

For Christian and Eva

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Introduction

Zewsząd bije odór nie do wytrzymania.

(An unendurable stench reeks from everywhere.)

Podniecenie, upojenie wolnością płciową [...] zarazem niewybredny stosunek do tematu i dziecięce ubóstwo ducha

(Excitement, intoxication with sexual freedom [...] at the same time an unrefined approach to the topic and a childish paucity of spirit.)

Kobieta-pisarka imponuje szczerością i odwagą, którą dotychczas wykazywali tylko bezimienni autorzy krótkich, a dosadnych aforyzmów, skreślonych na płotach i w pewnych ubikacjach.

(The woman-writer impresses with a frankness and daring that up until now has been exhibited only by nameless authors of short, but blunt, aphorisms, sketched on fences and in certain toilets.)¹

What had these women written that deserved such censure? Over a decade ago, in an article by Jagoda Hernik-Spalińska, I ran across these insults from inter-war critics in reference to some plays by women writers. I was not only surprised by the vehemence of the criticism, but also intrigued by the list of Polish women playwrights to whom these comments referred and about whom I had never heard even in graduate school. Finding the works turned out to be harder than expected. Besides the plays of Zofia Nałkowska and Maria Jasnorzewska, plays by the other writers seemed inaccessible. Moreover, during my search, I discovered that inter-war critics accepted the existence of a phenomenon that they called “dramat kobiecy” (*women’s drama*), which generated a flurry of commentary in the press.² Brief references with a few names thrown in,

1. Hernik-Spalińska 1996, 153 and 157. All translations into English throughout this study are my own, unless otherwise indicated.

2. See, for example, Żeleński 1965–1975 and Irzykowski 1995, 1997.

also surface in post-1945 histories of literature and theater, with their authors offering no details.³

Eventually I was able to collect five plays, in addition to those of Nałkowska and Jasnorzewska. Four of them had never been published, existing only as typed manuscripts in theatrical archives.⁴ The eight plays that I chose to discuss in this study offer a wonderful and interesting cross-section of theatrical texts between 1930 and 1938 that focus on women in a nontraditional way. Inter-war critics repeatedly associated some of them with “women’s drama.” Others lack that direct link, but clearly attempt to offer audiences a new approach to, or idea about, women’s issues. Zofia Nałkowska’s *Dom kobiet* (*House of Women*) is, of course, the work of a writer both very well known at the time of the play’s appearance and today.⁵ She had started writing gynocentric Modernist novels before World War I. After the war, she insisted that she was exploring the human condition in general, rather than focusing on specific feminist issues. Yet inter-war critics reacted strongly to the play’s performance and saw it as part of “women’s drama.” Moreover, *House of Women* inspired Maria Morozowicz-Szczepkowska to write *Sprawa Moniki* (*Monika’s Case*), a play that critics perceived as the first real example of feminist theater.⁶ Szczepkowska, an actress, screenwriter, and director, was also a feminist activist who did not hide her desire to produce a work that would stir up audiences. She had disliked Nałkowska’s play, calling it a “galeria kwękających, niedołącznych, bezapelacyjnie poddanych supremacji męskiej bab” (*gallery of grousing, feckless broads, completely subject to male supremacy*).⁷ Szczepkowska’s drama did cause a scandal and did draw crowds to its record-breaking almost 300 performances. She then went on to write two more “scandalous” plays, one of which is *Milcząca*

3. See, for example, Czanerle 1970; Marczak-Oborski 1984, and Kwiatkowski 2000.

4. Recent historical work has unearthed some other titles. See, for example, Poskuta-Włodek 2006 and Hernik-Spalińska 2006.

5. Nałkowska 1990, 5–130. All references to and quotations from the play will be followed by page numbers referring to this edition.

6. Morozowicz-Szczepkowska 1933. All references to, and quotations from, the play will be followed by page numbers referring to this edition.

7. Morozowicz-Szczepkowska 1968, 277.

siła (*Silent Power*).⁸ Attacked by inter-war critics for its poor dramatic quality, it nevertheless is fascinating because it shows the author trying to work out how to define the human subject and how to deal with women's situation in society. At the time of writing, Szczepkowska's thinking was clearly in a state of flux and she explored the topic from a number of different angles. The resulting text offers more questions than it answers, but also reveals the author's complex and multifaceted approach.

