

**The Sandbox of History: Nationality, Sexuality, and the Historical Impulse in
Contemporary Polish LGBTQ Culture**

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CHAPTER I.

Introduction

In 2008, journalist-historian Krzysztof Tomasik published a collection of biographical sketches entitled *Homobiografie (Homobiographies)*. In this work, Tomasik connects a variety of Polish historical and literary figures, their lives spanning the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, through evidenced or alleged same-sex desire. Tomasik opens the introduction with the work of author and critic Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński, whose 1929 essay “Ludzie żywi” (“Living People”) underscores how Narcyza Żmichowska’s romance with another woman became a wellspring for the nineteenth century Polish feminist author’s creativity, and criticizes the fact that this aspect of her biography had been studiously ignored by those claiming her for national or moral ends.¹ Sometimes called the *enfant terrible* of Poland’s early twentieth century literary scene, Boy-Żeleński had a keen nose for hypocrisy, and was known for his critiques of both conservative and bohemian circles. Deeply disappointed in the way Żmichowska had been scrubbed of her sexuality, turned from “a fantastic woman into a boring governess,” and “so marinated in virtue that no one wants to pick up her books anymore,” Boy-Żeleński describes the difficulty of challenging established canons: “it is indeed easier to dig out an author from complete obscurity than it is to remove the gravestone of that kind of canonization.”² Boy-

¹ Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński, “Ludzie żywi,” (1929; Wolne Lektury Project, 2014), 48-63. <https://wolnelektury.pl/media/book/pdf/boy-ludzie-zywi.pdf>.

² Quoted in Krzysztof Tomasik, *Homobiografie: Pisarki i pisarze polscy XIX i XX wieku* (Warsaw: Krytyka Polityczna, 2008), 4. Original: “Zrobiliście z tej wspaniałej kobiety nudną guwernantkę; zamarynowaliście ją w

Żeleński argues against the process of “canonization” to which Polish writers are subject, a process that entails an erasure of the nuance and messy contradictions that characterize lived experience, especially those details which are at odds with national or religious “values.” He instead attempts to reanimate the “living” personalities of historical figures who have since been immortalized as pillars of the Polish literary canon; he excavates the biographies of a number of Polish literary luminaries in order to recover their humanity, in all its beauty and ugliness. Tomasiak takes Boy-Żeleński’s formulation as his starting point and challenge. In order to expose the “truth” of famous Polish writers’ sexualities, Tomasiak “takes on” the national Polish canon, specifically attending to the “private sphere,” which, he claims, is zealously guarded by those who would erase homosexuality from Polish culture completely. He insists that critics need to develop new interpretations of the work of writers whose sexualities had previously been obscured, and theorizes that these readings have the ability to unsettle the Polish canon, as well as the Polish national narrative more broadly.³ Tomasiak’s project also has an emancipatory goal: he wants his audience to realize that Polish national heroes, those individuals who have influenced Poland and represented Polish culture abroad, can be gay, and that their homosexuality doesn’t diminish their role in Polish history.

Individuals or collective bodies shape and/or consume historical narratives in order to produce a sense of personal and national identity; as Stuart Hall writes, “Identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past.”⁴ Within the realm of LGBT historiography, Scott Bravmann terms such narratives

cnocie tak, że nikt już jej książek do rąk nie bierze [...] bo zaiste łatwiej się wygrzebać pisarzowi z kompletnego zapomnienia, niż odwalić kamień grobowy takiej kanonizacji.”

³ Tomasiak, *Homobiografie*, 5.

⁴ Stuart Hall, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, eds. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 394.

“gay and lesbian historical self-representations,” or “queer fictions of the past,” in order to evoke how history is a construction, not a given; however, he also points out that these narratives work to cohere and consolidate sexual identity in the present through the assertion of difference or sameness.⁵ “Queer fictions of the past” have been recently proliferating in Poland in the form of monographs, anthologies, and online databases. These archives are dedicated to not only compiling and circulating information about LGBTQ history in Poland, but also to writing same-sex desire into the national imaginary. Examples range from documentaries about “re-discovered” queer figures to biographical anthologies à la Tomasiak’s *Homobiografie*. “LGBT Polish History” is relatively new discursive territory, its popularization coinciding with the rise of Polish LGBT identity politics in the late 1990s/early 2000s. These “queer lineage” or genealogical projects are not limited to books and film, but also encompass events like lectures, panels, public discussions and presentations of and about Polish/Central European LGBTQ history.⁶ The tone of these projects vary, as some seem to adhere to more rigid academic parameters, while others have an overtly activist and/or political character. Such projects address very real oppression, discrimination, and violence experienced by individuals who have

⁵ Scott Bravmann, *Queer Fictions of the Past: History, Culture, and Difference* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 4-5.

⁶ For examples of studies of homosexuality in Polish literature, see Wojciech Śmieja, *Literatura, której nie ma: szkice o polskiej "literaturze homoseksualnej"* (Kraków: Universitas, 2010); German Ritz, *Niż w labiryncie pożądania: Gender i płeć w literaturze polskiej od romantyzmu do postmodernizmu* (Warsaw: Wiedza Powszechna, 2002); and Błażej Warkocki, *Homo niewiadomo: Polska proza wobec odmienności* (Warsaw: Sic!, 2007).

For information on documentary film projects, see *Kisieland*, directed by Karol Radziszewski (2012), HDV, <http://www.karolradziszewski.com/index.php?/videos-films/kisieland/>; and *Ciągle wierzę*, directed by Magda Mosiewicz (Warsaw: Follow Me Film Production, 2011).

For examples of festivals or events that incorporate LGBT history, see the website for the Pomada Festival; <http://www.pomada.info.pl/>; Różowy okulary PRL-u Blog; <https://rozoweokularyprl.wordpress.com/>; and the website for Queerowy Maj; <http://queerowymaj.org/>.

For websites and online repositories of LGBT history, see “the completely queer museum” (“całkowicie przegięta placówka muzealna”) Homikoteka, <http://homiki.pl/index.php/homikoteka/>; and the Queerstoria project, <http://queerstoria.u-f-a.pl/>.

historically been erased as national subjects or constructed as abject within the public sphere, and make visible the LGBTQ Polish community so often rendered marginal and dismissed.

While I briefly address more “official” histories of Polish figures now recognized as gay, lesbian, or transgender in the following chapters, I largely focus on “unofficial” histories that do not represent “facts,” but rather are loosely based on them. These latter narratives expose the fiction of the former; the fictionalized histories and historical fictions that I analyze do not claim to represent “the real;” rather, as Michel de Certeau reminds us, “fiction plays on the stratification of meaning: it narrates one thing in order to tell something else; it delineates itself in a language from which it continuously draws effects of meaning that cannot be circumscribed or checked.” Fiction proves problematic for the academic field of history, which often places itself at odds with it, constructing its authority through the analysis and translation of “the elusive language of fiction into stable and easily combined elements.” Fiction, whether it takes the form of novel, myth, or personal observation, is, for the historian, “a witch whom knowledge must labor to hold and to identify through its exorcizing.”⁷ However, de Certeau argues that “historiography” as such is also a fiction; historians’ claims to represent “the real” (painstakingly excavated from archives and the like, scrubbed clean of any “fictional” varnish) grant the practice of historiography epistemological authority (or the authority of epistemology), “but this authorized appearance of the ‘real’ serves precisely to camouflage the practice which in fact determines it.” The ideologies and structures of power that dictate the methodologies of historiography, assign history a privileged position as an “objective” science, and shape the historical narratives that emerge, are deftly hidden by the presentation of “the real” as fact, as

⁷ Michel de Certeau, *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 202.

what “really happened,” a claim made believable through the historian’s expert analysis. As de Certeau sums up, “representation thus disguises the praxis that organizes it.”⁸ Historiography is not opposed to fiction, but rather is organized by it, as well as produces it, and it is particularly invested in creating a narrative about itself that denies the existence of such narration in the first place.

In this dissertation, I analyze fictionalized histories; I argue that the play, cabaret performances, and novel that constitute my case studies engage modes of queer historiography that manifest personal and political investments in the stories they tell, histories that actively avoid a fixed commitment to “the real” or to establishing the “authority” of narrative or author. Rather, these artist-historians, or researchers involved in creatively fictionalizing history, interrogate national narratives and sexual identity, creating spaces of resistance to the exclusionary processes of nation-building for themselves and their audiences. In contrast to the dominant tendency of *Homobiografie* and other such reclamation projects (or the grafting of an LGBTQ narrative onto a national one, bolstering mainstream identity politics), these queer historiographical projects downplay, complicate, or even refuse such identification with the nation; they lay bare the fictitious nature of “authoritative” histories that collectively produce the idea of “post-socialist Poland.” These artists instead play freely in the sandbox of History, building and embracing experimental, sometimes ephemeral, narratives that reflect their own understanding of self and a personal relation to the past. This kind of historical “play” is affectively and erotically charged, allowing the authors to forge bonds with their historical subjects, especially connections (or disconnections) that are not wholly based on the modern notion of sexual identity as such, but rather are comprised of feelings and erotic sensations that

⁸ Ibid., 203.

do not necessarily serve a political or emancipatory purpose. I contend that “bad” affects like shame, or the pleasure taken in erotic self- (and national-) degradation as expressed through contemporary Polish works of fictionalized history, enable certain transtemporal relations and communities that undermine or refuse assimilation to existing national narratives.

A History of Own’s Own: *Homobiografie* and East-Central Europe’s “Time of Coincidence”

Tomasik’s *Homobiografie* is committed to maintaining existing national narratives, despite its intention to “sexually” shake-up the canon. Tomasik’s goal of acceptance in Poland’s admittedly hostile environment, an objective supposedly attainable through identity politics, precludes any significant changes to the national narrative; a deconstructive critique of the canon and how it upholds certain racial, gender, and sexual exclusions might play into religious/nationalist fantasies of the destruction of Poland at the hands of its queers. Tomasik relies instead on the strategy of “outing” important Polish historical figures with whom, ostensibly, straight patriotic Poles identify, thereby writing homosexuality into Polish culture as a productive force. In this vein, Tomasik claims to “speak” for the historical figures who can’t speak for themselves. He explains, “my protagonists are locked in the closet, because they lived in pre-emancipated times when homosexuality was not a political question nor even up for public debate. However, they also lived in the closet because they didn’t do anything to leave it [...] and today they’re in the closet because they’re not allowed to leave.”⁹ Tomasik is therefore also engaged in a project of rehabilitation, in which he tries to “make things right” by allowing a

⁹ Tomasik, *Homobiografie*, 7. Original: “Moi bohaterowie są zamknięci w szafie, bo żyli w czasach przedemancypacyjnych, kiedy homoseksualizm nie był kwestią polityczną ani nawet tematem polemik prasowych. Jednak żyli w szafie także dlatego, że nie robili nic, żeby z niej wyjść [...] Teraz są w szafie, bo nie pozwala się im stamtąd wyjść.”

space for these posthumous figures to express their “long-repressed, ignored, or hidden” sexual orientation. He closes the introduction to *Homobiografie* with a rather bold statement:

“Decrypting the homosexual history of these artists sometimes appears to be simply carrying out their wishes. It is the specific fulfilment of a will they did not have the courage to write.”¹⁰

Tomasik reveals himself as historian-executor, assuming that it was cowardice, ignorance, or oppression that prevented these figures from embracing their sexual identity *as identity*.

Tomasik was both lauded and criticized when the book appeared in 2008; predictably, despite his project’s assimilatory tone, more conservative voices viewed it as “an aggressive attack on our culture.”¹¹ However, he had his detractors in the LGBTQ community as well. Joanna Mizielińska criticizes him for promoting an essentialized vision of gender and sexuality, largely ignoring bisexuality, and anachronistically describing his subjects, declaring, “his insensitivity is bold.”¹² While these are valid criticisms, Tomasik’s book does try to create an alternative history, even if he ultimately leaves the national canon mostly intact.

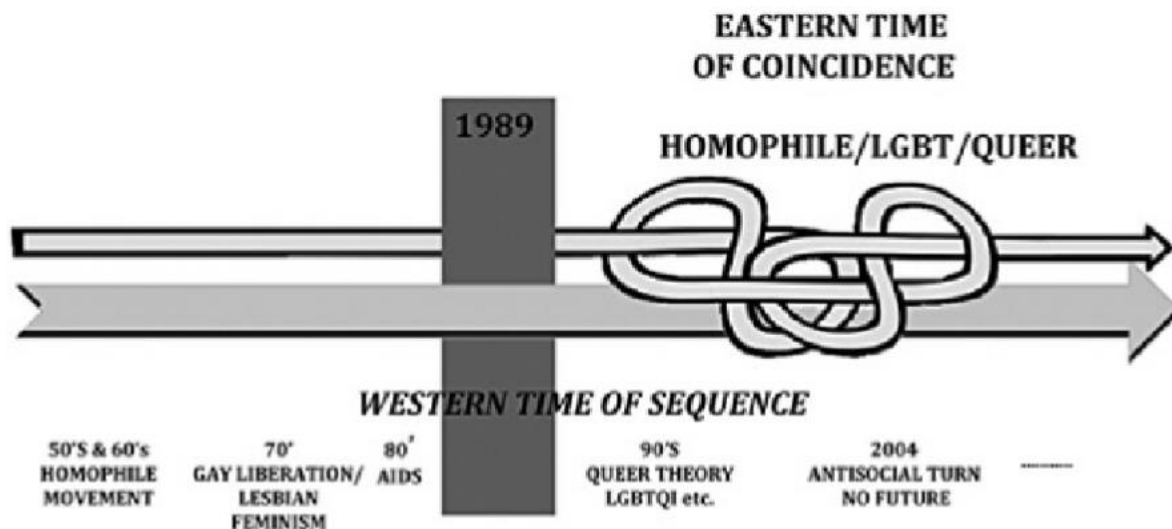
Tomasik, while he has a tendency make anachronistic/essentialist assumptions about his “protagonists” (such as assigning them contemporary identities and/or motivations), attempts to localize the rather problematic narrative of gay emancipation. Joanna Mizielińska and Robert Kulpa, in their seminal essay in queer Polish studies, “‘Contemporary Peripheries’: Queer Studies, Circulation of Knowledge, and East/West Divide,” attempt to disentangle Polish experiences of same-sex desire and its history from the domineering narrative of Western

¹⁰ Ibid., 13. Original: “Odczytanie homoseksualnej historii twórców i twórczyń jawi się czasem wręcz jako wypełnienie woli pisarza czy pisarki. Swoiste spełnienie zapisów testamentu, którego nie mieli odwagi napisać.”

