

WOMEN AMONG THE CREATORS OF INTELLECTUAL
AND ARTISTIC CULTURE IN POLAND
(26–27 September 1995)

The research into the history of women in Polish territories initiated in 1989 at the Warsaw University and coordinated by Anna Żarnowska and the present author resulted already in three volumes of studies and essays whose subject-matter is reflected in the titles: *Woman and Society* (Warszawa 1991, 2nd ed. 1995), *Woman and Education* (part 1–2, Warszawa 1992, 2nd ed. 1995) and *Woman and the World of Politics* (part I, Warszawa 1994, part 2 in the press). The conference that took place at the Institute of History of Warsaw University on September 26–27, 1995 was devoted to the place and role of women in the milieu of creators of culture and should make possible a continuation of this series of publications. Just like during the earlier feminist meetings of Polish historians (cf. e.g. Maria Bogucka's report in "Acta Poloniae Historica" v. LXI, 1992, p. 239–240) the attention was focussed on the period from the close of the 18th c. up to the outbreak of World War Two, that is the era of relatively fast though uneven advancement of women in various spheres of life, an era of their struggle for equal rights and for benefitting from the opportunities they created. The present conference was interdisciplinary in character, as it was attended by historians (here especially students of the history of science, learning and culture), historians of art and researchers into literature. The organizers intended to depart from traditional approaches, exemplified by biographies of outstanding writers and artists, in favour of collective portraits presenting the careers of women-intellectuals against the background of milieus where they developed their activity and creative work. The participants were also to consider the question of the attitude of the male part of intellectual elites to the growing numbers of women among them, while paying due regard to the universal processes of professional activation of the female population.

At the conference 12 papers and 5 reports were delivered. The inaugural paper of Grażyna Szelańska (Warsaw): *Woman — the Medium and Creator of Culture* — was devoted to the analysis of examples of "passive" participation of women in culture, confined to inspiring creators and performing organizational functions; the author also tried to establish when and to what extent women became their full right partners. She drew attention to the sphere of mass culture, especially the film, discussing the careers of actresses, women-scenarists and directors, above all in the United States. In her opinion feminization cannot be regarded as a gradual though steady phenomenon. On the contrary, from the 1920s up to the 1950s the numbers and the role of women in the American film industry were greater than in the later period. Perhaps we have to do here with a phenomenon (corroborated by sociological studies) of masculinization (or remasculinization) of the profession which starts bringing larger profits than before.

The presence of women in Polish literary life at the close of the era of Enlightenment and in the days of Romanticism was the subject of Jerzy Skowronek's paper (Warsaw): *Women Among the Creators of Sentimental and Popular Culture in the First Half of the 19th c.* The authoresses of those days rather adopted current conventions and literary vogues than participated in their creation or transformation. After the downfall of independent Poland patriotic motivations became an important stimulus for their creative work. Otherwise, the less esteemed literary genres, such as educational literature for children and youth and stories

for country-folk and towns-people remained the main field of their writing. Although this specialization in a large measure continued to be the domain of women, in the second half of the 19th c. they reached out for themes and motives of the main-stream of literature, so far cultivated mainly by male-authors, and competed with them for the palm, winning it sometimes in accordance with their individual talents. This thesis was defended by the paper of Grażyna Borkowska (Warsaw), entitled *Literary Tradition and Female Genius — the 19th and the Beginnings of the 20th c.* She also presented an interesting suggestion of distinguishing three stages in the writing of Polish women-authors, which would represent an adaptation of the typology applied by historians of English literature. The first stage would embrace 1840–1870, when part of women-writers did not go beyond an apology of tradition while others posed uncertain questions as to the place of women in society and tried to reconcile postulates of change with elements of the heritage of the past. The second stage (1870–1910) was marked by imitation of “male” literature and only in the third, after 1910, can one perceive typically feministic accents, not always connected with social commitment but representing a reflection and analysis of “the female way of experiencing the world”.

The papers of Hanna Kirchner (Warsaw) *Women Authors of the Inter-war Period* and by Jolanta Niklewska (Warsaw) *Authoresses of Literature for Children and Youth in the Russian Partition in the 19th–20th c.* were marked by a clear difference of perspective. The first paper dealt with several well-known authors, the second with ordinary hacks. As it could be expected, the creative work of the first group reflected the changes in the social position of women, it also featured some struggling, contesting characters. The second group largely approved of the traditional model of the family, where a woman personifies above all domestic virtues.

