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Letters and Diary of Anna Moszyńska: The Obverse of Conversation, The Reverse of Madness

C R I T I C S :
Anna Moszyńska, *Listy z Pirny, 1850. Uzupełnione fragmentami dziennika oraz listami Piotra Moszyńskiego* [Letters from Pirna, 1850, supplemented with excerpts from the journal and letters from Piotr Moszynski], edited by Emilia Kolinko, Warsaw 2018.

The personal documents published in the *Archiwum Kobiet* [Women's Archives] series constitute exceptional editorial and publishing projects. The authors of the editorials, who found and read the 19th century manuscripts, equipped them with introductions, biographical notes, timelines, appendices and comments, at the same time resigning from modernising the texts and abandoning other editorial interventions. Instead, they kept all "individual features of the writer: linguistic habits, hesitations, placement of notes [...]"¹. Letters, diaries, women's memoirs have so far been poorly represented and usually ignored in the historiography and history of literature, or they were somehow limited. For many years they were neglected and are still hidden in archives and libraries. The second publication in this innovative series, which was launched by *Bronisława Waligórska. Listy z cytadeli, 1886* [Bronisława Waligórska. Letters from the Citadel, 1886] prepared by Monika Rudaś-Grodzka, includes the correspondence and diary of Anna Moszyńska discovered

by Emilia Kolinko. Both books revolve around the deep relationship between the present and the past, and the reality. In the case of Moszyńska, her mental illness is also of importance. By the same token, the world of Moszyńska is brought to the reader who can learn about her story directly in its original form of an unsmooth, raw text. We have the opportunity to get to know (analyse and interpret) the text which is linguistically faithful to the past reality and truthful, i.e. free from any arbitrarily fixed, i.e. changed/modernised form given to it by the editor².

The edition preserving the handwritten shape of the document, close to the authentic form of notation (with crossings, erasures, additions, regressions marked in the print), reinvigorates "the possibility to familiarize oneself with what is non-normative in the text, what deviates from the convention, or even violates it"³. The editor's ideas are perfectly in line with the activities of the team of *Archiwum Kobiet* of IBL PAN [Institute of Literary Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences], whose database contains data on unpublished autobiographies, including a huge number of im-

¹ M. Prussak, *Edycja dokumentacyjna. Zasady wydania*, [in:] *Bronisława Waligórska. Listy z cytadeli 1886*, ancilla libri M. Rudaś-Grodzka, Warsaw 2018, p. 7. In my opinion, printing is not quite an "impersonal form" (ibid.), because even lettering and typographic projects reflect personal and/or political decisions. See: A. Szydłowska, *Od Solidarycy do TypoPolo. Typografia a tożsamości zbiorowe w Polsce po roku 1989*, Wrocław 2018; A. Szydłowska, M. Misiak, *Panewropa, Kometa i Hel. Szkice z historii projektowania liter w Polsce*, Kraków 2015.

² M. Prussak wrote about intersecting and converging paths of philologists and editors, in "My, filologowie", [in:] *Tożsamość tekstu. Tożsamość literatury*, ed. by P. Bem, Ł. Cybulski, M. Prussak, Warsaw 2016, p. 7-8.

³ M. Prussak, *Edycja dokumentacyjna...*, p. 7.

portant documents, valuable from the personal and socio-political point of view. The aim of the Archive is to fill in the gaps in the knowledge of Polish culture, i.e. to revive the forgotten voices of women. Moszyńska herself emerged from this abundance of voices, “lost” in two ways: due to the lack of research interest and her own illness. The illness itself condemned her to silence: She was placed in a madhouse, and her husband assured her that she would receive letters or oral messages from him and her children every day, but at the same time advised her not to write too often, as this mental effort could further harm her.

