regains

*dance*, tome 6, *op. cit.*, pp. 94–6; quoted after: M. Ilnicka, 'Korrespondencja', *Bluszcz* no. 2, 2 (14) Jan. 1885.

<sup>43</sup> Quoted after: *ibidem*.

<sup>44</sup> M. Ilnicka, 'Korrespondencja', *Bluszcz* no. 2, 2 (14) Jan. 1885.

<sup>45</sup> M. Ilnicka, 'Korrespondencja', *Bluszcz* no. 6, 30 Jan. (11 Feb.) 1885.

<sup>46</sup> Quoted after: *ibidem*.

her writing force, and looks for a journal that would be read by an adequately broad public (finding favour with the editorial team of *Temps*), resolving to creatively write for the sake of truth and beauty, thereby to inspire the readers' minds. To support her statement, Ilnicka cites a fragment from Sand's letter to Emmeline Raymond of June 1871, possibly testifying to such immortal idealism: "To comprehend the love for evil is outright impossible for those who sense the love for good, though we have to take facts into account and be knowledgeable that there is amongst people a plenty of evil ones, a whole number of madmen, with enormous amounts of idiots. This, nonetheless, should not undermine our confidence in progress, our respect for liberty, and our hope in God; and this is precisely how it befits for us to create for ourselves the notion of beauty and good, whose ideal shall reveal itself before us [...]".<sup>47</sup>

Ilnicka expects that the prompt reinstatement of balance after the traumas of history has not been rooted merely in Sand's strong character (which she otherwise definitely appreciates) but mainly in her need for love towards the world and people, belief in civilisational, spiritual and moral progress which is incessant and which is benefitted by death as well as by birth. The propelling force is, thus, the rational idealism Ilnicka has identified in Sand's mature period, and found it much in line with her own worldview. She supports her observation with an excerpt from Sand's letter to Flaubert of 12 January 1876, treating it as a creed of the writer's late years: "This is my recapitulation of my doctrine of life [...] To see the good and the evil in a possibly farthest space: behind us, in front of us, around us... everywhere! To finally find the unceasing gravitation of all the things toward the need for good, truth and beauty. [...] I did believe in my earlier days in what is my faith today [...] but lacked force, and would say, like you do today, 'There's nothing I can [do] about it...' But I was lying to myself then. [...] One has the power—of the lack of which we tend to accuse ourselves—when one is ardently willing to go upwards."<sup>48</sup>

Ilnicka's summary of her study on George Sand's inner change goes as follows: "This [i.e. Sand's letters to her friends, written in her last years (IW's note)] is her final confession, as it were: a reckoning of the conscience and admission of guilt. [...]. May her memory be given absolution from people. She erred, inflicted suffering, demolished the peace of human souls

<sup>47</sup> G. Sand to E. Raymond, letter of 18 June 1871, Nohant, in G. Sand, *Correspondance*, tome 6, *op. cit.*, pp. 138–9; quoted after: *ibidem*.

<sup>48</sup> G. Sand to G. Flaubert, letter of 12 January 1876, Nohant', in Sand, *Correspondance*, tome 6, *op. cit.*, pp. 373–80; quoted after Ilnicka, 'Korrespondencja', *Bluszcz* no. 7, 6 (18) Feb. 1885.

through the passionate paradoxicalities of her splendid writings; but when passion came off her, then the reason and sense not darkened by its clouds could operate in calmness and brightness, and she enhanced herself and had the noble power of spirit to admit that her error was a weakness. It is only hauteur founded upon egoism and sowing the poison of sophistries because of arrogance ought to be put in the position of judgment and guilt"<sup>49</sup>.

Elevated and high-minded as it is, this conclusion is, as aforesaid, rather facetious, given Ilnicka's argument in its entirety. It namely follows that the lack of the fatal force of passion (the moment when the hormone level finally decreases) is the actual reason behind one's real transformation. Thus, the critic clearly conditions morality upon the sex drive.

Nevertheless, it is astonishing to see Ilnicka incessantly revolving in her essays around the figure of George Sand, never able to forget her while portraying the other female authors. Clearly, the author of *Lelia* was for Ilnicka one of the most important, if not outright the major, point of reference in the pantheon of female writers. This is why she joined those who were eager to 'absolve' George Sand *post mortem*, at any cost. The rehabilitation embarked on by Ilnicka was an attempt to appropriate the famous figure for the purpose of her own worldview. Given this standpoint, it is not quite important whether Ilnicka was right or she has somewhat manipulated the epistolary material concerned. Her study was tasked with quietening down her own soul as a literary critic, and the task was fulfilled.



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#### ABSTRACT

In this article the author is trying to show – on the example of critical articles by Maria Ilnicka – how strong was, in Poland of the second half of 19th century, the influence of George Sand on discourse about women's writing, even among conservative critics. Maria Ilnicka (1824–1897), longtime editor of the women's weekly „Bluszcz” („Ivy”), a novelist, commentator and literary critic, is considered (and considered herself) a woman opposed to emancipation understood as a rejection of traditional family roles and transgressing the boundaries of the male world in behaviour. As can be seen by analysing Ilnicka's critical output – Sand was for her a kind of template, to which she would compare many women writers she discussed. Interestingly, this template was perceived both in a negative (as an anti-model) and positive way. Ilnicka rejected Sand as a morally suspicious person, but also recog-

<sup>49</sup> M. Ilnicka, 'Korrespondencja', *Bluszcz* no. 7, 6 (18) Feb. 1885.

nised her great talent and would sometimes defend her from her own reproaches. In 1884/188 Ilnicka published an extensive analysis of the final two volumes of Sand's *Correspondence* (George Sand, *Correspondance*, M. Sand (Ed.), Vols. 1-6, Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1882-1884). She performed interesting analytic work on the epistolographic material, in order to prove her own thesis about a spiritual and moral transformation of older Sand; she wrote a kind of „confession” in absentia in Sand's name, building it from quotes taken from her correspondence with appropriate comments, and almost absolved Sand for the mistakes of her youth. This rehabilitation can be considered an attempt to „appropriate” the classic writer for the benefit of her own views.

KEY WORDS

George Sand, Maria Ilnicka, epistolography, women's press, emancipation