Continued attacks by critics led Szczepkowska to move in a different, seemingly less inflammatory, direction. As a result, she wrote *Walący się dom* (*The Falling House*), a play about the decline of a landowning family.⁹ Works on this topic had a long tradition in Poland going back to the plays of Aleksander Fredro.¹⁰ Yet, in some ways, in *The Falling House*, the author's approach to the definition of the human subject is more radical than in her earlier works.

The only other play that caused as much of a theatrical sensation as *Monika's Case* was Marcelina Grabowska's "*Sprawiedliwość*" ("*Justice*").¹¹ From the moment of her journalistic debut in 1932, Grabowska was primarily a journalist with leftist leanings. She was also, however, a playwright and novelist who continued to work long into the post-1945 period. Grabowska intended "*Justice*" to be a shocking work in the style of "Zeittheater"; certainly, even today, the topic of abortion can be controversial.¹² The author went further than just breaking a thematic taboo. She created a Naturalist-style work in which a character starts as a type, but then develops in the direction of an individual.

8. Morozowicz-Szczepkowska, Manuscript nr. 3238. All references to, and quotations from, the play will be followed by page numbers referring to this manuscript.

9. Morozowicz-Szczepkowska, Manuscript nr. 2256. All references to, and quotations from, the play will be followed by page numbers referring to this manuscript.

10. Aleksander Fredro, 1793–1876. Considered to be the best Polish Neoclassical writer of comedy. He never accepted or incorporated Romantic issues or elements of style, despite his long life. Fredro wrote comedies of manner focused on gentry life as well as tales in the manner of the French writer Jean de La Fontaine.

11. Grabowska, Manuscript nr. 541. All references to and quotations from the play will be followed by page numbers referring to this manuscript.

12. Zeittheater is politically engaged, leftist theater initiated in Germany in the first decades of the twentieth century. A classic example is the theater of Erwin Piscator. It brought to the audience's attention the most pressing, and often the most scandalous, taboo social problems.

In a completely different vein, we have Maria Jasnorzewska's *Egipska pszenica* (*Egyptian Wheat*) and *Baba-Dziwo*.¹³ On the one hand, Jasnorzewska's fame came from her poetry: a hyper-feminine voice of the modern woman. For the Polish reading public, she has remained a poet. On the other hand, she was also the third most frequently staged popular playwright of the period, a fact forgotten today. She herself wanted to remain a popular commercial playwright, supposedly steering clear of associations with feminism and theatrical experiments. Yet inter-war critics often linked her with "women's drama," since she presented issues from a female perspective. Even more removed officially from "women's drama" is Zofia Rylska's *Głębia na Zimnej* (*The Deep at Zimna*).¹⁴ The writer had the play produced pseudonymously under the name of her son in 1938, showing the reluctance of some women even at that late stage to come forth publicly with a theatrical work. At the same time, *The Deep at Zimna* underscores the fact that feminist ideas and a focus on women had spread out beyond the group of women playwrights linked by critics to "women's drama." Another play seemingly concerned with the landowning class, it nevertheless raises serious questions about the status of women in society.



These plays reflect the sea change that occurs in the social position of women during the inter-war period. In addition, they are part of a heated discussion on the role of women in society that begins the minute Poland regains independence in 1918 and that continues for the next 20 years. Scholars have studied these transformations from a feminist perspective in only a piecemeal fashion. By the term "feminism," I mean first the direct attempt to change the ideology that underlies the entire social order. This kind of change would improve women's rights and social position. Feminism here also refers to the less obvious, but equally challenging,

13. Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska 1986, *Egyptian Wheat*—vol. 1, pp. 429–556, and *Baba-Dziwo*—vol. 2, pp. 277–392. All references to and quotations from these plays will be followed by page numbers referring to this edition.