Emilia Kolinko points out that she found the correspondence and the journal of Moszyńska in the collections of the National Library in Warsaw. She recalls, in her editorial note, that the medical documentation of Moszyńska and some of Moszyński’s private letters were handed over from the Kraków waste paper warehouse to the library in 1989. While preparing the book, she divided the material into several compact sections (with independent page numbering). Thus, the volume consists of: a corpus of sixty letters from Anna Moszyńska to her husband (covering half of the section), children, friends, her maid and others, as well as two forged documents (Moszyńska wrote letters to her husband pretending to be her own doctor), and two diarist notebooks by Moszyńska; The appendices contain several different letters (from Moszyńska’s daughter, the stepchild of Moszyńska’s friends to Anna, two letters from Piotr to different addressees). The appendices also contain the documentation of Anna Moszynska’s illness and the letters from physicians to her husband. The final part includes letters from Piotr Moszynski to his wife. Such a documentation was accompanied by a detailed timeline and an insightful introduction, which allow to recreate the course of Moszyńska’s life and illness. Kolinko’s multifaceted analyses of Anna Moszyńska, her family and her husband’s family, as well an abundance of information about Moszyński’s friends and

acquaintances (the Biographical Dictionary is an additional aid here) and extensive historical contexts of the mid-19th century, including detailed descriptions of clinics for the mentally ill, as well as the conditions and treatment methods, meticulous and interesting footnotes, reproductions of photographs, letters, drawings and other illustrations, as well as the author’s research involvement, make reading a fascinating activity, while at the same time overwhelming due to the pessimistic tone of these egodocuments.

Anna Moszyńska (1820-1889), nee Malinowska, was born in Wołyń into a noble family. After the death of her parents, Anna and her siblings were taken care of by their relatives. She ended up in the Sobański estate, where Józefa Moszyńska lived. Anna became Józefa’s maiden, a girl to keep the latter female company. Together, they left for Chernihiv, to see Joseph’s father, Piotr Moszyński, who later became Anna’s husband. Moszyński returned in 1834 from exile to Siberia, sentenced for his activity as a member of the Patriotic Society. After Piotr’s arrest and forced departure, his first wife joined a Lithuanian officer, but it was Moszyński who, after returning from Tobolsk, was granted custody of his daughter. Following his divorce, Moszyński asked Anna Malinowska, the girl being twenty years younger than him, to marry him. Their wedding took place in Kiev in 1839. The Moszyński family lived with Józefa in Dolsk, in Volhynia. In 1840, Anna gave birth to her first daughter Julia, who died shortly afterwards. Moszyńska fell into a coma, became ill. Subsequently, these symptoms together with her earlier female ailments (paleness, fainting, extremity trembling, nervousness) were associated with her more serious mental disorders; moreover, women in the Malinowski family showed a tendency to fall into melancholy. Anna’s older sister, Idalia, was diagnosed as a nymphomaniac. In 1842, Moszyńska’s second daughter – Zofia was born. The Moszyński family moved to Krakow, where Anna became involved in charity activities, including co-creating the first Krakow children’s shelter. More children

were born, namely Emmanuel and Maria. In 1846, the uprising broke out in the city and at that time Anna wrote a visionary text entitled *Uczucia i widzenia Polki w roku 1846* [Feelings and visions of a female Pole in 1846], published anonymously by Piotr Moszyński in 1850. This was the time of the onset of her mental illness, and she was reported to show “an unhealthy tendency to mysticism and asceticism, excessive religiousness [...], the desire to keep clean and turn away from the world”⁴ (*Kalendarium*, p. 27). Her condition improved after a journey along the Rhine. She became pregnant again and gave birth to her son Jerzy in 1847, then fell ill again, developing mania. She suffered from insomnia, had attacks of fury, refused to take medication and food. In 1848, she and her husband left for Marienbad for a treatment. Afterwards, the Moszyński family stayed in Ostend, Paris and London. In 1849 another daughter, Helena, was born in Cracow. Anna stayed in Cologne during the summer and the view of the cathedral in Cologne evoked strong spiritual emotions. In Switzerland, she met the mother of her deceased and very idealized friend, Eleonora Karwicka, and ultimately Anna’s mental and physical well-being deteriorated rapidly. Moszyński took her back to Marienbad, but this time the healing procedures did not bring any improvement. The family spent the winter in Dresden with friends and relatives. One of Moszyński’s guests noted in his diary that Anna was completely crazy and the fear that she would kill someone or set fire to the house was shared by the party. At the beginning of February 1850, Piotr took his wife to a neighbouring asylum in Pirna. Since then, Moszyńska had been a patient of mental hospitals for many years. She spent half a year in the private Pirnean Healing and Welfare Centre of the Kingdom of Saxony. Then, in August, she went to a hospital in Leubus (now Lubiąż), from where, after three months, she left for the Moszyński fam-