¹¹ Błażej Warkocki, “O żałobie, żartach i liberalnych strażnikach ‘szafy,’” in *Różowy język: Literatura i polityka kultury na początku wieku* (Warsaw: Krytyka Polityczna, 2013), 41.

¹² Joanna Mizielińska, “Travelling Ideas, Travelling Times: On the Temporalities of LGBT and Queer Politics in Poland and ‘The West,’” in *De-Centring Western Sexualities: Central and Eastern European Perspectives*, eds. Joanna Mizielińska, Robert Kulpa (Farnham, GB: Routledge, 2011), 96. Accessed June 30, 2016. ProQuest Ebrary.

emancipation—both in the sense of the achievement of LGBTQ civil rights and societal acceptance, and of the “emancipatory” transition from communism to capitalism and democracy. Even the word “queer” itself is considered by some Polish scholars to be an instance of Western cultural colonization, given that it carries with it a history of injury specific to an Anglophone context, and that the origins of “queer theory” are largely based in/a critique of twentieth century Western philosophical movements and political/social traumas.¹³ They argue that Western discourse around nonheteronormative sexuality and gender, having a fairly linear, progressive narrative, moved from the Homophiles of the 1950s to the Gay Liberation movement in the



WESTERN AND EASTERN GEO-TEMPORAL MODALITIES?

Figure 1.1. “Western ‘time of sequence’ and Eastern ‘time of coincidence’” (Source: Figure 1.1 in Joanna Mizielińska and Robert Kulpa, “Contemporary Peripheries’: Queer Studies, Circulation of Knowledge, and East/West Divide,” in *De-centring Western Sexualities: Central and Eastern European Perspectives*, eds. Joanna Mizielińska and Robert Kulpa [Farnham, GB: Routledge, 2016], 24. Accessed June 30, 2016. ProQuest Ebrary.)

¹³ I use the word “queer” not because I think it is necessarily appropriate to the Polish context (much has been written about the inadequacy of this word in describing Polish LGBT experience) but because I draw on theoretical work that privileges it as a (dis)organizing concept. While I acknowledge the implications of “Western” epistemological authority that its use has in this dissertation, I would like to bracket the history of the word itself and instead highlight the deconstructive, disruptive critical force that it signifies, which I believe can be, and has been, adapted to local Polish contexts. For further discussion concerning the term “queer” and its possible Polish equivalents, see Tomasz Basiuk, *Homofobia po polsku* (Warsaw: Sic!, 2004) and Joanna Mizielińska, *Płeć, ciało, seksualność: od feminizmu do teorii queer* (Kraków: Universitas, 2006).

1970s, and then to the traumatic period of the 1980s/early 1990s AIDS era. The sheer refusal of the state, and of society more broadly, to recognize the horror and extent of the epidemic precipitated radical queer activism, which continued through the 1990s up until today. On the other hand, they explain, there was no public discussion of homosexuality or political organizing around same-sex desire under Communism in Central-Eastern Europe. Therefore, with the fall of “the Iron Curtain,” formerly socialist countries suddenly became inundated with not only capitalist structures and temporalities, but all of the political and theoretical paradigms associated with sexual and gender identity politics. They write, “For CEE [Central-Eastern Europe], this change was much sharper and more abrupt, literally bringing the collapse of one world and the promise of a ‘(brave?) new world’ much more coincidentally than sequentially- ‘everything at once.’ Indeed, it should be even more complicated, and represented as a constant ‘knotting’ and ‘looping’ of time(s) after 1989.”¹⁴ They term these two temporalities the Western “time of sequence” and the Central-Eastern European “time of coincidence.” While their formulation flattens out a great deal of both Western and Eastern European geographies, activisms, communities, and understandings of same-sex desire, their point is well taken; Eastern Europe was forced to take on the past of the West as its present, and the present of the West as its future. The region was, and is, considered temporally lagged, but as the impulse to “catch up” spread, its temporalities quickened, resulting in a striking, often painful dialectic between privatized and nationalized industries, global capitalism and the remnants of the planned economy and “secondary” black market, and the construction of “democratic institutions” and the political legacy of Communism. Historiography, and LGBT historiography in particular, is implicated in

¹⁴ Joanna Mizielińska and Robert Kulpa, “‘Contemporary Peripheries’: Queer Studies, Circulation of Knowledge, and East/West Divide,” in *De-Centring Western Sexualities: Central and Eastern European Perspectives*, eds. Joanna Mizielińska and Robert Kulpa (Farnham, GB: Routledge, 2011), 23. Accessed June 30, 2016. ProQuest Ebrary.

this web; Tomasik's *Homobiografie*, which brings together various queer pasts from different time periods, social strata, and levels of national importance, in a sense figures the "Time of Coincidence." *Homobiografie* hosts these historical, temporally disparate figures in one anthology, and the (loose) chronological order of the chapters does not tell a story about the evolution of LGBT Polish communities so much as it indicates that what matters more is the existence and expression of homosexuality in an already agreed-upon narrative of Polish cultural/literary history. That Tomasik attempts to write a specifically Polish history speaks to a desire to separate from a Western narrative, to build one's own "time of sequence."

However, *Homobiografie* falls into the trap of progressive, teleological narratives; Tomasik ends up rewriting the national narrative as one dependent upon LGBTQ contribution without critically questioning the functions of that narrative itself. Indeed, insofar as the Polish national narrative is shaped by notions of progress, certain subjects, both past and present, are designated as "backwards" and ejected from it, allowing the nation to construct itself in opposition to the temporally abject.

The academic monographs, fictionalized biographies, and other instances of historical "play" considered in this dissertation also produce exclusions, especially when they interpret or represent non-normative expressions of gender, but the queer historiographical strategies that shape such work also makes room for new (dis)identifications with historical figures and communities. I primarily read these texts through the analytical lens of affective and erotic queer historiographies in order to highlight the deeply intimate nature of the relationship between historian and subject, the present and the past. Additionally, "touching" the past through affective or erotic experiences creates connections not necessarily based in the rather modern

notion of sexuality as *identity*, but rather provides paths for identification that elude, or outright refuse, the assimilatory aims of mainstream identity politics.

Over the past twenty years, scholarly engagement with queer forms of historiography has proliferated richly and offered new ways of conceptualizing queer encounters with the past.¹⁵ The relationship between the historian and her subject, the latent desires that fuel historical inquiry, the eroticization of contact with the anachronistic and temporal Other, the politics of retrospection, the slippages and pleasures and painful pangs of (dis)identification, and fierce resistance to the politics of assimilation and respectability have all factored into the larger discussion on queer historiography. Queer theorists have attempted to negotiate between the alterity that characterizes so much of “modern” historiography and the allure of identification with the past. While the concept of identity (and by extension identification) tends to threaten the deconstructionist tendencies of queer criticism, nevertheless it is an inescapable paradigm through which we organize our experience. Recent forays into queer historiography attempt to account for possible alterities, disconnections, and ruptures, as well as allow for communion with the past through affective and erotic responses in ways that don’t rely on coherent sexual identities. In other words, queer theory has explored modes of historiography that acknowledge

¹⁵ For examples of scholarship about and enacting queer historiographical strategies, see Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003); Carolyn Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre and Postmodern* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999); Louise Fradenburg (now L.O Aranye) and Carla Freccero, *Premodern Sexualities* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), Jonathon Goldberg and Madhavi Menon, “Queering History,” *PMLA* 120, no. 5 (2005): 1608–1617; David Halperin, *How to Do the History of Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); Karma Lochrie, *Heterosynchrasies: Female Sexuality When Normal Wasn’t* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 2005); Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2009); Christopher Nealon, *Foundlings: Lesbian and Gay Historical Emotion Before Stonewall* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001); Valerie Rohy, *Anachronism and Its Others: Sexuality, Race, Temporality* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009); Joan Scott, “Fantasy Echo: History and the Construction of Identity,” *Critical Inquiry* 27, no. 2 (January 2001): 284-304; and Valerie Traub, “The New Unhistoricism in Queer Studies,” *PMLA* 128, no. 1 (January 2013): 21–39.

and embrace the “‘play of recognitions,’ but that also see these recognitions not as consoling but as shattering,” not as productive of identity, but as destructive (or deconstructive) of it.¹⁶

Early works by queer theorists such as Carla Freccero, L.O. Aranye Fradenburg, and Carolyn Dinshaw pushed disciplinary boundaries, and perhaps more importantly, pushed the limits of the term “queer” as it developed in the 1990s. These historians were instrumental in decoupling “queer” from fixed notions of identity politics and in the reconceptualization of queerness as a critical paradigm. Theorists use this paradigm to investigate the desire to do historical work and the pleasurable effects of identification or disidentification with historical subjectivities. These scholars question the utility of “new historicism” and the authority of our positions as archivists, historians, and academics. They variously take into account different and competing temporalities, and highlight our experiences of the past in the present (and future). Fradenburg, for example, labels history “an erogenous zone” and urges academics to “[examine] the powerful consequences of our relations with the dead, and the modes of enjoyment at stake therein.”¹⁷ More recently, Christopher Nealon and Heather Love have flipped the script, so to speak, and focus on less positive aspects of the historiographical process, including “bad” feelings that have little to no political use.¹⁸ Love takes up the affectual, melancholic brush with history in *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History*. She claims that “what has been most problematic about gay and lesbian historiography to date is not... its attachment to identity, but rather its consistently affirmative bias.”¹⁹ Love concerns herself with negative affects like shame, regret, aversion, disgust, and other feelings that arise through painful

¹⁶ Heather Love, *Feeling Backward*, 45.

¹⁷ Louise Fradenburg (now L.O. Aranye), “‘So that We May Speak of Them’: Enjoying the Middle Ages,” *New Literary History* 28, no. 2 (1997): 219; *Ibid.*, 215.

¹⁸ Christopher Nealon, *Foundlings: Gay and Lesbian Historical Emotion Before Stonewall* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001).

¹⁹ Love, *Feeling Backward*, 268.

(dis)identifications with historical figures, because these “backwards feelings” offer “an index to the ruined state of the social world; they indicate continuities between the bad gay past and the present; and they show up the inadequacy of queer narratives of progress.”²⁰ In other words, a historical encounter that is structured by negative affect may teach us more about the present and about ourselves than it does about the past, confronting us with the fact that “contemporary gay identity [is] produced out of the twentieth century history of queer abjection: gay pride is a reverse or mirror image of gay shame, produced precisely against the realities it means to remedy.”²¹ Shame is as much a part of queer experience as pride; that may seem an obvious fact, but embracing shame is taboo in the current climate of mainstream LGBTQ politics—it is anathema to “progress,” an indication of internalized homophobia, and identification with it becomes a source of shame in and of itself.

Another vein of queer historiography is not necessarily characterized by negative affect, but rather is saturated with erotic, bodily sensation. Elizabeth Freeman writes extensively on what she terms *erotohistoriography*, which she defines as

a politics of unpredictable, deeply embodied pleasures that counters the logic of development... It insists that various queer social practices... produce form(s) of time consciousness, even historical consciousness, which can intervene upon the material damage done in the name of development. Against pain and loss, erotohistoriography posits the value of surprise, of pleasurable interruptions and momentary fulfillments from elsewhere, other times.²²

Poland’s experience of the “time of coincidence,” with its looping, fragmented temporalities, proves ripe for such erotohistoriographic contact. Freeman variously figures the historical encounter as sexual, a “visceral encounter between past and present figured as a tactile meeting,

²⁰ Ibid., 27.

²¹ Ibid., 19-20.

²² Elizabeth Freeman, “Time Binds, or Erotohistoriography,” *Social Text* 84/85 (2005): 59.

as a finger that in stitching, both touches and is touched, and that in reading, pokes and caresses the holes in the archival text even as it sutures them.”²³ Fingering, and even fisting, the gaps and holes of history can be thought of as a specifically queer (indeed corporeal) practice that suggests, “history is not only what hurts but what arouses, kindles, whets, or itches.”²⁴ In addition, Freeman posits that “historical” S/M role-play (including scenes that include racial roleplay like slavery, the Holocaust, etc.) can physicalize the encounter with history, pleasure and pain breaking “time” itself and reconstituting the original traumatic moment into something new and possibly reparative.²⁵

Most (though not all) of the theoretical offerings of the past two decades that I invoke concern themselves with American or Anglophone histories and literatures. Freeman and Love, for example, situate their analyses of American and British writers in the context of capitalism and entrenched histories of slavery, immigration, colonialism, and racism. While much of this theory can be extrapolated and adapted to fit an East Central European historical paradigm, I want to suggest that the pleasures and pains of “doing history” in East Central Europe are particular to the region. The physical, psychological, and social traumas of multiple violent conflicts, the experience of both communism and capitalism (and particularly the transition from one system to the other), and Poland’s contentious history with imperialism create highly specific historical ruptures and ensuing temporalities that now influence the way in which Poles approach and manifest historical consciousness(es). In my dissertation, I examine authors and historians who reach back to gender-transgressive figures in pre-war Poland, a period which functions in contemporary discourse as encompassing a burgeoning “authentic Poland” before it

²³ Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 110.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 117.

²⁵ *Ibid.* 144.

was interrupted by the Communist period, and which was reborn after 1989. Others document same-sex desire under Communism, weaving together social and governmental oppression of “homosexuals,” or celebrating that period as comparatively utopic, as it allowed many non-normative genders and sexualities to quietly flourish. In this region, LGBTQ histories are heavily marked by nationalism and by traumas of loss (both personal and societal), and are particularly influenced by the rapid transition to capitalism that made possible its (neoliberal) European Union membership. How may alternative, hitherto unexplored historiographical “modes” contribute to self/historical knowledge in a post-socialist context, especially in regions that are implicated, albeit complexly, in post-colonial discourse? Precisely, what does it mean for a queer individual in a post-socialist nation to experience feelings of shame or take “illicit” pleasure in encounters with the past?

I begin my analysis of representational strategies and affective modes of queer historiography by tracing the “rehabilitation” of Piotr Odmieniec Włast, a late nineteenth/early twentieth century modernist poet who was exiled from literary and social life when they began living publically as a man. “Discovered” by Polish literary scholars within the last few decades, Włast has been of considerable interest to the LGBTQ community in Poland, and has been variously represented as a transgender, transsexual, and/or lesbian forebear. Christened Maria Komornicka at birth (most scholars still refer to them as Komornicka), the poet’s contribution to Polish modernism was not insignificant; however, it was largely ignored after their gender transition. Izabela Filipiak (now Izabela Morska), one of Poland’s most well-known lesbian authors and activists, was a major contributor to Włast’s “recovery project,” publishing a monograph on the poet as well as a four-act play entitled *Księga Em* (*The Book of Em*). Also one of the aforementioned “outed” individuals in Tomasiak’s *Homobiografie*, Włast functions in

contemporary discourse as both a feminist and queer icon, despite the fact that, while still alive, Włast rejected Polish feminism.