14. Rylski, Manuscript nr. 1164. All references to and quotations from the play will be followed by page numbers referring to this manuscript.

exploration of various aspects of reality through the filter of female sensibility. Finally, I describe a given author's approach to the definition of subject as feminist, if in some way it challenges and/or defies the traditional, essentialist representation of subject. Thus, my aim in this study is to answer the question "What is or is not feminist about these works?" with a focus on how these authors define the human subject. Such a decision is justified by the broad Modernist preoccupation with the subject that had already started at the end of the nineteenth century and continued into the twentieth.¹⁵ In order to "get at" these definitions, to determine whether these plays are feminist or not, I employ a variety of theoretical perspectives, and consider the critical reception of these works during the inter-war period. First, this shows how contemporaries reacted to these plays and how they fit them into the broader discussion on women. Second, considering these plays from a 1930s perspective, as well as a contemporary one, reveals that these plays are original not just in their historical context, but are innovative even by today's standards.



One challenge that I need to mention at the outset is the choice of texts, the kind of texts, and the kind of critical responses that I analyze. First, all of the dramatic texts are plays that were widely discussed in the press at the time of their staging. Though other women's works that have remained

15. It is important to emphasize that discussions concerning the subject included both men and women. My study focuses on women. However, one should keep in mind the changing ideas concerning masculinity. Beginning with Charles Baudelaire's "flâneur," one moves to a Modernist Wildian concept of the "dandy," as well as various forms of androgyny. In Poland, Romantic masculinity consisting of an ethos of rebellion and chivalry, but also of patriotism, gradually began to coexist with different models during Young Poland—the Polish version of Modernism. In general terms, we could say that there was a movement away from the aristocratic/noble model to an intelligentsia model. In most cases, older models of both the female and male subject did not disappear completely, but rather found room for themselves within the new model. For more on the changes in the Polish model of masculinity, see Ingebrant 2014. Young Poland, named to align itself with Young Germany and Young Scandinavia, dominated Polish culture and art from 1890 to 1918. The movement opposed Positivism (Polish Realism) and bourgeois culture. Its adherents believed that a whole epoch was ending. Some of these artists exhibited a hedonistic escapism into decadence, symbolism, and, in the visual arts, into Art Nouveau. The movement also saw itself as continuing Romanticism—thus, its other name, "neo-Romantyzm" (Neo-Romanticism).

out of reach would supplement the depiction of “women’s drama,” the plays considered here offer a remarkable cross-section of inter-war women’s dramatic writing focused on women’s issues. Second, the issue of publication raises some questions. All of Jasnorzewska and Nałkowska’s dramatic works have been published. Of the remaining plays, only Morozowicz-Szczepkowska’s *Monika’s Case* appeared in print. The printed texts all first appeared during the lifetime of their authors, and we can accept them as authoritative versions. The other four plays considered in the study I obtained from archives. They are typescripts with handwritten corrections used for these plays’ stage performances. The theatrical texts are not finished or definitive projects; one, in fact, has two endings. I have had to treat them as more of an approximation than a final product. This is a challenge that often arises in women’s studies when dealing with women’s writing from earlier periods; it makes the interpretation of the texts both more tentative and more interesting since, in a sense, when looking at theatrical texts, we are dealing with live theater or at least its remains. Third, for both types of texts, the critical reception that I consider comes in the form of newspaper reviews of stage performances and not scholarly analyses of plays. This adds extra layers of complications, but also allows us to see the critics’ immediate reactions to these works. Thus, on the one hand, the critics had their own agendas that influenced their opinions; they were reacting to texts often shortened or adjusted for a given staging, and they were seeing the plays through the prism of the director’s vision and the actors’ performance. On the other hand, with the exception of *The Deep at Zimna*, all of the playwrights actively participated in the staging of their works and, as far as is known, approved the productions. This gives at least some authorial sanction to the performances.



I base the analysis of the dramatic texts on a literary theoretical approach supplemented by historical and cultural information. The ephemeral theatrical performances of these plays have left exclusively written “traces.”¹⁶ These plays survive only in written form, be it in print or typed theatrical

16. For the value of a context-based study of historical texts, see Belsey 2005, 85–98, quote p. 89; Ratajczakowa 2006, vol. 1, 30–32, and Iwasiów 2006, 14.

manuscript. Moreover, reaction to the performances from the inter-war period exists only in written form, primarily in reviews.