ily palace in Kraków. After returning home, she also spent some time in the Hospital of the Holy Spirit in Cracow, until she was placed again in Leubus in 1851, where she was treated until 1875. Four years later, she left the institution, lived with her son Jerzy in Łoniów until her death; her husband Piotr died in 1879, she died ten years later.

In mid-February 1850, during her stay at a clinic in Pirna, Anna started to keep a diary, and soon afterwards she commenced correspondence. Her letters and her two-part diary constitute the testimonies of the “presence of a voice and the absence of a voice” (*Wstęp*, p. 43), states Emilia Kolinko: “Anna Moszyńska wrote to exist, to express her existence in its emotional and intellectual meaning”. These two parallel personal documents are also “a chaotic bundle of many voices, many personal narratives (dialogues, stories for children, literary sketches, memories) [...]”. Once Anna acknowledges her illness, another time she denies it; once she is satisfied with her stubbornness, then she is pleased with her stubbornness, then she swears submission and obedience to her husband; discouraged and angry, she wants to stop writing to Piotr, but finally she capitulates, reaches for the pen, the need to write about herself is too strong” (*Wstęp*, pp. 52-53).

That notwithstanding, Moszyńska did not see any contradictions between the voices that resonated from her correspondence and her journal. That was perhaps because she treated her writing as a polyphonic confession, or rather perceived herself as a metamorphic combination of several characters: a man and a woman, a woman and a child, mother, orphan, hermaphrodite, messiah, patriot, prophet... In the first part of the diary, she announces that she intends to confess before Piotr, while confession has always constituted “great suffering combined with unspeakable consolation” (*Dziennik I*, p. 6). He is a confessor, she is a suffering soul (*Listy*, p. 175). Moszyńska recalls an earlier letter where she began the process of revealing sins and mysteries, defining her role: obe-

⁴ Anna Moszyńska. *Letters from Pirna, 1850, supplemented with excerpts from the journal and letters from Piotr Moszynski*, ed. by E. Kolinko, Warsaw 2018, p. 43. I hereafter give the chapter and section titles in brackets, together with page numbers [translation mine].

dient sister, daughter, child (*Listy*, p. 96) perhaps because she had written earlier: “To you, my dear Piotr, I have sworn obedience and marital faithfulness before God [...] But let me tell you, Piotr, that it is marital obedience that married women swear to their husbands, rather than unlimited obedience; this does not equal to the renunciation of their own will [...]” (p. 94). In her notes, she compares herself to a lonely child who starts to gain independence and wonders about the world, finding no support in anyone or anywhere. She only hears words of punishment. “I asked you, Piotr, to love me, and you always answered that I was sick. I said: ‘Shower me with love, Piotr!’, while you would only pour drugs into me. Until in the end, there was no... can’t really say, supposedly no patience. Oh, God! My Piotr, I’m so sorry for this.” (*Dziennik I*, pp. 7-8).

Piotr, reminding her of the regrettable condition, urges her in a letter: “I beseech you, therefore, on all that is sacred, to listen to the advice given by Lord Pienitz and Dietrich, for only strictly observing even the smallest rules can guarantee your recovery and, by the same token, you coming home” (*Piotr Moszyński. Listy do Anny Moszyńskiej, 1850*, p. 3 [Piotr Moszyński, *Letters to Anna Moszyńska, 1850*, p. 3]).