Chapter Two, “Contested Histories, Impossible Rescues: Izabela Filipiak and Piotr Odmieniec Włast,” reads Filipiak’s play as a historical conduit constituted by affective affinities and layers of identification. In her academic study of the author’s life, Filipiak attempts to “rescue” Włast from their discursive exile by situating them in a genealogy of Polish literature, as well as unmasks the processes by which they were excluded in the first place. Filipiak, while writing her dissertation on Włast, concurrently wrote a hagiographical play based on Włast’s biography and *oeuvre* (the play has yet to be performed).²⁶ I look at the points of identification that make historical “understanding” possible for Filipiak, and trace how she understands her own contentious relationship to Polishness through the less politically efficacious aspects of Włast’s narrative. I argue that *Księga Em* figures the queer historical encounter between the historian and her subject, a process that engages the complex interplay of negative affects between gender, sexual, and national identity, as well as those that privilege eroticism in the present as a possible conduit for historical feeling and “feeling” historical.

Chapter Three, “The Past in the Present: Furious Histories and the Possibility of Transhistorical Publics,” extends the intimate relationship of historian and queer historical subject into the audience. I suggest that “performing history” not only allows audience members access to alternative historical narratives that “queer” national belonging, but that it also engenders a dialogic relation between past and present publics/counterpublics. To this end, I

²⁶ Filipiak has apparently approached over thirty theaters with the play, and all of them have rejected it. While there is no definitive reason for *Księga Em*’s long-term rejection, Elwira Grossman speculates that Polish theatre suffers from “a fear of gender syndrome,” or a tendency to erase, or at best tentatively approach, topics like gender, sexuality, and feminism. See Elwira M. Grossman, “Who’s Afraid of Gender and Sexuality? Plays by Women,” *Contemporary Theatre Review* 15, no. 1 (2005): 108-109.

analyze the dramatizations of historical biographies that Agnieszka Weseli-Furja, an independent historian of Polish sexuality and a queer activist, has performed in the last decade. I begin with her rendition of Maria Konopnicka, a Positivist author and feminist who is known for her highly patriotic poetry. I demonstrate how Furja navigates nationalist discourse, ultimately “queering” the heteronormative scaffolding that supports Polish nationalism. I then take up Furja’s most recent historical subject, interwar lesbian and feminist activist Zofia Sadowska. Sadowska was a controversial doctor in the 1920s and, having been accused in the tabloids of seducing and molesting female patients, quickly was cast as a figure for moral depravity and as a threat to the “nation.” Cruelly satirized by the press, she lost her reputation and sank into obscurity. Furja played significant roles in recovering and spreading Sadowska’s story; as a historian and Sadowska’s biographer, Furja spent much of her time in various archives looking for traces of the elusive figure. As an activist, Furja, together with the Warsaw-based queer-feminist collective UFA, in 2011 organized a raunchy, 1920s-themed cabaret performance to mark Sadowska’s 125th birthday, and it has since become an annual event. Furja performs monologues as Sadowska, drawing on interwar newspaper clippings and other famous Polish literary works as source material. Thanks to Furja and other contemporary LGBTQ historians who have painstakingly recovered her story, Sadowska is now considered an important lesbian/trans figure and is one key to understanding how sexological and political discourse were intertwined in interwar Poland.

As in Chapter Two, I discuss Furja’s personal relationship with Sadowska and the ways in which the historiographical process is figured in her artistic work. However, given that Furja has only performed, and never published, her texts, I expand my analysis of the transhistorical relationship to include the audience. I bring Mikhail Bakhtin’s meditations on dialogism and

temporality into conversation with Michael Warner's notion of "counterpublics," as well as Warner and Lauren Berlant's theorization of "queer world-making," in order to demonstrate that the generation of publics and counterpublics across time is possible, and that certain affects and erotic experiences triggered by embodied performances can discursively produce not only queer subjects, but queer communities in the present.

Chapter Four, "Anal-yzing *Lubiewo*: Soviet Tops and Colonial Bottoms," takes up Michał Witkowski's critically acclaimed *Lubiewo*, a novel that lays bare the exclusions upon which contemporary Polish LGBTQ identity politics is founded. Witkowski's novel builds an ethnography of a lost era, permeated with nostalgia for socialist Poland and for the seemingly plentiful queer sexual encounters in parks and Soviet barracks. The vignettes, observations, and stories that constitute the novel resembles a collection of oral histories; in this way the novel fashions for itself a "fiction" of historical authority, an authority which is deployed to aggressively attack the taboos of Polish history. *Lubiewo* creates and enforces past and present categories of sexual and/or gender identity, drawing a demarcation between the homosexuals of socialism and the *geje* (gays) of the new capitalist era. In my reading of the novel, I demonstrate how Witkowski interrogates the mainstream Polish historical narrative of moving from oppression to freedom, occupation to autonomy, stagnation to development, as well as narratives of progress tied to capitalism and globalization. *Lubiewo* challenges these tropes through a mapping of sexual and nostalgic pleasures derived from Polish encounters with Russian imperialism. Polemicizing with current post-colonial discourse in Poland, *Lubiewo* takes its pleasure in the "bad" socialist past, and in a decidedly queer Slavic brotherhood; in Witkowski's version of Polish history, Polish queers (and, by extension, Poland itself) willingly submit to

their Russian masters in an erotic, pleasurable relation of bottom and top, subordinate and dominant, colonized and colonizer.

Each of these texts functions within a historiographical matrix that includes both reclamation and the unassimilable “bad queer past,” politically efficacious affects and feelings that simply hurt, narratives that look to queer futurities and those that gaze backward. They also each index a particular, and peculiar, moment in the development of Polish LGBTQ identity politics, albeit I do not present them in chronological order. Witkowski’s novel arose in 2005 as a response to the introduction of a politics of respectability and a push for LGBTQ visibility; Filipiak’s play, written between 1997 and 2003, traces an increasing dissatisfaction and alienation from Polish politics and national identity through an implicit lens of sexuality, while Furja’s performances in the late 2000s/early 2010s mark a flourishing of Polish queer activism that refuses neoliberal or homonormative co-optation. These texts, when taken together, form their own kind of history, the result of mining an eclectic, multi-modal archive for moments of queer pleasures, queer resistance, and queer failure. Through my compilation and analyses of these academic and historical projects, I too am implicated in the creation of historical fictions, of constructing a story about post-socialist Poland that may enforce my status as “authority,” while obfuscating my personal and ideological investments in the figures of Filipiak, Furja, and Witkowski, as well as in Polish LGBTQ culture more broadly. My own affective and erotic encounters with Polish history and disidentifications with Polish nationalism, inflected as they are with an awareness of my position, and privilege, as a Western “outsider,” have deeply shaped my choices in methodology and of subject matter. As such, I make no claim to represent “the real,” for that is a disingenuous and impossible task in any case, but rather wish to proceed in the same spirit of “historical play” that, I argue, characterizes the works of these queer Polish

artists/historians/activists; I imagine one of many possible textual constellations, connecting these case studies and their refigurations of national and sexual identity not through a chronology that moves inexorably towards the future, but rather through a rhizomatic mapping of partial attachments, felt resonances, and disruptive moments of recognition.

CHAPTER II.

Contested Histories, Impossible Rescues: Izabela Filipiak and Piotr Włast

From the depths of memory, I can recall the following: it was a summer evening in Górki, and I was eleven years old. We were sitting on the tallest hill under young birch trees with Marynia Komornicka. I was talking about my delight with Hamsun, whose Pan and Hunger I was reading at the time. There was a description of the fear of madness. I admitted to Marynia that I found it convincing. I was afraid of different diseases, but never madness—somehow I was so certain of my brain, of my thought process. And she replied that she knew that fear. —Zofia Nałkowska, August 29, 1946¹

I am absolutely certain that I await rehabilitation, which will reproach many, and will cause blushes of shame or the pallor of incurable regret in many fine people. —Piotr Odmieniec Włast, June 27, 1909²

Zofia Nałkowska, one of the most popular literary figures in interwar Poland, an influential author who ran a prestigious literary salon, notes in her *Diaries* her memory of a then-forgotten modernist poet by the name of Marynia (Maria) Komornicka. Having been born only eight years before Nałkowska, Komornicka was close with Wacław Nałkowski, Zofia's father, a well-known geographer and public intellectual. In 1895, Komornicka, together with Nałkowski

¹ Quoted in Krzysztof Tomasiak, *Homobiografie*, 2nd ed. (Warsaw: Krytyka Polityczna, 2009), 28. Original: "Pamięć wydobywa z głębin taką rzecz: mam lat jedenaście, jest letni wieczór, Górki. Siedzimy pod młodymi brzoźami na najwyższej górcie z Marynią Komornicką. Mówię swoje zachwyty nad Hamsunem, którego czytałam wówczas Pana i Głód. Jest tam opisany strach przed obłądem. Wyznaję jej, że to mnie przekonywa. Boję się różnych chorób, ale nigdy obłądu—tak jakoś pewna jestem swego mózgu, samego procesu myśli. A ona odpowiada, że zna ten strach."

² Quoted in *ibid.*, 27. Original: "Jestem absolutnie pewien, że doczekam się r e h a b i l i t a c j i, która niejednego spiorunuje, a nawet bardzo wielu niezłych ludzi okryje płomieniami wstydu lub błądzącją niepowetowanego żalu."

and another author, Cezary Jellenta (born Napoleon Hirszbard), published a collection of texts entitled *Forpoczty* (*Vanguards*). The collection could be considered one of the first expressions of the modernist Young Poland movement and signifies a break with the literary and philosophical vision of Positivism.³ If Nałkowska's memory is accurate, and she was indeed eleven when she sat under the trees with Komornicka discussing the fear of insanity, then it would have been the same year that *Forpoczty* was published. Yet why was this particular memory so compelling for Nałkowska? She continues in her memoirs, writing, "And I was silent, thinking that I had clearly blundered (the conversation was a performance on my part, because Marynia was already an adult and had published her *Sketches* and I viewed her friendship as *de rigueur*). And here, fifty years later, I know that she's been insane for years and is probably already dead."⁴ Nałkowska, through this reminiscence of Komornicka (written in 1946), functions as a witness to Komornicka's alleged insanity before it manifested itself more profoundly, her "madness" resulting in various institutionalizations of which Nałkowska was also aware; the disappearance of Komornicka from public and literary life, Nałkowska assumed, meant that she was dead. Nałkowska's memory of this particular conversation was prompted, and perhaps even colored or exaggerated, by what came after that conversation on the hill,

³ *Forpoczty* was not widely circulated at the time of its publication, and is often overshadowed by other Decadent or modernist manifestos published in the late 1890s/1900s. Cezary Jellenta published an article in 1935, shortly before his death, in which he tries to reclaim *Forpoczty*'s place as precursor, or vanguard (as the title suggests) to the Modernist movement. For a discussion on the writing, publication, and reception of *Forpoczty*, see Izabela Filipiak, "Forpoczty," in *Obszary odmiennosci: Rzecz o Marii Komornickiej* (Gdańsk: Słowo/obraz terytoria, 2006), 139-228; and Katarzyna Sadkowska, "Lwowska Forpoczta? Wiedeński odczyt Ostapa Ortwinia o literaturze polskiej," *Przegląd filozoficzno-literacki* 36, no. 1-2 (2013): 309-324.

⁴ Quoted in Tomasiak, *Homobiografie*, 28. Original: "I ja milknę—myślac, że widocznie powiedziałam źle (rozmowa była popisem z mej strony, bo Marynia była dorosła, wydała już swe *Szkice* i jej przyjaźń uważałam za bardzo obowiązującą). I oto po latach całych pięćdziesięciu wiem o niej, że jest obłąkana od wielu lat, zapewne już nie żyje."

namely, a mysterious biographical, symbolic, and historical narrative that continues to be a source of contestation for literary critics, historians, and LGBTQ activists alike.⁵

Piotr Odmieniec Włast (named Maria Komornicka at birth in 1876) is one of the most intriguing figures in Polish literary history. Their most famous works are published under the name Maria Komornicka, and that is how the majority of literary critics and historians refer to them, even today.⁶ Therein lies the crux of this contested history; as the story goes, in a hotel in Poznań in 1907, a female-bodied poet, dramatist, and literary critic named Maria Komornicka burned their feminine clothing and “transformed” into their male ancestor, Piotr Włast. Włast’s

⁵ Maria Janion indicates that Nałkowska probably thought of Komornicka as a kind of intimidating role model. Izabela Filipiak interprets the relationship between the poet and Nałkowska as, at least at times, a contentious one, noting that Nałkowska probably considered it a “rivalry,” and points to fragments of letters and diaries in which Nałkowska expresses a negative disposition toward Komornicka. See Filipiak, *Obszary odmienności* (Gdańsk: Słowo/obraz terytoria, 2006), 78, 318-325; and Maria Janion, *Kobiety i duch inności* (Warsaw: Sic!, 1996), 190-191. For more on Nałkowska and Komornicka’s “rivalry,” see Brygida Helbig-Mischewski, “Nałkowska i Komornicka: czyli kto zawinił?” *Poznańskie Studia Polonistyczne Seria Literacka* 21 (2013): 163-175.