Furthermore, despite the recent emphasis on theater studies, the analysis of dramatic texts—in and of themselves—continues to impart a wealth of cultural information. More specifically, as Gayle Austin comments on the value of dramaturgy for feminist criticism:

... there are advantages for the feminist critical project of studying plays. Plays allow the reader and audience to visualize, and to fill in blanks and gaps. They provide the frameworks for productions that can bring out many of the issues feminism finds pressing. They combine verbal and nonverbal elements simultaneously; so that questions of language and visual representation can be addressed at the same time, [...]

They [plays] contribute a unique field of examples of women's representation.¹⁷

Inga Iwasiów writes in a similar vein about the merits of gender being represented both verbally and visually:

Dramaturgia [...] stanowi obszar szczególnie atrakcyjny badawczo (z punktu widzenia krytyki feministycznej), bowiem kategoria płci zyskuje w jej obrębie wyraziste znaczenie już na poziomie wypowiedzi bezpośrednich (dialogów) postaci, opisów, charakterystyk zawartych w didaskaliach.

(For research (from the point of view of feminist criticism) dramaturgy forms an especially attractive field, because within its boundaries, the category of sex is given clear definition already on the level of the characters' direct statements (dialogues), on the level of descriptions, characterizations contained in the stage directions.)¹⁸

In effect, I analyze theatrical reviews, as well as dramatic texts, while keeping in mind the sociocultural milieu of inter-war Poland and how that environment affected the critical reception accorded these plays.

17. Austin 1990, 3.

18. Iwasiów 2000, 157.

All of this without forgetting the variations in the nature of printed texts, typed theatrical texts, and newspaper reviews.

As mentioned earlier, the search for the feminism, or lack thereof, in these works follows a variety of paths. Patricia Schroeder writes convincingly on the subject of not limiting oneself to a particular ideology:

... to insist that their [women's] plays cannot be considered feminist unless they adhere to a particular ideological stance within feminism or that they take shape in a certain prescribed dramatic form, is to practice essentialism in its most insidious guise; ...¹⁹.

Moreover, Rita Felski states that

... the political meanings of women's writing cannot be theorized in an *a priori* fashion, by appealing to an inherent relationship between gender and a specific linguistic or literary form, but can be addressed only by relating the diverse forms of women's writing to the cultural and ideological processes shaping the effects and potential limits of literary production at historically specific contexts.²⁰

Inga Iwasiów takes a similar stance when she writes that

... trzeba czytać oświetlając tekst i kontekst, korzystając z doświadczeń lektury wrażliwej genderowo, ale starając się też raz jeszcze, bez uprzedzeń, przejrzeć paradygmaty, definicje gatunkowe, recepcję. [...] Pokazać [...] kobiecy tekst jako uwarunkowany przynależnością do gatunku i modyfikowany przez rodzaj, przez płć.

(... one must read in a way that illuminates text and context, making use of the experience of readings that are gender sensitive, but once more, without prejudice, looking through paradigms, genre definitions, reception. [...] One must show [...] a woman's text as conditioned by belonging to a genre and modified by gender, by sex.)²¹

19. Schroeder 1996b, 165.

20. Felski 1989, 48.

21. Iwasiów 2008, 10.

This need for a variety of perspectives reflects the very nature of literature that “does not conform to a strictly logical order.”²² Literature requires us to read “textual details,” not just general content and ideas, but the nitty-gritty of how ideas are presented on all levels of composition. This trait makes literature “particularly resistant” to being stuffed into one universalizing and abstracting theory.²³

Concurrently, I could have asked which feminist theory to apply. Since “the varieties of feminist theory are almost without limit,” which one do I choose?²⁴ In fact, “feminism’s meanings are constantly in dispute.”²⁵ Do I follow first-, second-, or third-wave feminism? Should I look at women’s situation only through the lens of arguments over the definition of subject? Perhaps it would be better to focus on the authors’ exploitation of genre expectations. Alternatively, I could map the unique experiences of the female protagonists as they relate to inter-war Poland. Actually, a variety of approaches offers useful insights. By considering each play through the prism of several different theories, I have been able to highlight each work’s uniqueness, while showing the similarities and differences among them. Moreover, given that drama is an “open” genre that finds “closure” only in its theatrical realizations, applying a number of theories to the same play can “allow the reader [...] to fill in the blanks and gaps.”²⁶

In the end, I have found it most useful to consider each play from the perspective of subject definition, cultural myth, and genre expectations. Since some variant of the essentialist, body/mind duality is present in every play, I begin there in my approach to the definition of subject. At the same time, there always appears what I call the “possibility of change.” The given writer believes in an essentialist substratum of traits associated with each sex, but also depicts the change in and development of characters based on different theories and resulting from a variety of stimuli. Moreover, in every case, these changes occur through relations with the “Other.” Finally, two plays introduce in one case a partial and in the other a complete nonessentialist approach to the subject.