The further papers and reports were delivered by Maria Wierzbicka (Warsaw), Barbara Jakubowska (Warsaw), *Women-Authors and Their Works — Women in Polish Historiography in the Inter-War Period*, Alicja Kusiać (Poznań), *Łucja Charewiczowa — Initiator of Studies on the Fate of Women*, Elżbieta Pakszys (Poznań), *Women in Polish Analytical Philosophy. On the Hundredth Anniversary of Lwów-Warsaw School*, Dorota Mazurczak (Poznań), *Academic Careers of Women in Inter-war Poland as Observed at the University of Poznań*, Dorota Zamajska (Warsaw), *The Academic Career of Cezaria Baudouin de Courtenay*. The all helped to define the role of women in Polish learning and science of the first half of the 20th c., above all in university centres and in humanities. Women entered the world of learning gradually, with a delay caused by inaccessibility of higher education to women that continued in Polish territories until the first years of our century. They had to overcome antifeminist prejudices of the conservative part of the professorial body (the authors of reports can be given the credit for unearthing the unknown sources that document this fact). Polish women-scholars of those times numbered few outstanding individualities that could pave the way in particular branches of knowledge; however a large part of them could boast of considerable didactic achievements. In the 1930s the feminization of academic milieu was considerably intensified. In this decade as many as 30% of doctoral degrees in history were granted to women and their presence in lecture-rooms and libraries (although not yet in the chairs!) ceased to be something exceptional.

Similar phenomena took place at the same time in the milieu of painters, sculptors and actors. They were discussed in the papers by: Maria Poprzeczka (Warsaw) *Bożnańska and Others. The Careers of Women-Painters at the Turn of the 19th c.*, Anna Sieradzka (Warsaw) *Not Only Stryjeńska. Women-Artists as Co-Creators of Art Déco in Poland*, Małgorzata Meducka (Kielce) *Actresses about Themselves. Memoirs of Polish Actresses before 1939*. Here also the inaccessibility of specialized education delayed the passing of women from amateur to professional creativity. However as early as in the inter-war twenty years talented and well-educated women painters, sculptors and actresses were not only numerous but

enjoyed an equal status with their male colleagues and contributed to the adaptation of new currents of European art on the Polish ground.

The last papers: Michał Śliwa (Cracow), *Women among Polish Socio-Political Thinkers in the First Half of the 20th c.*, Helena Brodowska (Łódź), *Helena Radlińska, Co-Creator of Polish Open University*, Magdalena Marcinkowska (Warsaw), *Women-Publicists from the Circle of Radical Intelligentsia — "Głos" 1901-1905*, Andrzej Chwałba (Cracow), *Controversy About Values: Sympathizers with Emancipation Movement in Relation to Religion and Catholic Church*, confirmed the weakness of Polish feminist movement in the strict sense of the word, signalled already in previous studies. The movement had its beginnings in the first years of the 20th c. and resulted from the efforts of a small group of women activists from the circles of more or less radical left. However, despite the stereotype opinion they did not always find support in the leadership of the parties and social organizations active on the left side of the political scene. While formulating the programme of creating a new model of relations in the family and society they came across a violent opposition of the Catholic Church: those women activists themselves launched a much stronger attack than some socialists against the Christian vision of the family propagated by the clergy, which was in their opinion responsible for the many ages of underprivileged position of women. However these concepts did find any larger following, even in the circles of intelligentsia.

The participants in the discussion frequently indicated a necessity of enlarging the field of observation and of applying new methods of research in historico-feminological studies. It will not be easy to meet the postulate of comparing the processes of women's entrance into the circles of creators of culture in Poland with other European countries (these threads were present among others in the statements of G. Szelągowska, G. Borkowska and M. Poprzęcka). The application to these problems of semiotic methods seems also difficult, though promising. It is worth mentioning that another conference, devoted to the role of women in the transformation of culture of everyday life in the 19th and 20th c. is planned to take place next year.