⁶ Because the history of this particular figure is so incredibly contested, any decision regarding the name and pronouns used to reference Włast reflects the particular ideological and/or interpretative stance of the author as well as the moment of publication of their work. Izabela Filipiak largely uses “Maria Komornicka” and feminine gender markers to refer to the author, while Wiktor Dynarski, a trans studies scholar and trans activist, refers to the author as Włast and uses masculine gender markers. Other critics and historians, for example Karolina Krasuska in her monograph *Pleć i naród: Trans/lokacje*, use a slash or hyphen between Komornicka and Włast to mark biographical and/or creative “periods” in the author’s life. As the use of names and pronouns is relevant to the way the author is conceived and described today, I want to clarify my own usage of names and pronouns. In my opinion, each of the aforementioned approaches has its benefits and limitations, but from this point forward, in any discussions of the poet’s life, I largely refer to them as Piotr Włast in order to respect Włast’s autonomy in self-definition, and use the pronouns “they/their” to reflect the ambiguity and fluidity of gender evidenced in some of Włast’s works (exceptions to this will occur in direct quotations and/or discussions of those quotations where necessitated). Additionally, because this chapter is largely about Filipiak’s relationship to the author, I sometimes use Komornicka and feminine pronouns in my discussions of Filipiak’s monograph *Obszary Odmienności* and drama *Księga Em* in order to more accurately reflect Filipiak’s own understanding and (dis)identifications with the author. My solution is by no means perfect; I recognize that the use of “they/their” is an anachronistic, and moreover Anglo-centric, construction that doesn’t reflect Polish language use today nor the time period in which Włast lived. Nor does it reflect the masculine gender markers Włast used. Moving between names and pronouns in this way also may result in a seemingly confusing and messy narrative for a reader not familiar with the subject matter, yet I believe this effect also performs the refusal of coherency and consensus that Włast’s own life, and afterlife in contemporary literary and LGBT discourse, demands. See Karolina Krasuska, *Pleć i naród: Trans/lokacje: Maria Komornicka/Piotr Odmieniec Włast, Else Lasker-Schuler, Mina Loy* (Warsaw: Instytut Badań Literackich, 2012), 36n7, and Wiktor Dynarski, “Analiza wybranych badań nad płciowością Piotra Własta z perspektywy transgender studies” (master’s thesis, Uniwersytet Warszawski, 2011), www.academia.edu/3646878/Analiza_wybranych_bada%C5%84_nad_p%C5%82ciowo%C5%9Bci%C4%85_Piotra_W%C5%82asta_z_perspektywy_transgender_studies

sister, Aniela Komornicka, described the episode later as a “pathological *idée fixe* on masculinity.”⁷ This “transformation” has been the subject of much speculation; it has variously been interpreted as a symbolic or spiritual transformation (as a caterpillar becomes a butterfly), a psychotic break, a gesture rebelling against or succumbing to patriarchy, or as a moment of clarity and recognition of what we would now term a transgender identity. These explanations generally tend to incorporate elements of each other, as symbolic or spiritual transformation, for example, can also simultaneously be linked to mental illness. On the other hand, as Wiktor Dynarski points out, there is no necessary link between Włast’s gender identity and mental illness at all. However, the figure that emerges from these narratives looks somewhat different in each case, especially from the perspective of sexuality and gender. Feminist critics have worked to reclaim the poet from a narrative of feminized pathology and madness; lesbian historians have indicated possible same-sex desire, or at least highlighted the fact that Włast is linked to a lesbian history through the figure of the “invert”; and, from a transgender studies perspective, Włast has been identified and reclaimed as trans masculine, or as a trans man. Others still have attempted to portray Włast’s gender as just one facet of a self-fashioning that occurred on many different bodily and textual levels. Włast is an enticing figure for the present-day queer for a few reasons: first, because the Włast we “know” today is comprised of multiple, interwoven discourses that now figure prominently in the mapping of Polish feminist and LGBTQ history, including the pathologization of women who overstepped conventional gender roles and of homosexuals or “inverts,” the construction of national/gendered subjectivities, and the place of female authors in the national literary/philosophical canon; and second, because the ambiguities cast upon Włast’s experience and expression of gender by the aforementioned narratives open it

⁷ Quoted in Filipiak, *Obszary odmienności*, 440. Original: “chorobliwa *idée fixe* męskości”

up to signification, all whilst refusing any singular interpretation. While some of Włast's biographers have sought the "truth" of their gender transformation, or, at the very least, an explanation for it, symbolic or real, the archive that constitutes Włast's textual body resists giving a definitive answer.

This chapter concerns itself with the ways Włast's biography has been interpreted by literary scholars in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, as well as Włast's portrayal in works of fiction; primarily, it looks at Izabela Filipiak's monograph *Obszary odmienności: Rzecz o Marii Komornickiej* (*Realms of Otherness: On Maria Komornicka*) and *Księga Em* (*The Book of Em*), Filipiak's "hagiographical" play based on Włast's life. Filipiak, born in 1961 in Gdynia, Poland, wrote her dissertation on Maria Komornicka, publishing it as an academic book in 2006. Today, she is perhaps best known in Poland as a feminist writer and LGBTQ and disability rights activist. She was one of the first public figures to claim a lesbian identity in Poland (in a 1998 interview with *Cosmopolitan* magazine), and has subsequently written many articles, blogs, books, and plays that thematize discrimination. Filipiak studied and taught extensively in the United States, returning to Poland in 2009 to take a position in the American Studies Department at the University of Gdańsk.⁸

I largely draw on Filipiak's academic treatise on Komornicka, as well as the works of literary criticism that she references in *Obszary odmienności*, to relate the biographical details of Włast's life. In my retelling of Włast's story, I simultaneously trace Filipiak's own investments in her research on Włast: her methodologies, her emotional and/or affective ties to Włast, and the

⁸ Filipiak herself went through a transformation; she has since changed her last name to Morska, an adjective for "sea"—an instance of self-creation, perhaps functioning as a symbolic refusal of the patriarchal structure of the family in favor of a geographical attachment. I refer to her in this chapter as Filipiak, however, as she published both *Obszary odmienności* and *Księga Em* under that name.

points of identification that she forges to the poet. I argue that both her academic and fictional work are driven by the impulse to not only “rescue” Włast from obscurity, enact the “rehabilitation” Włast predicted for herself, and circulate their textual body in the “more accommodating” present, but also that her interest in Włast stems from her struggle to negotiate and represent her transhistorical, affective, intimate relation to the modernist author.

It is not hard to imagine why scholars and activists alike are drawn to the figure of Włast; Włast’s life, the narrative(s) of which has been pieced together through letters, writings and publications, the recollections of family members, friends, and professional contacts, clinic records, and other documents, makes for a compelling, if tragic, story. However, their textual traces evoke more questions than answers. Filipiak remarks that “this evidence, missing pages and full of holes (*volante* and *volee* as Derrida said—having no owner, being no one’s property, the original meaning lost, which could affect the trajectory of its movement), can more easily constitute an ephemeral biography than solid material for literary criticism.”⁹ Even so, historians have been able to come to a relative consensus on the basic facts of Włast’s life. Born in 1876 to a land-owning family in Grabów nad Pilicą under Russian rule, Włast was somewhat of a literary wunderkind. When they were about thirteen years old, they left the family estate and, together with their mother, moved to Warsaw. In 1892, at the young and impressive age of sixteen, Włast drew attention with their literary debut, publishing two short stories in *Gazeta Warszawska* (*Warsaw Gazette*). A year later, the same journal published their novella, and in 1894 Włast’s *Sketches* (*Szkice*) came out, all penned under the name of Maria Komornicka. In the latter half of 1894, they were forced to travel to Cambridge by their father (with whom they had a contentious

⁹ Ibid., 86. Original: ”Te pełne dziur i brakujących stron świadectwa (*volante* i *volee*, jak rzekł Derrida- niemające posiadacza, niebędące niczyją własnością, wytracone z właściwego znaczenia, które wpływałyby na tor ich ruchu) łatwiej mogą się złożyć na biografię ulotną niż na solidny krytycznoliteracki materiał.”

relationship), ostensibly to study. By all accounts, Włast was reluctant to go. A choice between Cambridge and staying on at their family estate, however, was apparently no choice at all; Włast traveled with their sister and mother to England in the fall of 1894. Despite the stated purpose of the trip, Filipiak notes that no student record of Komornicka was ever found at Newnham College, the women's college where Włast would have found herself.¹⁰ The sojourn in England lasted until February 1895, a mere six months after their arrival, and in 1896 *Raj młodości*. *Wspomnienie z Cambridge (Paradise of the Young. Memories from Cambridge)*, a diary of their experiences, was published in Poland.¹¹

After returning in 1895, Włast developed a friendship with Waław Nałkowski and Cezary Jellenta, two members of the "radical Polish intelligentsia."¹² Together they published the aforementioned *Forpoczty*, a collection of texts ranging from prose to drama and poetry, complete with an introduction by Nałkowski and a closing note by Jellenta outlining the

¹⁰ Ibid., 98.

¹¹ Both Filipiak and Karolina Krasuska have analyzed *Raj młodości* as an encounter with British colonialism. Filipiak highlights one particular passage in which Włast describes their feelings on seeing African students and their alienation in Cambridge. Włast writes, "In looking at them, I felt—other than a deep sadness, empathy and sympathy—a feeling of shame: a feeling like that which seizes us when confronted with a pauper, or a hunchbacked brother... a feeling of humiliation and violence done to justice, the feeling as if we are privileged through their pain, we are better equipped for life through their weakness, healthy through their handicaps, rich through their poverty... and I was ashamed of my white face, ashamed of my inherited culture, ashamed for nature and her inexorable, cruel, 'rational' laws." Włast, while expressing belief in a kind of essentialist, biological determinism, articulates the contested identification inherent in a relation of shame. On the one hand, feeling alienated and foreign themselves, they do share a connection with these students (sympathy, empathy), yet as Filipiak points out, Włast doesn't group themselves with them; rather, they identify with the colonizer ("I am ashamed of my white face"), aka Shame is a major force in Filipiak's relationship to Włast, as I argue later in this chapter; acknowledging but also critical of this colonial relation of power. Włast experiences this relation as one of shame, and, as I explore in this chapter, shame is a social affect that includes both an irresistible draw to the object (or subject) that shame has attached to, and the refusal to bridge that connection. I read Filipiak's own relation to Włast as one charged with (national) shame, rendering this passage from *Raj młodości* an interesting parallel. "Patrząc na nich, oprócz głębokiego smutku, współczucia i sympatii, doznawałam jeszcze uczucia wstydu: uczucia, jakie nas ogarnia wobec nędzarza, lub względem brata-garbusa... uczucia upokorzenia i gwałtu danego sprawiedliwości, uczucia, jakobyśmy byli uprzywilejowani ich krzywdą, lepiej do życia uzdolnieni—ich słabością, zdrowi—ich kalectwem, bogaci—ich nędzą... I wstyd mi było mojej białej twarzy, wstyd dziedzicznej kultury, wstyd za naturę i jej nieubłagane, okrutne, 'rozumne' prawa." Filipiak, *Obszary odmienności*, 101-105. For more on Włast, colonialism, and nationality, see Krakuska, *Płeć i naród*, 42-50.

¹² Filipiak, *Obszary odmienności*, 140.

motivations behind the project.¹³ Even though *Forpoczty* was not widely read, nor received much critical attention, Nałkowski and Jellenta's patronage and collaboration were important in promoting Włast as a literary talent to be taken seriously.

It is probable that at some point in 1894, before the trip to Cambridge, Włast met Zofia Villaume. Villaume soon became Włast's close friend and confidante. While Filipiak declines to define or label Włast's sexuality in *Obszary odmienności*, avoiding an anachronistic or essentialist reading to which other activist-historians might be prone, she suggests, "the relation between Maria Komornicka and Zofia Villaume could be read today as a story of lost and found love... or as a story of sentimental, girlish friendship condemned to wane."¹⁴ Filipiak also opens Villaume and Komornicka's correspondence to same-sex erotic or romantic interpretation through an analysis of Włast's letters and recollections of Komornicki family members.¹⁵ In another publication, Filipiak goes so far as to say that Villaume was "in all likelihood, a lover."¹⁶ Whether Włast and Villaume had an erotic relationship or not, Villaume was an important figure in Włast's life; Villaume was one of the few individuals with whom Włast resumed correspondence after their institutionalizations, exile to the family estate in Grabów, and survival of World War II.

In 1898, Włast married the poet Jan Lemański. While Włast's motivations in agreeing to this marriage, as so often seems to be the case, remain unknown, Filipiak speculates that

¹³ Ibid., 144.

¹⁴ Ibid., 298. Original: "Relacja Marii Komornickiej z Zofią Villaume może być przez nas odczytana albo jako historia utraconej i odzykanej miłości[...], albo jako historia skazanej na przeminiecie dziewczęcej, sentymentalnej przyjaźni."

¹⁵ Ibid., 264-269.

¹⁶ Izabela Filipiak, "If I Were a Man, I'd Tell You I Had Also a Certain Temptation': On 'The Booke of Idyllic Poetry' by Maria Komornicka," in *Tribades, Tommies, And Transgressives: Histories of Sexualities*. Ed. Mary McAuliffe and Sonja Tiernan, (Newcastle, UK: Cambridge Scholars, 2008), 197. For a discussion of Filipiak and the tensions between trans and lesbian historiographies, see this dissertation's conclusion "Transhistoricity: Some Concluding Remarks."

Komornicka married Jan “Leman” Lemański not out of affection, but rather because such a liaison would be rebellious act in the eyes of her family and of society. This was, in other words, “the only way that [Komornicka] could lead the exciting and forbidden life of an artist.”¹⁷ Lemański was poor and preferred a bohemian lifestyle, abandoning a career as a lawyer in order to try his hand at writing.¹⁸ As a poet and satirist, he led a literary life that Włast coveted. However, their marriage was rocky from the beginning; a few months after the wedding, in a fit of jealousy, Lemański confronted and shot Włast while they were walking on the Planty in Kraków with their cousin. Włast was wounded in both arms, but luckily, their injuries were not serious. The incident did not escape the notice of the press and their literary contemporaries, however, and became somewhat of a scandal. Lemański was painted as “pathologically jealous” while he served a short sentence for the attack.¹⁹ Lemański and Włast later travelled abroad together, where Lemański fell ill. Włast functioned as his caretaker, but soon after their return to Poland in 1900, the couple decided to separate.

Włast published a collection entitled *Baśnie. Psalmodie (Tales. Psalms)* in 1900, and in 1901 began collaborating with Zenon Przesmycki (who published under the pseudonym Miriam), becoming a regular contributor to the esteemed literary journal *Chimera* under Przesmycki’s editorship.²⁰ Włast also contributed witty books reviews to the journal under the pen name “Piotr Włast,” a pseudonym suggested by their mother that referenced a family

¹⁷ Filipiak, *Obszary odmienności*, 341. Original: “jedyny sposób, by [Komornicka] mogła wieść ekscytujące i zakazane życie artysty.”

¹⁸ Ibid.; Filipiak also muses that “Komornicka chose a humble man of letters for a husband much in the same way the Krakow literati chose farm girls as wives in ‘Wesele’ (The Wedding)” See *ibid.*, 339. Original: “Komornicka wybiera za męża ubogiego literata podobnie jak krakowscy literacy biorą chłopki na żony w *Weselu*.”

¹⁹ Maria Janion, “Gdzie jest Lemańska?!” in *Kobiety i duchy inne*, 2nd ed. (Warsaw: Sic!, 2006), 191.