22. Rooney 2006, 2.

23. Rooney 2006, 2.

24. Buchanan 2010, 165.

25. Jaggar 2008, vii.

26. Austin 1990, 3.

Having established from a theoretical perspective a definition of subject in each of the plays, I then examine the presentation of women against the background of cultural myths. Since no writer creates in a void and since the inter-war period was a transitional era, I found it productive to consider these texts vis-à-vis the foundational myths of Polish national identity: the so-called “dworek” (*estate*) myth, as well as the “Matka-Polka” (*Mother-Pole*) myth.²⁷ In some cases, the writers openly oppose these myths. In others, they take a quieter, more subversive approach, seemingly accepting a myth, yet undermining or reinterpreting it in a novel way.

I then consider both genre expectations held by audiences used to the dominance of Realist form, as well as how these writers use various elements of form to challenge the depiction of women. In every case, the writers exploit the “fissures” of the genre used, fissures that stem from the very origins of Western drama and theater. By exploiting them, by widening them into “fractures,” these authors create tension between the traditional and the feminist; they make the image of women and their situation more complex and raise questions that do not always have answers.

Finally, I study the critical reception of these works in the inter-war period. I consider the theoretical, social, and political inclinations of the handful of critics whose reviews I analyze. I show what they focus on and what they miss, but also what they notice. Despite certain prejudices and limitations, the best of the liberal critics were sensitive to the quality of these works, as well as to their weaknesses.



In order to give the reader a more nuanced picture, Chapter 1 compares Modernist Polish theater and drama produced by women with women’s theater and drama in Western Europe and the United States. Chapter 2 presents a more detailed description of the Polish inter-war period. It looks at discussions concerning both the role and status of women, as well as the form and goal of theater and drama in the newly independent country. It considers how developments in popular culture, such as

27. For an explanation of these two foundational myths of Polish national mythology, see Chapter 7.

cabarets and film, affected the development of literature, including drama. Then, since some of the playwrights are completely unknown even to Polish readers, Chapter 3 introduces the writers and highlights their major achievements and/or ideas. Chapter 4 does the same thing for the actual texts, as they too are unknown to audiences for the most part. Chapters 5 and 6 focus on the approach to subject in each work. Chapter 5 shows how and to what degree the definition of subject is essentialist. Chapter 6 demonstrates the various “possibilities of change” and the conditions that lead to the transformations of the characters, and discusses the two plays that take a nonessentialist approach to the subject. Chapter 7 considers how these writers present women, their roles, and social standing in terms of the “estate” and “Mother-Pole” myths. This analysis is useful given that four of the discussed plays are set on estates. Moreover, the other works deal with the intelligentsia, which many in Polish society at the time perceived as the heir of the landowning class.²⁸ Chapter 8 focuses on a variety of “fissures” in the dramatic form and on how their use complicates the presentation of women and of their role within family and society. Chapter 9 gives a brief survey of the major inter-war liberal critics, then looks at their critical reviews of these plays, pointing out what the critics noticed and what they missed. I link the critics’ comments to various elements of genre that may have affected their response. Finally, the conclusion summarizes the uniqueness of these plays, showing how they emerged from and responded to nineteenth-century women’s drama and, in turn, foreshadowed the post-1989 renaissance of plays written by women.