Letters exchanged between spouses create a strange duet. Each of the partners perceives and remembers the course of the events differently. Moszyński states that his wife’s illness is conditioned by the weakness of her body and is convinced that she will be cured. Moszyńska is convinced that she is not ill at all (or that her “illness” is of her heart), does not agree to stay at the clinic and usually refuses to take medication. Consequently, she is often forced to swallow pills and tied up in a straitjacket during maniac attacks when she destroys different objects. She acts aggressively against the staff, and resorts to self-infliction. Anna also falsified two letters to Piotr, impersonating the director of the clinic – as a doctor Ernst Pienitz, she informed Moszyński that his wife’s health condition is better, and she could be

taken home. Piotr, of course, immediately realized what the facts were and reprimanded her. There are other testimonies from that time, namely the correspondence between Moszyński and his friends and relatives, letters exchanged between doctors and Piotr, as well as records of the course of Moszyńska’s illness made by Dr. Anton Dietrich in Pirna and Dr. Friedrich Hoffmann in Leubus. The medical records include repetitive descriptions of Anna’s fury attacks associated with her menstrual cycle, her attempts to subjugate the staff, the fact that she believes in supernatural forces, her religious delusions and communist views, as well as they report on Anna’s constipation, diarrhoea, insomnia, feverishness, talkativeness, malice, sexual excitement, exposing oneself and masturbation. The second description is longer and additionally takes into account the family background, including mental disorders within the family, political context, i.e. the impact of turbulent social events on the patient’s well-being, the course of individual pregnancies and breastfeeding periods, the description of the body and the appearance of genitals, Anna’s interest in mysticism and magnetism, her barefoot walks in the room and outdoors, disregard for conventions, failure to observe the rules of the centre, intolerance, a history of treating former ecstasy and melancholy in Marienbad, Anna’s identifying with Jesus Christ on the cross, and also her thinking that she was a hermaphrodite who can fertilize herself. Her “switching” genders is probably related to Anna’s ideas about herself: She felt that she was more than a woman, and less than a man – “oh yeah, some kind of something” (*Listy*, p. 176). According to Moszyńska’s doctors, she misjudged her condition by not recognising her illness; she believed that her agitation was the result of resistance and that she was rightly resisting against being imprisoned against her own will. Finally, in times of well-being, she’s ironic and sceptical, calling herself “the Queen of the Crazy” (*Dziennik I*, p. 24).

It would be impossible to find a common ground for the three relationships portrayed in Anna’s let-

ters to her husband and children, letters from Piotr and the medical reports (she is poetic, he is decent and the reports are quite emotionless). That notwithstanding, I am more curious about the confessions included in Moszyńska's personal documents, which Emilia Kolinko described as both a necessity and a mistake, doomed to failure because Moszyńska was not absolved, but only constantly confronted with the opinions of her husband and doctors who denied her the truth about herself and regarded her behaviour as pathological (*Wstęp*, p. 54), even in those cases when she only acted in an eccentric way. Probably also for this reason, she identified herself with crucified Jesus Christ. Her diary (*Dziennik I*, pp. 35-36) and one of the letters, include Moszyńska's *Sen Maryi Eleonory* [Mary Eleonora's Dream]. It tells the story of a girl who leaves home, wanders around the forest, picks flowers, then makes a wreath of thorny twigs and puts it onto her head. She takes one spike and pierces her foot. The Father appears, who puts her on the ground, sticks her thorns into her hands, and ends her crucifixion. The girl is awakened from sleep by her brother and it turns out that the pain was caused by the boy stabbing her in the course of attaching a bouquet of violets to the dress (*Listy*, pp. 219-221). This proves Moszyńska's powerlessness, concludes Kolinko, stating that "she resorted to doloristic symbolization, because passion meant that suffering would be rewarded, yet only in the future, after death" (*Wstęp*, p. 67). In reality, every day she fell into deeper isolation. That notwithstanding, she constantly fought for herself, she disagreed with everyone, even though sometimes she pretended to be humble. In fact, this contrast between the earthly pain due to the lost cause and the feeling of post-mortal triumph, constitutes a reflection present in Goethe's *Pieśń koptyjska* [Coptic Song]: If people are faced with the choice of being an anvil or a hammer, then at some point it might be worth trying being both at once. The martyrologic context, i.e. the martyrdom of the Polish nation/ Christ's martyrdom, is more extensively discussed by the author in the earlier chapter entitled: *Od martyrologii narodu do komunizmu i walki*

słowem miłości [From the Martyrology of the Nation to Communism and the Fighting with the Word of Love], including the analysis of Moszyńska's on *Uczucia i widzenia Polki...* [The feelings and vision of a female Pole] (*Wstęp* pp. 61-65).