²⁰ Maria Podraza-Kwiatkowska, *Utwory poetyckie prozą i wierszem*, (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1996), 5-8.

ancestor.²¹ Working with Przesmycki and *Chimera*, Włast enjoyed a brief but productive period of relative success, although Nałkowski and Jellenta distanced themselves from Włast, feeling that their former protégé had strayed too far from their patriotic-liberal roots. Włast's work of poetic prose *Biesy* (*Demons*) appeared in *Chimera* in 1902, which, in Maria Janion's words, functioned as "a kind of spiritual autobiography" and "a survey of enormous disappointments, a diary at the limit of experiences, a confession of the extremely exhausted ODMIENIEC."²² The literary work, extraordinary as a psychological analysis of youth, Otherness, and madness, contains the character "Odmieniec," a term that means misfit or changeling and a name that Włast later adopted for himself. In 1903, while in Paris, Anna (Włast's mother) and Aniela Komornicka began to receive unsettling letters from Włast, including strange descriptions of angels. The women interpreted these descriptions as hallucinations, and decided to travel to France.²³ Once reunited with their apparently ailing relative, they sought treatment for them in a French clinic. At this point, the Varsovian rumor mill was in full swing and gossip about Włast's behavior abroad had begun. Włast, whose rocky, abusive marriage, subsequent divorce, and *femme fatale* persona already had earned them a reputation for scandal, only sank further in the eyes of their contemporaries.

In 1905, Włast returned to Warsaw. Przesmycki, who had functioned as Włast's literary patron for the past few years, distanced himself from them. Przesmycki's journal *Chimera*, where Włast had published much of his *oeuvre*, was on its last legs (it eventually closed in

²¹ Filipiak, "If I Were a Man," 201. Filipiak relates the family legend that Piotr Włast was a medieval ancestor, a noble who, according to legend, was the picture of excess; when ordered to build seven churches as penance, he instead build seventy.

²² Janion, "Gdzie jest Lemańska?!", 195. Original: "rodzaj autobiografii duchowej." ; Maria Janion, "Maria Komornicka. In memoriam" in *Kobiety i duchy inne*, 2nd ed. (Warsaw: Sic!, 2006), 219. Original: "Zresztą całe *Biesy* to jakby przegląd monstualnych rozczarowań, dziennisk doprowadzony do kresu doświadczeń, spowiedź umęczonego do ostateczności ODMIENICA."

²³ Filipiak, *Obszary odmienności*, 398.

1907). While Wład managed to publish a few more pieces between 1905 and 1907, including translations, the Komornicki family was becoming increasingly worried about the mental state of the poet. The year 1907 marked Wład's final exit from public life in addition to (or because of?) their gender "transformation;" as the story goes, in July of that year, Wład's mother found them in the bed of a hotel room demanding masculine attire while their feminine clothes burned in the stove. Maria Dernałowicz, one of Wład's relatives, described an additional (unsubstantiated) episode that was repeated until it became legend; Wład apparently was either obsessed with the idea of, or actually forced themselves to, rip out their teeth in order to attain a more masculine appearance.²⁴ Regardless of whether this episode is strange fact or sensationalized fiction, Wład spent the next seven years travelling between various clinics where they were institutionalized and "treated" for a variety of disorders. Wład begged their family to release them, adamant that their masculine embodiment was not linked to any psychic malady. With the outbreak of World War I in 1914, Wład returned to the family estate, where they lived until the property's destruction in 1944. Mostly confined to one section of the house, they lived a hermit's existence amongst their books. They wrote a massive tome of poetry entitled *Xięga idyllicznej poezji* (*The Book of Idyllic Poetry*) over a period of years, which only was published at the insistence of Zofia Villaume and Aniela Komornicka, among others.²⁵ Wład died in an institution in 1949, having largely adhered in name, language, and dress to the gender they had publically assumed in 1907.

Wład's "re-discovery" began in the 1960s. A professor of Polish literature, Stanisław Pigoń, collected and edited materials concerning the poet, including memories of Aniela and Jan

²⁴ For a discussion of the provenance and possible significance of this rumor, see Filipiak, *Obszary odmienności*, 256-261.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, *Obszary odmienności*, 86.

Komornicki, Włast's siblings, selected letters, and a "psychological analysis" of Maria Komornicka performed by Włast's cousin and professor of psychiatry, Aleksander Oszacki. Oszacki's "diagnosis," which included persecution mania, among other things, was based on the poet's aforementioned work of poetic prose *Biesy*, in which Włast describes the experience of existential and psychological pain.²⁶ Printed in *Archiwum Literacki* in 1964, these materials constitute a significant contribution to our present-day knowledge of Włast, yet they also are based in the conviction that Włast was severely mentally ill. According to Pigoń and Oszacki, the great tragedy of Włast's life was that madness had extinguished the promising talent of the literary prodigy. Pigoń tellingly writes of *Xięga idyllicznej poezji*, "Only rarely does a flicker of previous talent shine through. In sum: it is a sad testament to ruins."²⁷

Włast's life and works sustained some interest throughout the 1960s, spurred by Maria Podraza-Kwiatkowska's work on the poet.²⁸ Later, in 1977, Włast's grandniece Maria Dernałowicz published her memories of Włast's life. Dernałowicz, having known Włast only *as* Włast, is one of the few people who refer to the poet using masculine gender markers. However, Włast's first "true rehabilitation" from a pathological narrative came when Maria Janion, one of the foremost authorities on Polish Romanticism and the "mother" of feminist literary critique in Poland (as well as Filipiak's academic advisor), took up the topic of Włast in her 1979 seminal essay "Gdzie jest Lemańska!?" ("Where is Lemańska?!"). Instead of relegating Włast to the realm of madness, she instead argues that Włast's writing indicates a relentless pursuit of personhood, of a fundamental humanity, which, as a woman, was denied them by the misogynist

²⁶ Ibid., 85.

²⁷ Quoted in Janion, "Gdzie jest Lemańska!?" in *Kobiety i duch inności*, 186. Original: "Z rzadka tylko zapełgał tam płomyk dawnego talent. Na ogół: smutne świadectwo ruiny."

²⁸ See Maria Podraza-Kwiatkowska, "Tragiczna wolność. O Marii Komornickiej," in *Młodopolskie harmonie i dysonanse* (Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1969), 137-168.

world of Polish modernism and *fin de siècle* philosophy. The only way the artist could attain an independent voice free of societal constraints was to recreate themselves anew in an existential or spiritual sense. Janion interprets Włast's adoption of a masculine name, clothing, and language as manifestations of an inner rebirth as a "not-woman." Therefore, Janion polemicalizes with earlier works on Włast, positing that instead of representing the poet as a victim of their own mind, it would be more accurate to portray them as a victim of society. Janion writes:

She was a nonconformist, maybe one of the most uncompromising figures in the history of our culture in the last century. Her courageous journey into the depths of her own existence does not have many equals. For her nonconformism, for her protest against established societal norms, for her insubordination and independence, for her sacrifice to the gods of Inner Experience, she suffered the heaviest of moral and secular consequences: locked in a madhouse, forgotten, condemned, and contemptuously treated as an "unfortunate lunatic."²⁹

Włast's courageous self-creation, Janion insists, was subject to a "malevolent, repressive reductionism" that medicalized their spiritual transformation; Janion posits that the tragedy of Włast's life is that their societal and spiritual struggle against the constraints of their gender was misperceived as madness.³⁰ In a later essay entitled "Maria Komornicka, in memoriam" published in 1996, Janion develops the thesis of "Gdzie jest Lemańska!?" further, suggesting that Włast's self-creation was driven by an internalization of the misogyny permeating their era (Janion counts Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, not to mention other Polish modernists, amongst Włast's philosophical influences), which effected an attempt to rid themselves of the "woman within" and led to the emergence of a masculine persona.³¹ Janion explains, "I believe that her

²⁹ Janion, "Gdzie jest Lemańska?!", in *Kobiety i duch inności*, 187. Original: "Była nonkonformistką, może jedną z najbardziej nieugiętych w dziejach kultury naszej ostatniego stulecia. Jej odważna podróż w głąb własnej egzystencji ma niewiele sobie równych. Za swój nonkonformizm, za swój protest przeciwko przyjętym konwencjom społecznym, za swoją nieuległość i niezależność, za swoją ofiarę złożoną bogom Doświadczenia Wewnętrznego, poniosła najcięższe konsekwencje życiowe i moralne: zamknięcia w domu obłąkanych, zapomnienia, potępienia, wzgardliwej wyższości wobec „biednej wariatki.”

³⁰ Ibid., 198. Original: "złowrogiemu, represyjnego redukcjonizmu"

³¹ Janion, "Maria Komornicka, in memoriam," in *Kobiety i duch inności*, 249.

key problem was her attitude towards patriarchy. What was metaphysical for Komornicka is, in fact, social. It concerns the division of gender roles in society. Komornicka understood the organization of power in patriarchy as metaphysical, and in this way, simply put, found herself at odds with feminism.³² Włast, in Janion's estimation, felt unfairly burdened by inherent female weaknesses, and strove to cleanse their body and spirit of femininity in order to achieve power. This, of course, was certainly not what many nineteenth- and early twentieth century Polish feminists envisioned; rather than *becoming* men, they advocated for the emancipation of women in the spheres of education and marriage, but in such a way that it wouldn't be at cross-purposes with Polish national ideals.

Janion's adherence to the idea that Włast's gender transformation was rooted in internalized misogyny sits uncomfortably next to her discussion (but not conviction) of Włast's "transsexualism." As Wiktor Dynarski notes, Janion is anti-psychiatric in her approach to Włast's biography and creative works, in contradistinction to some other critics. Even though this is the case, Dynarski identifies Janion's understanding of transsexualism as deeply shaped by medical discourse and a biological understanding of gender.³³ Janion rejects the idea of Włast as transsexual because Włast never mentions physically altering their body (beyond clothing and superficial appearance) to "match" a pre-existing "internal gender." Here we may read Janion's understanding of transsexualism through the familiar trope of "a man's brain trapped in a woman's body," a description of gender dysphoria that many transgender studies scholars refute

³² Ibid., 243. Original: "Sądzę, że kluczowym jej problemem stała się postawa wobec patriarchy. Co dla Komornickiej było metafizyczne [...] jest w istocie społeczne. Dotyczy podziału ról płciowych w społeczeństwie. Układ sił w patriarchacie Komornicka uznaje za metafizyczny i w ten sposób, mówiąc skrótowo, znajduje się ona na antypodach feminizmu."

³³ Dynarski, "Analiza wybranych badań," 34.

as essentialist and binaristic.³⁴ Janion concludes that in the case of Włast, transsexualism is therefore too reductive an explanation; she claims, “for Komornicka it was about *freeing the soul from the female body, and not the “alignment” of body and soul.*”³⁵ In this way she highlights Włast’s internalized misogyny and interprets their transformation as a desire to *symbolically*, not literally, enter masculinity and thus to belong to a superior order. While Janion gestures here toward an *almost* Butlerian understanding of gender as constituted by the effects of discourse and thus “not real,” she also explicitly connects Włast’s self-hatred and desire to rise within the gender hierarchy with the “cultural dimension of transsexualism.” She forges, perhaps unintentionally, a problematic link between transsexuality/transgender identity and internalized misogyny, an accusation that has caused and continues to cause deep rifts between some “feminist” and transgender communities.

Janion’s attention to the subject of Piotr Włast inspired many other works on the author, among which number Edward Boniecki’s 1998 monograph *Modernistyczny dramat ciała: Maria Komornicka (A Modernist Drama of the Body: Maria Komornicka)*, Krystyna Kralkowska-Gątkowska’s 2002 *Cień twarzy. Szkice o twórczości Marii Komornickiej (The Face’s Shadow: On the Works of Maria Komornicka)*, and Karolina Krasuska’s 2011 *Płeć i naród: Trans/lokacje*

³⁴ Sandy Stone expresses why this trope is problematic in her seminal essay “The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto.” She writes, “Small wonder, then, that so much of these discourses revolves around the phrase ‘wrong body.’ Under the binary phallographic founding myth by which Western bodies and subjects are authorized, only one body per gendered subject is ‘right.’ All other bodies are wrong. As clinicians and transsexuals continue to face off across the diagnostic battlefield which this scenario suggests, the transsexuals for whom gender identity is something different from and perhaps irrelevant to physical genitalia are occulted by those for whom the power of the medical/psychological establishments, and their ability to act as gatekeepers for cultural norms, is the final authority for what counts as a culturally intelligible body. This is a treacherous area, and were the silenced groups to achieve voice we might well find, as feminist theorists have claimed, that the identities of individual, embodied subjects were far less implicated in physical norms, and far more diversely spread across a rich and complex structuration of identity and desire, than it is now possible to express.” Sandy Stone, “The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto,” in *The Transgender Studies Reader*, eds. Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle, (New York: Routledge, 2006), 231-232.

³⁵ Janion, “Maria Komornicka, in memoriam,” in *Kobiety i duch inności*, 250. Original: “Można zatem sądzić, że Komornickiej chodzi o wyzwolenie duszy z ciała kobiety, a nie o “pogodzenia” ciała i duszy.”

(*Gender and Nation: Trans/locations*).³⁶ Most of these authors, to varying degrees, expand upon or polemicize with Maria Janion's interpretation of the poet's biography and works; Boniecki gestures towards mental illness, Kralkowska-Gątkowska prefers a psychoanalytic approach, and Krasuska engages transgender theory. Filipiak, Maria Janion's former student and protégé, became interested in Włast through her mentor's work in the 1980s. Filipiak, now a feminist author, activist, and academic, undertook her research project on the modernist poet in the mid-1990s, an endeavor that resulted in the hagiographical/biographical play *Księga Em* and a dissertation that was later published as *Obszary odmienności* in 2006.

Obszary odmienności undoubtedly reflects the academic legacy of Janion; Filipiak's methodological approach is similar in that she looks at the philosophical, literary, national, racial, sexological, and gender discourses circulating at the turn of the twentieth century in tandem with Włast's writings in order to extrapolate information about the poet's life, thoughts, and motivations. However, perhaps paradoxically, the strength of Filipiak's work lies in her unwillingness to commit to any one interpretation. She maintains a skepticism and a distance that encourages a questioning of the so-called facts; Filipiak envisions the task of examining Włast's life à la Edgar Allan Poe's Detective from "The Purloined Letter" (and its subsequent Lacanian, Derridean, and Zizekian interpretations). She explains,

The interpreter of the text—the text of a life, the artistic text—is therefore (at least while collecting circumstantial evidence and drawing conclusions) the examiner of a half-criminal secret. His success depends on whether and to what extent he manages to align his own "thoughts and feelings" with "the facial expression" of the perpetrator or victim. The interpreter-detective must simultaneously resign himself to the fact that the letter, if it makes it into his hands, will not stay in them for long [...] That is where I lodge my resistance against the practice of pointing to a single cause of the tragic course of events in the life and works of Maria

³⁶ Edward Boniecki, *Modernistyczny dramat ciała: Maria Komornicka* (Warsaw: IBL Wydawnictwo, 1998); Krystyna Kralkowska-Gątkowska, *Cień twarzy. Szkice o twórczości Marii Komornickiej* (Katowice: Uniwersytet Śląski, 2002); Karolina Krasuska, *Płeć i naród: Trans/lokacje*.