“Women’s drama” elicited a flurry of responses during the inter-war period, yet there exists no comprehensive study of this short-lived, but important, phenomenon. Such a study has become all the more important as, once again, there has occurred a flowering of plays written by women since 1989. One has the feeling of *déjà vu*; contemporary women playwrights are

28. The intelligentsia is an East European and Russian phenomenon, in which intellectuals see themselves as a separate class and consider themselves to be the spiritual leaders of their respective nations. For a more detailed explanation, see Chapter 7.

depicting many of the same issues discussed 60 years ago. Like the inter-war works, these contemporary plays offer a full range of subjects from essentialist to nonessentialist; they question maternity and woman's role within the family. Once again, male critics are expressing condescension towards them, while women writers have a harder time getting their works staged than do their male counterparts. A thorough and comprehensive consideration of inter-war "women's drama" reveals plays that ranged from great to mediocre as works of art, but all of which contained a complex understanding of the female subject and of the role of women in society. Furthermore, the analysis uncovers a shared faith in the possibility of individual improvement among the inter-war writers, a characteristic that differentiates them from the defeatism of most contemporary women's plays, especially those written in the years immediately following 1989.

I hope that this study will be of interest not only to scholars of Polish literature and drama, but also more broadly to all scholars of drama. In addition, I think that those scholars who apply feminist theories to literature might find my synthetic approach useful. By analyzing these plays through the lens of subject definition, cultural myths, genre, and "fissures," I can highlight the similarities and differences among the individual works, and show the significance and specificity of the entire group. Furthermore, I have offered a broad sociocultural background, as well as explained and/or footnoted numerous cultural references. This should make the monograph accessible to advanced undergraduate and graduate students, possibly in a course on Eastern European/Polish drama and film.

The post-World War II literary criticism of Nałkowska and Jasnorzevska's *oeuvre* has been overwhelmingly traditional. Only very recently in post-communist Poland have feminist theory and criticism made significant inroads. The greater part of these newer studies deals with the feminism of Nałkowska's early, pre-World War I novels, with her diaries, as well as with her controversial public appearances in the first years of the 20th century.²⁹ Barbara Smoleń discusses the author's progressive presentation of women in *House of Women* as compared to Federico Garcia Lorca's *House*

29. For some examples of newer criticism of Nałkowska's work, see: Borkowska 2000; Chałupnik 2004; Foltyniak 2004; Kochańczyk 2001; Kraskowska 2000a; Kraskowska 1999b; Marszałek 2004; Walczewska 1999; Wójcik 2001; Wójcik 2004; Kirchner 1996; Galant 2005; Iwasiów 2008, 133-192, and Wiśniewska 2008.

of *Bernarda Alba*.³⁰ Hanna Kirchner's 2011 biography of Nałkowska devotes one chapter to the play. In it, she interweaves biographical data with inter-war critical responses, frequently quoting Tadeusz Źeleński.³¹ She also refers to Smoleń's article, without adding any new analysis.³² Two writers, Inga Iwasiów and Marian Rawiński, have discussed the "(non) construction of a feminist heroine" in Jasnorzewska's dramatic works.³³ In a 2009 article, Arleta Galant uses a feminist perspective in order to compare the presentation of family in Nałkowska's *House of Women* and Jasnorzewska's *Egyptian Wheat*. She concludes that both plays are very pessimistic, not offering women any hope of improving their position within the family, a point of view that this study disputes.³⁴ In 1984, Anna Godlewska wrote a brief overview of Morozowicz-Szczepkowska's work. She characterized it as a journalistic reflection of the inter-war period, further claiming that it could have no real interest for today's audiences. Godlewska wrote before the next wave of plays by women, on the same issues, appeared around 1990.³⁵ Recently, Anna Pekaniec published a conference paper that gives an overview of Morozowicz-Szczepkowska's literary activity.³⁶ As her sources, she repeatedly and almost exclusively refers to the writer's own memoir, which underscores the paucity of other critical sources. In the case of the other three playwrights, only three post-war articles briefly mention their work as part of a historical survey of pre-war "women's drama."³⁷ Thus, this study attempts for the first time a comprehensive analysis of a group of plays that formed a significant and publicly visible part of women's struggle to find their place, improve their social situation, and discover who they were in inter-war Polish society.

30. Barbara Smoleń 2001b. Federico Garcia Lorca (1898–1936) was a Great Spanish poet and playwright, executed by Nationalist forces during the Spanish Civil War.

31. Tadeusz (Boy) Źeleński (1874–1941). Literary critic, poet, translator of French literature, a doctor by training. He was a major figure in Young Poland, who dominated both the literary and the social scene in Poland during the first three decades of the 20th century. Liberal, he was very involved in championing women's rights and women writers.