Andrzej Szwarc

EVERYDAY LIFE, A NEW TREND IN RESEARCH INTO THE HISTORY OF CULTURE

Everyday life, one of the most fruitful trends in contemporary historical research, has countless supporters and as many staunch opponents. Scholars engaged in this research are accused by its opponents of ahistoricity, quest for cheap popularity and even commercialism. Such being the situation, polemics over the question of everyday life are becoming increasingly frequent; in Poland this gave rise to a conference *Everyday Life — A New Trend in Research into the History of Culture*, which was organized in Warsaw on September 29, 1995 by the Commission for the History of Culture of the Historical Sciences Committee, Polish Academy of Sciences.

Eight papers and communiqués were read at the conference; they dealt with general questions (methodology of research, questions of definition) as well as with various detailed aspects of research into the Poles' everyday life in the 16th-20th centuries. The debates opened with Tomasz Szarota's (Warsaw) text *Everyday Life — A Research Subject or Mere Popularisation?* in connection with the editorial series of Hachette (France) and the State Publishing Institute (Poland). Szarota characterized the two popular series, French and Polish, pointing out the similarities and differences between them. In his opinion, the series published by the State Publishing Institute in Poland comprises many valuable historical studies written by professionals (among others, M. Bogucka, B. Geremek, W. Czapliński and A. Mączak); its editorial level is also higher than that of Hachette. In concluding his opinions, Szarota declared that everyday life should be regarded as a separate trend in research and expressed regret that through methodological discussions on this trend had been started only in the last few years.

Next, Maria Bogucka (Warsaw) characterized European disputes over the character of “everyday life” research and its definition. She focused attention on vehement disputes held especially by German historians, some of whom, e.g. Hans Jürgen Teuteberg, Richard van Dülmen and Peter Borscheid ardently support research into everyday life while others, e.g. Jürgen Kocka, Klaus Tenfelde and Hans Ulrich Wehler, criticize it. In summing up the German discussions Bogucka said that the main criterion distinguishing “everyday life” from other subjects of historical research is its repeatability which makes it possible to define the essence and character of what is “everyday life” and to mark its boundaries. This concept of “everyday life” includes not only week days but also holy days, which also recur and co-create the framework of the existence of both ordinary people as well as members of social elites. In her paper Bogucka presented also her own model of the historical process which, in her view, takes place mainly on three planes: those of everyday life, of social mentality and of great events. In Bogucka’s opinion great events (e.g. wars and natural calamities) exert a strong direct influence on everyday life, even though everyday life is by nature resistant to sudden changes. On the other hand, by shaping social mentality everyday life exerts an indirect but essential influence on great historical events. This means that it is an extremely important, not to say fundamental, element of the historical process, an element which should be the subject of further serious interdisciplinary research.

The paper presented by Elżbieta Kowicka (Warsaw) was less general and concentrated on the usefulness of various historical sources for research into the everyday life of Poles in the 19th century. In Kowicka’s view, posthumous inventories, despite certain shortcomings, are the most valuable written source for this type of research. These inventories, in which belongings are listed in the German way (by kinds of objects) or the English way (descriptions of each room), sometimes contain the prices of individual commodities and thus make it possible to evaluate a legacy. Since there are so many of them, 19th century inventories can be subjected to a statistical analysis. As regards other written sources useful in research into everyday life, Kowicka mentioned lists of trousseaux, accounts of household expenses (including the very valuable lists of goods stockpiled for future use), *silva rerum* (noblemen’s records), economic and social correspondence, diaries and *belles lettres*. She said that interesting information on everyday life was also provided by 19th century cookery books, practical guides and newspapers (including advertisements). Of the relics of material culture, the most important in Kowicka’s view were iconographic sources (pictures, portraits, woodcuts, photographs), as well as collections of luxury objects and articles of everyday use.

The morning debates concluded with an interesting communiqué by Dariusz Jaroś (Warsaw), who pointed out that secret bulletins issued by the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers’ Party were of great importance for research into everyday life in Poland during the Stalinist period. The bulletins are based on ample correspondence, thousands of petitions, protest letters against dismissals from work, requests for pardon, denunciations and letters concerning other matters. The bulletins present a distressing picture of the socio-economic and political reality during that time.