Komornicka, meaning the “imperative of spiritual development” or “misogyny of the era,” since I assume that Maria Komornicka, as such a vast and creative personality, had complex reasons to end her “feminine” existence. I also am reconciled with the fact that we will never fully know those reasons.³⁷

Filipiak’s fundamental stance as the interpreter-detective is one of suspicion. Her role is to examine Włast’s textual body as a corpse, riddled with discursive wounds, discovered in culture-as-crime-scene. She invokes Zizek’s analogy of detective as psychoanalyst in order to define the duty of the literary critic: the scene of the crime is staged, an illusion, a collection of disparate signs whose truths are not readily apparent. Włast’s crime scene, then, is not temporally limited to the period of their physical life, but also includes the interpretations that have been layered onto it over time. Filipiak questions her academic predecessors’ assumptions about the perpetrator; Janion’s assertion that Włast must have necessarily internalized the misogyny prevalent in Polish modernist discourse is countered with the suggestion that perhaps Włast’s contact with misogyny acted, not as an ideological poison, but rather as a vaccine against it, allowing Włast to develop a critical distance and tools necessary to the literary trade: absurdity, a knack for mockery, and irony.³⁸ Włast, she argues, also had no recourse in Polish feminism, because the poet’s desire to express their individual aesthetic (and need for recognition) was at odds with the Positivist program laid out by prominent Polish feminists like Maria Konopnicka and Eliza Orzeszkowa (and later Zofia Nałkowska). Włast found themselves outside of discourse, without recognition or support; their literary output, tied to gendered expectations of talent,

³⁷ Filipiak, *Obszary odmienności*, 73. Original: “Interpretator tekstu—tekstu życia, tekstu twórczości—jest zatem (przynajmniej na czas zbierania poszlak, wyciągania wniosków) badaczem na poły kryminalnej tajemnicy. Jego sukces zależy od tego, czy i w jakim stopniu zdoła uzgodnić swoje ‘myśli i uczucia’ z wyrazem [...] twarzy’ przestępcy bądź ofiary. Interpretator-detektyw musi zarazem pogodzić się z tym, że list, jeśli trafi do jego rąk, nie pozostanie w nich długo [...] Tam umiejscawiam swój opór wobec nawyk wskazywania na pojedynczą przyczynę tragicznego rozwoju wypadków w życiu i twórczości Marii Komornickiej, wskazywania zatem na ‘imperatywy rozwoju duchowego’ bądź ‘mizogizm epoki’, gdyż zakładam, że Maria Komornicka, osobowość tak rozległa i twórcza, miała złożone powody, by zakończyć ‘kobieca’ egzystencję. Godzę się także z tym, że powodów tych do końca nie poznamy.”

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 77.

aesthetic, and subject matter dictated by the era's dominant discourses, wasn't legible, therefore it simply wasn't discussed. Thus began the process of Othering and exclusion to which Włast was subject; "as an archetypal Other she had to resign herself to an existence devoid of a foundation, of a place of her own--especially in the eyes of those who decided whether or not she belonged."³⁹ This, Filipiak suggests, caused the author to begin artistic and personal forays into "realms of Otherness," and from these experiments arose Włast's most important *alter-egos*: Odmieniec, a character from *Biesy*, the "martyr of discourse, wanting to incessantly to belong, but always hopelessly excluded," and Piotr Włast, an intelligent, witty, beloved literary critic whom could function successfully and independently of the poet's own felt Otherness.⁴⁰ In 1907, however, Piotr Włast and Odmieniec merge: "Włast and Odmieniec--the first a magnetizer, and the second, a shadow stealing along the walls—are united in one ever-shifting, fluid personality."⁴¹ There is no transformation of Maria Komornicka into Piotr Odmieniec Włast as a single and irrevocable act; rather, Włast becomes a sort of analytical lens, a continuous project of the self that allows the poet to creatively articulate existence beyond the discursive sanctions of their era. Transgression, in life as in literature, is "an overstepping of one's personal or internalized boundaries, and becomes a tool for development, its necessary condition. The Odmieniec is a mutable agent who recognizes themselves, and develops and defines the volatile regions of their belonging *ad infinitum*."⁴²

³⁹ Monika Świerkosz, *W przestrzeniach tradycji: Proza Izabeli Filipiak i Olgi Tokarczuk w sporach o literaturę, kanon i feminizm* (Warsaw: IBL PAN, 2014), 145. Original: "Jako archetypiczny Inny musiała zgodzić się na egzystencję pozbawioną zakorzenienia, swojego miejsca—przynajmniej w oczach tych, którzy o tej przynależności decydują."

⁴⁰ Filipiak, *Obszary odmienności*, 415. Original: "męczennik dyskursu, pragnący należeć, nieustannie, a jednak wykluczony, beznadziejnie"

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 424. Original: "Włast i Odmieniec- ten pierwszy, magnetyzer, i ten drugi, przemykający pod ścianiami cień—złączą się w jedną migotliwą płynną osobowość..."

⁴² *Ibid.*, 487. Original: "Dla Odmieńca jednak transgresja jako przekroczenie własnych lub uwewnętrznionych granic staje się narzędziem rozwoju, jego niezbędnym warunkiem. Odmieniec to mobilny czynnik, który poznaje siebie, rozwija i definiuje zmienne obszary swoich przynależności niejako *ad infinitum*."

In some ways, Filipiak's detective work constitutes a rehabilitation of a rehabilitation, or a rehabilitation twice-removed, if you will. Filipiak, painting her portrait of Włast against the backdrop of *fin de siècle* Europe with a wide array of discursive colors, attempts to rescue the poet from being reduced to a singular, black-and-white narrative, whether it be the symbolic biography of Janion or the more "literal" explanation of mental illness. Moreover, Filipiak attempts to combat the social victimization and discursive exclusion Włast faced in life by imbuing them with a kind of future-oriented agency, fulfilling Włast's hope for posthumous recognition. Włast, continuing to write in exile even though they could not hope to publish, desperately wants to be incorporated into the "body" of culture, not necessarily as an individual, but through a process of textual transubstantiation. Filipiak notes, however, that this orientation towards the future does not mean Włast wants to be "buried" in culture, or pass from the literal into the symbolic through ritualization, an entity relegated to their proper time and place in history. Rather, Filipiak suggests that they want to circulate and proliferate elsewhere. They desire a "radical emigration," not only from the realm of the feminine to the realm of the masculine, but from the past into the future. In the conclusion to *Obszary odmiennosc*, she cites one of Włast's letters (written using masculine gender markers) in which Włast looks to the future for their incorporation into discourse: "If someone were to write a novel based on my notes, a treatise from an aphorism, a play from my sketch, I would be happy about circulating through the veins of humanity, and I would feel fulfilled if they remembered to quote my text at the beginning as an epigraph."⁴³ In a sense, Filipiak's monograph (and play *Księga Em*, to which I will return shortly) function as a vehicle for Włast's temporal shift into a postmodern discourse;

⁴³ Quoted in *ibid.*, 483. Original: "Gdyby ktoś taki z mojej krótkiej notatki zrobił nowelę, z aforyzmu traktat, z mego szkicu dramat, to bym się cieszył, że krążę po żyłach ludzkości, a czułbym się zadośćuczyniony, gdyby nie zapomniano przytoczyć na początku mój tekst jako motto."

she attempts to bring Włast into the present and, in doing so, to give the poet what they desire: the legibility of their artistic and personal aesthetic.

In the introduction to this dissertation, I discussed the impulse to rescue figures lost to both the vagaries, often cruel, and intentional erasures of history. Much like the transhistorical tendencies of Krzysztof Tomasiak's *Homobiografie*, the contemporary queer subject often attempts to reconstruct alterity into more recognizable forms. Heather Love discusses this type of historiography as "emotional rescue," describing "the work of historical affirmation not, as it is often presented, as a lifeline thrown to those figures drowning in the bad gay past, but rather as a means of securing a more stable and positive identity in the present."⁴⁴ We see this in Monika Świerkosz's interpretation of Filipiak's *Obszary odmiennosci*; she locates the impetus to situate Włast in a Polish literary genealogy in Filipiak's own desire for legibility as an author. Świerkosz notes, "For [Filipiak] it was about--and not only as a researcher but also a writer--establishing contact with one's own past, which, through the figure of the predecessor, would allow her to better root herself in a literary tradition."⁴⁵ Świerkosz, taking up the mantle of Detective in order to perceive what lies beneath the "crime scene" of Filipiak's monograph, uncovers a kind of disidentification, a process of working through one's own discursive position and experiences of exclusion—as a lesbian, as a feminist, as a Pole--via partial, or strategic, identification with painful dominant discourses.⁴⁶ Świerkosz continues, "Filipiak draws a parallel between the situation of Komornicka's cultural alienation and her own position as writer marked

⁴⁴ Love, *Feeling Backward*, 33-34.

⁴⁵ Monika Świerkosz, *W przestzeniach tradycji*, 147. Original: "Chodziło jej—nie tylko jako badacze, ale również pisarce—o takie nawiązanie kontaktu z przeszłością, które przez figurę poprzedniczki umożliwiłoby jej samej lepsze zakorzenie się w literackiej tradycji."

⁴⁶ For more on disidentification, see Jose Munoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999)

as feminist, and therefore non-feminine.”⁴⁷ Here we get a glimpse of what Filipiak will go on to represent in and through *Księga Em*: a relation to Włast that consists of a layering, an enmeshing, of experiences of gender and of a Polish national identity, but which does not offer resolution, understanding, or rehabilitation for either the historian or her subject.

In Filipiak’s afterword to *Księga Em*, Filipiak writes that the lens through which she reads Włast was impacted by working through events in her own life. Identification through translation: Filipiak articulates that, early on in her research, the only way she could make sense of Włast’s “gender transformation,” then read as internalized misogyny, was to analogize it with her own deep loathing of her Polishness. The point of identification for Filipiak, then, is not a reparative one; her relationship with Włast is mediated by shared anxieties, shame, and bad feelings. Let us return to the second epigraph of this chapter, the epigraph that Włast longed for and which Filipiak obliged them: “I am absolutely certain that I await *rehabilitation*, which will reproach many, and will cause blushes of shame or the pallor of incurable regret in many fine people.” Rehabilitation for Włast is not complete without revenge, without vindication and a recognition of guilt. Moreover, the shame that Włast wants induced is fundamentally a social affect, “a relation to others... [which] begins in an acknowledgment of all that is most abject and least reputable in oneself.”⁴⁸ We can read Włast’s desire as a “wanting for others to want them,” but only if “those fine people” shed their finery and join Włast in a relation of recognized abjection. Yet what if we take Włast’s prophecy one step further? Perhaps the “blush of shame and paleness of untenable regret” is not limited to those who did harm to Włast during their

⁴⁷ Monika Świerkosz, *W przestrzeniach tradycji*, 148. Original: “Filipiak przeprowadza paralelę między sytuacją kulturowego wyobcowania Komornickiej i swoją własną pozycją jako pisarki uznanej za feministyczną, a więc nie-kobietą.”

⁴⁸ Michael Warner, *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics and the Ethics of Queer Life*, (New York: Free Press, 1999), 35.

lifetime, those who pathologized and excluded the poet from social and discursive life, but also extends to those very individuals who attempt to effect Włast's rehabilitation? What if Filipiak's historiographical project can only be understood in partial or refused connections, identifications that prove unpleasant or at odds with the present, and a stubborn refusal of agency? What if Filipiak can only enact a transhistorical communion through the social nature of shame?

***Księga Em* as Untenable Rescue: The Pleasures and Pains of (Un)Doing History**

Księga Em, Filipiak's play based on the life of Włast, arose out of intellectual curiosity and, more banally, a need for money. As Filipiak relates, in 1997 someone from *Teatr Telewizji*, a television show that adapts plays for the small screen, contacted her, inquiring whether Filipiak would be willing to write a play about the poet.⁴⁹ Apparently, the financial incentive was not insignificant. "I considered it for purely material reasons," she explains, "That was my original motivation." Filipiak agreed, but by the time she had begun her research and writing, the show had backed out of the deal. Filipiak, however, had already become intrigued with the figure of Włast, and continued to write the play in her spare time, finishing it in 2003, and then defending her dissertation in 2005.⁵⁰

Księga Em is a four-act play, each act coinciding, more or less, with a period of Włast's life. However, the drama is not a simple biographical retelling of the poet's life story; rather, Filipiak presents us with a supernatural, hagiographical, yet irreverent, vision of the poet. Filipiak tells us in the play's afterword that Włast's massive tome of poetry *Xięga idyllicznej*

⁴⁹ "Polska jest sceną zbrodni: rozmowa z Izabelą Filipiak," by Małgorzata Rawińska, Ewa Tomaszewicz, *Replika* 9 (2007): 7-9.

⁵⁰ Izabela Filipiak, *Księga Em* (Warsaw: tCHu, 2005), 198. Original: "Wzięłam go pod uwagę z powodów czysto materialnych. Taka była moja oryginalna motywacja."

poezji, written in their exile, functioned as generic and thematic inspiration; Włast's work, an almost 500-page document, is an eclectic collection of verses that are sometimes ironic, sometimes sentimental, a mix of genres and often disparate stylistic elements. Filipiak describes Włast's *Xięga* as a "camped hagiography," invoking "camp," the exaggerated styles and mawkish objects that are sometimes thought of as a specifically "gay" or queer aesthetic.⁵¹ Indeed, the play is full of chaotic exaggeration: angels riding rockets and breaking out into song, books giving dramatic monologues, a merchant selling existential band-aids roams a train. Filipiak incorporates Włast's poetry, letters, and other documents into the dialogue, as well as fragments from Lacan, Nietzsche, Foucault, Nałkowska, etc., resulting in the play's stylistic eclecticism and parodic feel.

Księga Em begins with a prologue in which the Queen, Artemis, and a courtier, Apollonius, playfully debate philosophy. They argue about their existential approaches towards life; Artemis reflects Filipiak's vision of Włast—unceremonious, unconventional, and inexorable in their pursuit of knowledge and pleasure— whereas Apollonius champions structure, hierarchy, and social values. The two oversee the birth and infancy of Em, the central figure of the play and Włast's dramatic reincarnation: nursing her on Nietzsche, assigning her somewhat frivolous fallen angels to accompany her throughout life.⁵² Laluś, one of Em's guardian fallen angels, closes the prologue with the narration of a few biographical episodes, indicating her the course of her life has been pre-determined.