I suppose that an autobiographical confession is not the same in Moszyńska's case as a confession to something concrete⁵. In her letters and the diary, Anna presents a polyphonic truth about herself (at the same time, we cannot separate this truth from her mental disorders). Moszyńska and her doctors want her to acknowledge her illness, undergo treatment and return to her previous healthy condition, i.e. of a woman, wife, mother, Pole and Catholic. Why was it only her illness that made her tell the truth about herself, which is partly crazy, partly subversive and partly romantic in style and completely depressing? It seems that Moszyńska's presence disappears in reality, even though her changing character is still visible, it is difficult to recognize it in a specific or uniform image. Destruction gains new shades⁶ – it manifests

⁵ M. Foucault begins his series of lectures in Louvain with reminding the method of the French psychiatrist François Leuret (1840), who, pouring icy water over a patient suffering from tormenting mania and hallucinations, forces him to acknowledge his illness: "[...] here, we encounter an idea that can be found throughout the history of psychiatry: you cannot be mad and be aware of being mad at the same time – seeing the truth makes madness disappear. And among all the therapies used over the centuries to treat madness, there are thousands of agents or deceptions invented to make the patient realize his madness. [...] What [Leuret] wants is a specific act, a confirmation: "I'm crazy." Confession, or realization, constitutes the deciding factor in a therapeutic action" (ibid., *Michel Foucault, Wrong-Doing, Truth-Telling, THE FUNCTION OF AVOWAL IN JUSTICE*. Edited by Fabienne Brion and Bernard E. Harcourt, Translated by Stephen W. Sawyer, 2014, [here transl. mine]).

⁶ It happens that as a result of diseases, accidents, traumatic experiences or without any reason the identity undergoes a radical transformation: "[...] the path splinters and the new personality, without precedent, co-habits with the previous one, eventually taking up the whole space for itself. It is an unrecognizable personality whose present does not flow from any past and whose future is devoid of tomorrow; an absolute existential improvisation. The form of the accident born, by accident occurred; the form of the affliction." (C. Malabou, *The Ontology of the Accident: An Essay on Destructive Plasticity*, 2015 [transl. mine]).

itself in the fact that Anna invented new names for herself (Helenka, Maria Eleonora, Ânn, etc.), plays various roles, hides her face behind transformation masks⁷, by constructing epistolary/diary stories and parables about herself. As a consequence, the break with the old self resulted in the transformation, maybe a new or re-birth. This is probably why one of the important figures in the letters and diary is the child he or she identifies with. Its emancipatory and transformational potential is probably the greatest, as if childhood contained the original future. Were all these metamorphoses congenital or random? How long did they last? We do not know the future fate of Moszyńska or any of her later personal documents, which would come from the period after she left the clinic in Leubus. It is not known whether they are still somewhere in the family or institutional archives.

The last chapter of the Introduction is entitled *Moszyńska jako tekst* [Moszyńska as a text] and Emilia Kolinko, paraphrasing Foucault's sentence, wrote: "There's no madness where there's a private voice" (p. 76). In the conclusion, however, a bit too short, the researcher reflects on the essential configuration of voice, madness and time, i.e. the old and contemporary rituals of "the exclusivity and inclusion of the madman"⁸, analysed by a French philosopher. Therefore, what kind of text is Moszyńska? What exactly is her voice and what kind of madness is it? Kolinko believes that Moszyńska has

turned into a story that's already ended. But the reality that has passed and the life that has become an unclear biography appear unexpectedly before us. The correspondence and the diary from Pirna are the points of access: "In this collection, all the voices meet: a lunatic prisoner, daughter, sister, wife, mother, friend and writer" (ibid.). The work entitled *Moszyńska* was created "at the crossroads of narrative and science", supplementing "the lack of voices of those diagnosed with madness, held in institutions and hidden shamefully in private homes" (p. 77)⁹.