Andrzej Pośpiech (Warsaw) discussed the correlation between three elements of the provincial nobility’s life in the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth from the 16th to the 18th centuries, namely, the people, the objects used by them, and everyday life. Having analyzed several hundred inventories of noblemen from Great Poland, Pośpiech drew attention to changes in the noblemen’s attitude to things, an attitude frequently tinged with sentimentalism. This shows that dry posthumous lists of belongings can be useful not only in describing the material conditions of human existence but also in research into social mentality.

In a paper *The Everyday Life of Landowners in Great Poland in the 19th Century* Witold Moliś (Poznań) discussed the Polish noblemen’s transformation into landowners in Great Poland at the end of the 18th century. He drew attention to the correlation between economic changes (modernization of landed estates, use of technical inventions, improved organization

of work at home and on the farm) and changes in the architecture of manor houses (new interior arrangement in country residences, establishment of a study-cum-office at the expense of parlours). These changes helped to shape a new mentality and a new way of life which laid stress on work rather than entertainment.

In a communiqué entitled *A New Look at Everyday Life in the Cycle of Exhibitions "The Streets and Lanes of Old Poznań"*, Held in the Museum of the Town's History, Magdalena Mrugańska-Banaszak (Poznań) discussed the principles of the exhibitions which presented various aspects of everyday 19th and 20th century life in Poznań's districts of Wilda, Jeżyce and Chwaliszewo. Different territorial, chronological and thematic arrangements were applied in the exhibitions organized in 1991-1994 in order to familiarize the public with the everyday life of old Poznanians.

The paper by Edmund Kizik (Gdańsk), which closed the debates, dealt with the participation of Gdańsk pupils and school teachers in funeral ceremonies in the 16th-18th centuries. On the basis of a rich source material, the author showed that funeral obsequies occupied an important place in the everyday life of schools in Gdańsk. They gave teachers an opportunity to earn extra money for funeral speeches and the organization of pupils' processions and were also of benefit to pupils, who received alms and a repast for participating in funeral ceremonies. Kizik said that the schools of Gdańsk competed for participation in funerals and frequently adapted their time-tables to the time of funerals. Since participation in funerals was very frequent (each school took part in a funeral 3-4 times a week), it can be regarded as an element of the youth's everyday life in Gdańsk.

Many participations in the conference took the floor during the discussion on the paper. Their remarks and proposals concerned questions of methodology and definition as well as new fields of research into everyday life, which is of enormous importance for the study of the past. For instance, Janusz Zarnowski (Warsaw) drew attention to the necessity of correlating research into social structures with research into everyday life; he was sceptical, however, about the influence of everyday life on great historical events. Ryszard Kiersnowski (Warsaw) wondered whether it was purposeful to precisely define the concept of everyday life, an analysis of which has always been, and still is, extremely useful. Stanisław Grzybowski (Cracow) emphasized the importance of research into mentality in everyday life, and Janusz Tazbir (Warsaw) said that research into everyday life showed that Poles had been part of Europe; on the other hand, it frequently broke false myths created by contemporary mass media (e.g. about everyday life during the German occupation). Anna Żarnowska (Warsaw) reflected on how to combine research into the life of the average man with the history of a society as a whole. Teresa Jakimowicz (Poznań) proposed that research be conducted into the reception of works of art by ordinary people. Tadeusz Roślanowski (Warsaw) reflected on how to examine the role of household articles in everyday life in various historical epochs. In the opinion of Stanisław Russocki (Warsaw), research into everyday life is an indispensable starting point for generalizations about the past.

In concluding the debates Maria Bogucka said that they had demonstrated the purposefulness of systematic studies on everyday life regarded as a separate field of interdisciplinary and comparative research. The correctness of this statement is not undermined by the still unresolved discussion on questions concerning definition and methodology. The source materials for research into everyday life, the most essential criterion of which is repeatability, seem to be rich and diversified. In Bogucka's opinion, certain problems may arise in research into contemporary times, for some sources portraying various elements of everyday life (e.g. memoirs, diaries, inventories, last wills, correspondence) are on the decline. But this gap may be filled by mass sources not used in this research so far (e.g. public opinion polls, accounts, films and the like).