Act 1 largely focuses on Em's childhood and life up until that fateful night in Poznań. Em's relationship with her mother, brother, and father (the latter is both father and "Father the

⁵¹ Ibid., 222.

⁵² Filipiak uses feminine gender markers until the final scene of Act 1, where the Incubus transforms Em's gender.

Authority”—his monologue is an amalgamation of Nietzsche, Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, and Włast’s *Skrzydzeni [The Wronged]*⁵³ are explored, as well as other noteworthy episodes: Włast’s initial warm reception as a writer, their relationship with Cezary Jellenta, the legend of the “teeth obsession,” etc. Perhaps the most significant interaction is Em’s meeting with the Demon (or “Guardian Fallen Angel”), first incarnated as a Sergeant (a reference to an incident where police mistook Włast for a prostitute—some scholars speculate that they were raped by the police officers) and then as the Incubus who enacts the gender transformation. Act II takes place in a train compartment in which the Mother is accompanying Em to a clinic for psychiatric treatment. This act largely represents the intense but contentious relationship Włast had with Anna Komornicka, but also includes scenes in which Em confronts the overlapping of gender and national identity.

Act III is, superficially, representative of the period of Włast’s institutionalizations, but it also functions as a vortex of discourses in the early twentieth-century. Filipiak entwines early psychiatry and the work of Michel Foucault, and interwar politician and nationalist Roman Dmowski with Russian sociologist Mikhaylovsky’s theories on demagogues and mob psychology. She also introduces us to Zosia, Em’s romantic interest, modelled on Zofia Villaume. This act thematizes Em as symbolic of transformation, also linking him to conversations around independence and the “masculinization” of nations. The final act, entitled “Niebografia,” is divided into episodes in which Em encounters figures from his past and present. Presented as visions, or perhaps hallucinations, Em meets his legendary ancestor Włast, the Professor (a composite character based largely on Stanisław Pigoń, according to Filipiak), Zosia, the Book (according to the *Dramatis personæ*, the Book is a reincarnation of Friedrich

⁵³ Ibid., 215-216.

Nietzsche but with lower self-esteem), and more manifestations of his guardian Demon. The play ends when Em, surrounded by the ruins of World War II, leaves this plane of existence with the tender Incubus, in order to await reincarnation.

Filipiak's extensive afterword, titled "My Life with Maria," serves as a cipher for the play. Filipiak gives her motivations and sources of inspiration, both for the play as a whole and for individual characters. She explains, "I don't present the history of her life, only the essential extraction from it—more real in the deepest sense, as the Poetess would say."⁵⁴ Filipiak found that the most effective way to convey the "essence" of Włast's life was through a text stylized as hagiography; "Saint Maria-Włast," encountering angels and demons, surviving trials and tribulations, in the end ascends into the eternal to be reborn again.⁵⁵ What is perhaps most interesting about the afterword, however, is that it also functions as a sort of diary; Filipiak intersperses her analysis of the play with observations from different periods of the writing and research process. Often deeply personal, these sections intertwine Filipiak's own professional, familial, and personal trials with her struggle to comprehend, to identify with, Piotr Odmieniec Włast.

It is these personal narratives that allow us to link Filipiak's struggles with identity to her interpretation and presentation of both Piotr Włast in *Obszary odmienności* and Em in *Księga Em*. Much like Świerkosz extrapolates Filipiak's negotiation of her own position in a canonical narrative of Polish literature from the historiographical project of *Obszary odmienności*, I consider *Księga Em* as a kind of queer (auto)historiography, one that oscillates between the reparative and the abject, meditating on and making use of the complex interplay of negative

⁵⁴ Ibid., 203. Original: "...nie przedstawiam tu historii życia, tylko esencjonalny wyciąg z niej—prawdziwszy w swej najgłębszej istocie, jakby powiedziała Poetka."

⁵⁵ Ibid., 212-215.

affects between gender, sexual, and national identity. In this formulation Włast remains somewhat of a conundrum; an illegible historical figure traceable only through a fragmented, broken archive; an entity that arguably embodies a history of pathologization and exclusion. Although Filipiak tends toward the reparative, looking to “correct” the past by bringing Włast into the present, her historiographical project in *Księga Em* can instead be interpreted as one that produces the opposite result; it is an exercise in the impossibility of rescue.

The shame that is the effect of Włast’s “rehabilitation” is a prominent affect in *Księga Em*. Shame has attracted much theoretical interest in recent years, especially in queer theory. Shame is also one of the most powerful and contagious of all negative affects. It is, as Eve Sedgwick explains, “a reaction to the loss of feedback of others, indicating social isolation.” Social isolation is a feeling that both Włast and Filipiak, it seems, know well, but such with such exclusion comes a desire for sociality.⁵⁶ Yet it is also more than a sign of desire; shame actually makes a double movement “toward painful individuation, toward uncontrollable relationality.”⁵⁷ Shame is not something that can be excised or reformed; it is unruly, unpredictable, and consequently a very queer feeling indeed. Influenced by the work of Silvan Tomkins, Sedgwick, in perhaps my favorite figuration of shame, calls it a “free radical” which can attach to and permanently intensify or alter the meaning of almost anything: a body part, an act, a feeling, an object, a position, a memory, a person, etc.⁵⁸ Shame can also produce, call into question, or transgress identities; its contagiousness (think of the averted gaze of one who witnesses the shame of someone else, or when shame is experienced on behalf of another) is a form of

⁵⁶ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, “Shame, Theatricality, and Queer Performativity: Henry James’s The Art of the Novel,” in *Gay Shame*, edited by David M. Halperin and Valerie Traub (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2009), 50.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 59.

identification with the other, capable of generating social links between both the shamed and the unshamed, the shamed and the unshamed, contemporaneously and, as I argue in this chapter, across time.

For Filipiak, transformation and transgression are key in her representations of Włast. In the afterword to *Księga Em*, Filipiak articulates her own sense of (national) shame, and her failed attempt to dislodge it from its attachment to national (or cultural) identity. She writes,

I have experience of an incomplete transgression, i.e. changes of my “type” from Polish to American.... I also have years’ worth of complaints, spoken most often in private--I would have been ashamed to share them--but those that return most stubbornly are those that I must finally admit: I have never regretted anything so much as the fact that I was born a Pole in Poland. Not anything for as long and as bitterly. Oh, if I had been born a Pole abroad, there wouldn’t have been a problem. I could have longed for the “Womb of the Fatherland” (and what a complicated, gendered picture that is, in and of itself--compared to that, Em is as artless as a rose!)... However, the spectacularly nomadic history of my family ended in the East.⁵⁹

Filipiak’s shame is twofold: she laments her Polishness--which we can tie to a sense of shame, shame of the country whose national narratives produce the exclusions to which she and Włast both fall victim--and she is ashamed of being ashamed. She recalls the transformation of her “type,” using the Polish word *rodzaj*, a term that also denotes “genus,” grammatical gender, and can refer to biological gender as well. Filipiak clearly sets up a parallel between her attempted transformation to another nationality and Włast’s gender, an analogy that she also explores in the conclusion to *Obszary odmienności*. She writes there, “The radical transformation

⁵⁹ Filipiak, *Księga Em*, 205-206. Original: “Za to mam za sobą doświadczenie niedokończonej transgresji, tj. Zmiany mojego rodzaju z polskiego na amerykański. Mam też za sobą całe lata narzekań, popełnianych najczęściej w samotności—wstydziałabym się nimi dzielić—ale nawracających tak uparcie, że muszę to wreszcie powiedzieć: nigdy niczego tak nie żałowałam, jak tego, że urodziłam się Polką w Polsce. Nigdy niczego—niczego take długo i tak żarliwie. Och, gdybym urodziła się Polką za granicą, to nie byłoby problemu, mogłabym tęsknić “za Ojczyzny łonem” (a cóż to za powikłany rodzajowo obraz, sam w sobie—przy nim Em jest prostoduszna jak pierwiosnek!) i przyjeżdżać “na stare śmieci.” Tymczasem jednak widowiskowo wędrowną historią mojej rodziny zatrzymała się na Wschodzie.”

into Piotr Włast is central in her experiences, when she treats the movement from the “period of femininity” to “masculinity” as a move to another country, as a peculiar sort of emigration with the intent to naturalize.”⁶⁰ In the afterword to *Księga Em*, too, Filipiak discusses the feeling of dislocation that accompanies emigration and that “emigrants from poorer and less influential countries to richer and more influential countries become, in a certain sense, ‘women.’”⁶¹ Filipiak’s own emigration to the United States, then, as well as her “incomplete transformation” is a felt connection to Włast’s assertion of their gender, both of which are associated with a feeling of shame. As Filipiak engages in the play of recognitions that historical encounters necessitate, she cannot resist the impulse to identify with Włast in some capacity; following Janion’s example, Filipiak attempts to “understand” Włast by making a problematic, but nonetheless effective, analogy that results in an identification constitutive of and constituted by shameful affect. Filipiak explains,

On the other hand, I well remember that in the moment I decided on that transition--on the discarding of my “earlier” identity as a Polish woman—and like in other instances when I didn’t get anything out of it, I felt as if I had signed a pact with the devil. And for what? When I remembered that, I could communicate the story of Maria K. Based on this analogy, at some point I had thought to myself, that the real Maria K. must have been ashamed of women. That’s how it is with similar feelings, they appear without regard to how very indignant the aforementioned people get when someone is ashamed of them, or think that one needs not be ashamed.⁶²

⁶⁰ Filipiak, *Obszary odmienności*, 482. Original: “W obrębie jej doświadczeń radykalna przemiana w Piotra Własta zajmuje centralne miejsce, gdyż ona traktuje przejście z “okresu kobiecości” do “męskości” jak przeprowadzkę do innego kraju, jako swoistą emigrację z zamiarem naturalizacji.”

⁶¹ Filipiak, *Księga Em*, 206. Original: “emigranci z biedniejszych i mniej znaczących krajów, przyjeżdżający do bogatszych i bardziej wpływowych krajów, stają się w pewnym sensie ‘kobietami’.”

⁶² *Ibid.*, 206. Original: “Z drugiej strony zapamiętałam dobrze, że w chwili, kiedy zdecydowałam się na przejście—porzucenie mej “wcześniejszej” tożsamości Polki, jak i w różnych momentach, kiedy nic mi z tego nie przychodziło, czułam się tak, jakbym podpisała cyrograf. I na co? Kiedy sobie o tym przypominałam, mogłam już wywołać sprawę Marii K. Bazując na tej analogii pomyślałam sobie kiedyś, że prawdziwa Maria K. Musiała się po prostu za kobiety wstydzić. Tak to już bywa z podobnymi uczuciami, że pojawiają się one bez względu na to, jak bardzo wyżej wymienione osoby byłyby oburzone tym, że ktoś się za nie wstydzi, bądź uważają, że wstydzić się za nie—nie trzeba.”

Shame is considered a “bad” affect, and an uncontrollable one; it comes unbidden, the experience of shame producing more shame. Filipiak’s national shame could be a symptom of the “Eastern European inferiority complex” which stems from an internalized Othering; Western Europe constructs Eastern Europe as its Other, and through the various machinations that ensure Western cultural “superiority,” Eastern Europe internalizes its Otherness.⁶³ Estonian writer Tonu Onnepalu expresses this succinctly in his novel *Border State*, in which the gay émigré narrator reflects at one point, “There are so many of them here, a wide variety, Poles, Czechs, Romanians. I can spot them from far away, and whenever possible I take a different path in the park or go into different cars in the Metro. They do the same, because East Europeans hate each other.”⁶⁴ Shame of “the East” doesn’t want to be reflected or recognized by others, or in others.

Filipek’s attempt to transform from a Pole into an American speaks to her need for inclusion, not exclusion, another parallel that is drawn between herself and Włast. Janion’s theory that Włast was a victim of internalized misogyny bespeaks the same desire—to be included as a full subject, not excluded for perceived female weakness. At first, Filipiak rejects Włast: “Foreign land. Without fundamental points of identification. I don’t wake up with the thought: God, why didn’t you make me a man?” However, Filipiak follows with “I wake up with the thought: God, why did you make me a Pole?”⁶⁵ Through her own experience of shame (here connected explicitly with national identity) Filipiak begins the process of what Carolyn Dinshaw terms the queer historical touch, this “process of touching, of making partial connections between incommensurate entities.”⁶⁶ This analogy centered on shame is Filipiak’s constructed

⁶³ For more on this “inferiority complex,” see Chapter Four, “Soviet Tops, Colonial Bottoms: Michał Witkowski’s *Lubiewo*

⁶⁴ Tonu Onnepalu, *Border State*, trans. Madli Puhvel (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press: 2000), 22.

⁶⁵ Filipiak, *Księga Em*, 200.

⁶⁶ Carolyn Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre and Postmodern* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 54.

entry point into Włast's history, yet also functions as an expression of a strange, imperfect mirroring, a gaze backwards which is returned sideways, distorted by time and space, influencing Filipiak's own subjectivity and self-understanding.

As promising as shame is in this regard, however, Heather Love dwells on where shame pulls us apart, and calls for an embrace of what she terms "ruined identities and histories of injury" while resisting the urge to write them into a narrative of progress, or to rehabilitate them to serve a present political purpose.⁶⁷ Filipiak's historiographical approach in *Księga Em* resonates, to some extent, with Love's call to embrace the shame of the past, the shame of the present, and the shame produced by the very act of embracing these feelings. Indeed, the aforementioned analogy linking Filipiak's national shame and Włast's alleged internalized misogyny could, as I pointed out earlier in Janion's work, be read as transphobic. This phrasing indexes a certain history of injury, particularly within and between the lesbian/feminist and transgender community. The analogy facilitating Filipiak's identification with Włast not only makes national shame legible for the author, but foregrounds this shame as a very real, very painful aspect of queer history which should not, indeed, cannot be ignored, buried, or written off as an archaic affect no longer relevant in the post-socialist moment of "liberation."