32. Kirchner 2011.

33. See Iwasiów 2000; Rawiński 1996 and Rawiński 2001.

34. Galant 2009.

35. Godlewska 1984.

36. Pekaniec 2011.

37. Hernik-Spalińska 1996 and 2006; Poskuta-Włodek 2006.

Women and Drama in Other Western Modernisms

In order to put the Polish situation in perspective, I will briefly compare the various environments in which women were writing in Europe and the United States, especially as they pertain to the creation of plays. Overall, some general tendencies characterize the situation of Modernist women playwrights in all of these countries.¹ First, even the most cursory glance shows that there were far fewer plays by women published, and especially performed, than there were book editions of poetry and prose by women throughout the nineteenth century and into the first three decades of the twentieth.² This had much to do with the widespread idea of theater being an unacceptable place for women, whether as actress, author, or spectator. Moreover, even at the turn of the last century, some male critics still claimed that women were simply incapable of creating great drama. We find such attitudes in critics as disparate as Piotr Chmielowski in Poland and Brander Matthews in the United States.³

If male critics did consider plays by women, they were often condescending; they reviewed the works differently than those of men and focused on the author's biography and on her "ladylike" traits, or lack thereof. In fact, in the United States newspapers often placed reviews of

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1. Modernism is the complex of movements that dominated Western literature from about 1880 (earlier in France) up until World War II. It included such movements as Symbolism, Expressionism, Futurism, and Surrealism. Young Poland was a part of Modernism.
 2. For the situation in America, see Abramson 1990a. For the situation in England, see Gale 1996, 10–13. For a more general survey of a number of countries, see Kelly 1996. For an overview of the Polish situation, see Kiec 2003.
 3. Chmielowski 1898, 529–530 and Brander Matthews quoted in Shafer 1995, 459.

plays by women not with other theatrical reviews, but on the society pages.⁴ Even women critics sometimes wrote about the femininity of women playwrights, rather than about the plays themselves.⁵ It is true that in all these countries, a minority of male critics and/or artists supported women in their endeavors, as was the case in Russia with Viacheslav Ivanov helping to publish plays by his wife, Lidia Zinovieva-Annibal or with Léon Blum in France insisting the Comédie Française accept Marie Lenéru's play.⁶ However, in general, not only did women playwrights have to contend with condescending critics, they also found it more difficult to stage their plays. In practice, this meant that, for many women, playwriting functioned as a secondary form of creativity, with their income derived chiefly from prose, poetry, and/or journalism.⁷ In this respect, the United States was something of an exception, with a sizable number of women actually supporting themselves by writing for the stage. Both popular theatrical venues, and later Hollywood, consistently accepted and produced works by women.⁸ In Poland during the nineteenth century, the plays of only one woman playwright reached the stage with any regularity and frequency. This was Zofia Mellerowa, known for her well-made comedies.⁹ Even after the popularity of Gabriela Zapolska's Naturalist satirical comedies at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, theaters staged only three to four plays by women per year *in the whole country*.¹⁰

4. Abramson 1990b, 58–59. For the British context, see Gale 1996, 15–17.

5. See Abramson 1990a, 46 and Shafer 1995, 149.

6. See Davidson 1996, 162 and Kelly 1996, 147. Also, note that, as in the case of Zinovieva-Annibal and her husband Ivanov, male support was sometimes a two-edged sword, with the woman feeling pressured to conform to the man's ideas (see, for example, Davidson 1996, 172).

7. See, for example, Gale 1996, 61–66. For the Polish situation, see Kiec 2003, 144.

8. Shafer 1995, p. 153. One big exception was African-American women whose work was almost exclusively performed by amateur ensembles (Shafer 1995, 370–371).

9. Zofia Mellerowa (1848–1901) sometimes wrote under the male pseudonym Wiktor Burzan. She was a playwright, short story writer, and journalist, best known for her comedies of manner, as well as for two dramas about peasant life that she coauthored with J. Galasiewicz.

10. For details, see Marczak-Oborski 1972. Gabriela Zapolska, 1857–1921. The leading Naturalist playwright in Poland, she wrote comedies of manners that mercilessly made fun of middle-class hypocrisy and immorality. Her plays continued to be staged even after World War II.

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