Indeed. Yet, Moszyńska's words boil down to a conversation with Piotr, an attempt to speak for herself and distinguish her own sound from other sounds, becoming oppressive. And that's Anna's main goal. A role she plays, quite effectively interrupted by the speeches of the other performers of the family and the community. Her letters and the diary make it difficult to draw a straight line between health and disease, the line is quite thin¹⁰. Therefore, I concluded that the duet of Anna and Piotr Moszyński fuels the nightmares – it's the obverse of dialogue and the reverse of madness.

translated by Małgorzata Olsza

⁷ "Transformation masks never let you see a masked face. They do not fit the face, do not treat it as a model and do not serve to pretend to be the face. Opening and closing, they show and hide only other masks. [...] Lévi-Strauss praises their "inspired gift of synthesis", the ability to connect heterogeneous elements. What they show is not a disguise imposed on the face, but transformational relationships that give structure to each face (showing and hiding different faces); thus these masks reveal the hidden bond that exists between formal unity and bond, between the fullness of a certain form and the possibility of breaking it down." (C. Malabou, *Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing. Dialectic, Destruction, Deconstruction*, 2005 [transl. mine]).

⁸ M. Foucault, *Madness, the Absence of Work*, transl. P. Stastny and D. Sengel, *Critical Inquiry* 21 University of Chicago Press.

⁹ The testimony of such voices, as well as the existence of masks of disease, have been recorded in autobiography, autofiction and art., see e.g. *Maski*, by M. Janion, S. Rosiek, vol. 2, p. 211-214, 245-276. See also: C. Lavant, *Memoirs from a Madhouse*, translated by Renate Latimer; pref. and afterword by Ursula Schneider and Annette Steinsiek, Riverside 2004; E. Ostrowska, *Oto stoję w deszczu ciała (dziennik studentki)*, Warsaw 2013; O. Hund, *Psy ras drobnych*, Kraków 2018.

¹⁰ G. Deleuze's term, which defines writing as becoming (someone, something) and does not identify this process with waiting for a form, but with finding a "neighborhood zone" (ibid., *Essays Critical and Clinical*, p. 6). The aim of writing is, according to the philosopher, "to free [...] the creation of health [...] in madness, that is, the possibility of life". p. 11, [transl. mine].

KEYWORDS

handwritten editions

MENTAL ILLNESS

ABSTRACT:

Discussion of: *Anna Moszyńska. Listy z Pirny, 1850. Uzupełnione fragmentami dziennika oraz listami Piotra Moszyńskiego*, [Anna Moszyńska. Letters from Pirna, 1850, supplemented with excerpts from the diary and letters from Piotr Moszyński], edited by Emilia Kolinko. The text discusses innovative editing techniques (together with the handwritten comments in personal documents), contrasted against existing writing practices and a short description of how Archiwum Kobiet [Women's Archive] published books. The paper, among other things, discusses the relationship between the autobiographical works and the madness and exclusion of female authors. Other issues presented include restoring a deep relationship between the past, present and reality in the egodocuments and other works (biographies, calendars, commentaries).

women's egodocuments

NOTE ON THE AUTHOR:

Iwona Misiak – PhD, literary historian, IBL PAN. Her research interests revolve around the Polish literature of the 20th century, with particular emphasis on the poetry of the generation of 1968. The author of: *Zmysł czytania* (2003) and *Początek zagadki. O labiryntowej twórczości Ryszarda Krynickiego* (2015). She cooperates with the Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw. The Editor of the “Fraza” quarterly. Member of the Women’s Archives team and the Editorial Committee of the publishing series *Lupa Obscura* (IBL PAN).