In Filipiak's afterword, she documents the "bad feelings" that accompanied her decade-long research project on Włast, chronicling the often painful development of her relationship to the poet. She writes of her experiences,

Here is what I gained from my life spent with Maria--I gained a friend. I didn't expect it, while I was growing closer to her, full of prejudice and aversion. I thought (and I quote), "I've had enough of these misogynist women around me- I meet them in the office, I see them on television- why do I have to devote my

⁶⁷ Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2009), 30.

attention to one of them?” However, this entity known as Maria Komornicka or Piotr Włast turned out to be an entirely extraordinary phenomenon, a person without whose help I couldn’t have managed to take up and internalize many phenomena, and to understand as a human being. The many readings of her poems and letters were a conversation with someone, whom at first you don’t want to listen to, and afterward suddenly understand why- because this person says things you don’t want to know, because this knowledge is for you too impossible, the realization of it too painful. It is the kind of knowledge which upsets personal utopias- wouldn’t it have been easier to survive without it?⁶⁸

This moves beyond simply gazing into the past--there is an active reach backwards, a mining of the archive (an affective archive, perhaps) for understanding. Filipiak articulates this relationship as a process that was originally based in resentment, shame. There is a transmission of not only knowledge but also affectual experience, an emotional dialogue between the figure of Włast and the author writing in the present. These impossible knowledges that are communicated are the result of the complex and often contradictory interplay of identification, negative affect, and illegibility. This knowledge is disruptive- it draws us away from the personal utopia characterized by good feelings, perhaps in this case pride, and directs our attention toward those unthinkable thoughts, those painful musings which are excluded by the narrative of feminism or “gay liberation.” We could perhaps even go so far as to extend this paradigm to “national liberation,” or at least to some middle ground where the two narratives intersect. However, Filipiak doesn’t just gesture towards the “disruptive” power of negative affect in her afterword. In her drama *Księga Em*, Filipiak uses Em to symbolically represent the gap between material

⁶⁸ Filipiak, *Księga Em*, 207. Original: “Oto, co zyskałam podczas mojego życia z Marią—zyskałam przyjaciela. Nie oczekiwałam tego, gdyż zbliżałam się do niej pełna uprzedzenia i niechęci. Myślałam tak (cytuje): “Dosyć mam mizogynicznych kobiet wokół siebie—spotykam je w biurze, oglądam w telewizji—dlaczego mam poświęcać jednej z nich swoją uwagę?” A jednak był określający się jako Maria Komornicka lub Piotr Włast okazał się całkiem nadzwyczajnym wydarzeniem, osobą, bez pomocy której nie zdołałabym pojąć i uzewnętrznić wielu zjawisk, a zatem dojrzeć jako człowiek. Wielokrotna lektura jej wierszy i listów była jak rozmowa z kimś, kogo z początku nie chcesz słuchać, a potem nagle rozumiesz dlatego—bo ta osoba mówi rzeczy, o których nie chcesz wiedzieć, bo ta wiedza jest dla ciebie zbyt niemożliwa, jej realizacja zbyt bolesna. Jest to wiedza, która burzy osobiste utopie—czy bez niej nie byłoby łatwiej przetrwać?”

existence and our affective experience of history, as well as to figure the layering of gender, sexual, and national identity that is a central theme in her work on the poet.

In Act II of *Księga Em*, Em and Em's mother are on a train to Krakow, where a psychiatrist has accepted Em as a patient. Em has decidedly negative feelings about treatment, and tries to manipulate the mother into funding an escape. While the train is between stations (stations subtly named Ladies and Gentlemen, respectively),⁶⁹ a revolutionary appears. He serves largely to symbolize a national tradition of insurrection and conspiracy in the name of an independent Polish state. The revolutionary is on the run from the authorities, and hides in their train compartment. Em asks him if he is, indeed, a revolutionary. The revolutionary replies, "In a certain sense." Em then says, "Me too. In a certain sense." He then proceeds to pull out a picture of his "fiancée." The following dialogue ensues:

Revolutionary: This is my fiancée.

Em: She's pretty.

Revolutionary: Like Poland. Unfortunately, she has all Poland's merits and faults.

Em: Do you know her well?

Revolutionary: As a matter of fact, not at all.

Em: But you know her faults...

Revolutionary: By analogy. After all, I know Poland.

Rewolucjonista: To jest moja narzeczoną.

Em: Jest piękna.

Rewolucjonista: Jak Polska. Niestety, ma wszystkie wady i zalety tej ostatniej.

Em: Zna ją pan dobrze?

Rewolucjonista: Właściwie wcale.

Em: Ale jej wady zna pan...

Rewolucjonista: Per analogiam. Znam przecież Polskę.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ This is obviously a reference to the Lacanian anecdote about how children enter the symbolic order "For these children, Ladies and Gentlemen will be henceforth two countries toward which each of their souls will strive on divergent wings..." Jacques Lacan, "The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious," in *Ecrits* (New York: Norton, 2007), 417.

⁷⁰ Filipiak, *Księga Em*, 82-83.

Understanding through analogy is how the Revolutionary bridges the gap between the personal and the national, love (or sex) and patriotism. Em asks the revolutionary how one can meet this girl in person, and then steals the picture. While they are pulling into the “Gentlemen” station, there is a racket outside and it becomes apparent that the authorities have caught up with the revolutionary. Em offers to take the revolutionary’s place. The revolutionary, touched, replies, “When I look at you, I remember who I am.” Em replies, “When I look at you, I remember who I am not.”⁷¹ The authorities burst into the train compartment and mistake Em for the revolutionary anyway, and only a hasty confession from the revolutionary, who shortly thereafter is shot, saves Em from death.

Here we can see that the structure of the initial and final dialogue between Em and the revolutionary is relatively symmetrical, but each reply is a distorted, imperfect reflection of the previous sentence. The structure here echoes the distorted, imperfect dialogue that Filipiak imagines with Włast--there is communication, and in a sense, communion--but ultimately each interlocutor is misunderstood in the inevitable failure of analogy. In addition, the revolutionary and Em are shown as linked in various ways--they share certain subversive characteristics, although one is a political dissident while the other transgresses gender norms. Filipiak then moves from gender to sexuality, presenting the revolutionary as performing a national script, where the object of sexual desire is Poland, and he is bound to the nation as one is, ostensibly, bound in a marital engagement. Filipiak makes a gesture here toward queer desire, when Em displays interest in meeting the girl. As the girl is analogous to Poland (the word *Polska* is also grammatically feminine, in contrast to Em’s use of masculine grammatical markers), the result is

⁷¹ Ibid., 85. Original: “*Rewolucjonista*: Kiedy patrzę na ciebie, przypominam sobie kim jestem. *Em*: Kiedy patrzę na ciebie, przypominam sobie, kim nie jestem.”

a sort of queering of patriotism. Em desires to emulate the revolutionary in his nationally sanctioned endeavors, yet as a liminal figure excluded from national discourse, can only do so partially, as their gender is illegible, unassimilable. Em's sacrificial offer inaugurates the revolutionary's understanding of his own martyrdom for the nation, and he actualizes his masculinity through his identification with Em. Em desires this masculinity, which is intimately tied to the national ideal. Yet Em is trapped on a train symbolically moving between masculinity and femininity, and is unable to disembark at either station. Thus Em cannot attain the desired masculinity, even though Em evokes it in others. Through their interaction, Em is acutely aware of a lack, while the revolutionary's identity is affirmed. However, the fact that Em was the one first recognized as the insurgent further destabilizes the kind of patriotic masculinity that the revolutionary supposedly embodies, questioning the coherency of this masculinity. It also raises the question of who is more threatening to the status quo, the "invert" or the terrorist?

Throughout the play, Filipiak is working towards a moment of catharsis which will not or cannot ever be actualized. The desire to rescue or rehabilitate these historical figures is impossible to resist, but the figures themselves evade our grasp. Love suggests that,

Such is the relation of the queer historian to the past: we cannot help wanting to save the figures from the past, but this mission is doomed to fail. In part, this is because the dead are gone for good; in part, because the queer past is even more remote, more deeply marked by power's claw; and in part because this rescue is an emotional rescue, and in that sense, we are sure to botch it.... Such a rescue effort can only take place under the shadow of loss and in the name of loss; success would constitute its failure.⁷²

⁷² Love, *Feeling Backward*, 51.

To grasp Włast's past is doomed from the start, a fact the Filipiak herself articulates in her self-fashioning as detective. Yet Filipiak still reaches out for Włast affectively, trying to match her own experiences of exclusion with theirs. However, no resolution can be found in such a parallel.

At the end of the play, the aging Em encounters a number of characters from his past, including his younger self. Gesturing toward a "queer" temporality, Filipiak plays with time, doubling it back upon itself, as characters from the distant past and distant future meet somewhere in the middle to form connections, partial or otherwise. In a scene entitled "The Eighth Star," an older Em meets a fighter pilot, who turns out to be the most recent form of her "guardian" demon. Together, they witness an exchange that seems to take place out of time, a mixing of the present and the past. A younger Em accuses the Demon of not having kept his promise:

Young Em: Why didn't you help me?

Demon: I should help you?

Young Em: You promised!

Demon: Someone promised you something?

Young Em: You could have taken pity on me out of the goodness of your heart.

Demon: The art of observation sucked me in, I preferred to watch. I was curious--how would you save yourself? After your discouragement, how long before the desire to try again flickers within you? What kind of ingenuity would you display? I liked watching how you raised yourself up. (*passionately, honestly*) I craved your disappointment while not wanting to discourage you from life--that's why I left a shade of hope. You wait--I do not come. But I toss you something that's not quite a sign. Again you wait. Almost broken. Aha, however, life constantly pulses in her, shakes, swells, rises... In order to again be truncated! It's fascinating--to be able to fulfil the expectations of others, but to not do so. To promise--and to not keep one's word. It's compelling. The question of whether this time I have managed to crush you.

Young Em: It is not I that has latched onto you; it's you who are dependent on me! I am your secret narcotic.

Młodzieńcza Em: Dlaczego mi nie pomogłeś?

Bies: A powinienem?

Młodzieńcza Em: Obiecałeś!

Bies: Ktoś coś ci obiecał...?

Młodzieńcza Em: Mogłeś się ulitować z dobroci serca.

Bies: Wciągnęła mnie sztuka obserwacji, wołałem się przyglądać. Byłem ciekaw—jak będziesz się ratować? W jaki czas po zgnębieniu zabłyśnie w tobie ochota, żeby spróbować ten jeszcze jeden raz? Jaką wykażesz się pomysłowością? Lubilem patrzeć, jak się podnosisz. (*Namiętnie, szczerze*) Pożądałem twojego rozczarowania nie pragnąc jednak zniechęcić cię do życia—dlatego zostawiałem cię nadziei. Ty czekasz—ja nie przychodzę. Ale podrzucam coś niby znak. Znow czekasz. Prawie złamana A jednak, proszę, życie znowu ścięte! To fascynujące—móc, a nie spełniać cudzych oczekiwań. Obiecywać—a nie dotrzymywać słowa. To wciąga. Czy i tym razem nie zdołam cię dobić?

Młodzieńcza Em: To nie ja się ciebie uczepliłam, to ty uzależniłeś się ode mnie! Jestem twoim sekretnym narkotykiem.⁷³

Filipiak leaves us with a possible model for historical encounter with the queer past. We can imagine ourselves as the Demon, drawn irresistibly to the past yet resisting the impulse to rescue it in order to voyeuristically experience the fear, shame, or revulsion evoked by the queer past. Or perhaps it is better to imagine ourselves occupying both positions simultaneously, as experiencing longing, desire, and need without fulfillment, eternally suspended in the moment of an unfulfilled promise.

However, it is not merely shame that demands our attention. Perhaps more subtly, but just as insistently, the erotics of this historical encounter produce a link to the past. Lack, longing, and desire, after all, are often erotically charged. Much like the Demon figures a relationship of lack, of pain, to the past, we are introduced to another of his incarnations--the Incubus. The Incubus is the vehicle by which Em is transformed into both a man and a great author (although neither of these promised transitions are complete) by means of an erotic encounter. As its name implies, we may think of the Incubus as figuring a sort of mytho-

⁷³ Filipiak, *Księga Em*, 186.

historical eroticism that carries its own shameful attachments; Incubi, sexual demons who rape, and sometimes impregnate, women in their sleep, are figures onto which cultures displace their sexual guilt and transgressions. At the end of Act I, Em is sitting in the infamous hotel room in Poznań, unable to sleep. A cruelly beautiful Incubus appears from the chimney and sits on her bed. The dialogue that ensues is curious--the Incubus offers transformation of Em's gender and the realization of Em's literary ambition, promising both through an erotic encounter with his own naked form.

Incubus: [...] Is it worth wasting demonic power on a woman? And yet, clearly... you don't want to go the whole way!

Em thinks "sex": The whole way?

Incubus: And how else? To be nothing more than an appendix, a footnote, a bit part, a poor relative of the great poets? You are whimpering with exhaustion! You are one twentieth of the entire worthless output of modernism. If I were you, I would die from shame this very night! Let me be specific. The body. You want it.

Em: True.

Incubus: And now a kiss.

The kiss is long and unexpectedly pleasant.

Em: That was...

Incubus: Unearthly?

Em: Once more.

They kiss again. The tenderness lasts a moment.

Em: Undress me.

Incubus: Yes, my beautiful boy.

Em: What will I tell mother?

Incubus: That you are already a man.

Inkub: [...] Czy nie warto marnować diabelskiej mocy na kobietę? A może, widocznie... Ty nie chcesz iść na całość!

Em myśli "seks": Całość?

Inkub: A jak inaczej? Appendix, przypis, ogon, poetycka woda po kisielu? Skamlesz z wyczerpania! Jedna dwudziesta urobku moderny, grafomańskiego en total. Gdybym był tobą, umarłbym ze wstydu tej nocy! Niech uściślę. Ciało. Chcesz tego.

Em: Zgoda.

Inkub: A teraz pocałunek.

Pocałunek jest długi i nadspodziewane przyjemny.

Em: To było...

Inkub: Nieziemskie?
Em: Jeszcze raz.
Całuj się ponownie. Czulości trwają chwilę.
Em: Rozbierz mnie.
Inkub: Dobrze, piękny chłopcze.
Em: Co powiem matce?
*Inkub: Że jesteś już dorosły.*⁷⁴

Em's transformation from female to male, from marginal poet to great author, is presented as taking place on the level of the body. The kiss, the erotic embrace are all material acts, felt on the level of the skin. The eroticism of this encounter, Filipiak explains in the afterword, was something she had conceptualized from the beginning as a form of reparation. She writes, "Out of some need for recompensation, I wanted to give Maria pleasure for that night and that's why I created the Incubus."⁷⁵ However, the transformation is also presented as taking place through language, and thus through culture. As the Incubus undresses Em, exposing his new form, he *names* him as boy, thus marking the transformation as complete. He also names Em's desire--the body. As Lacan writes, the naming of desire "is not a question of recognizing something which would be entirely given. In naming it, the subject creates, brings forth, a new presence in the world."⁷⁶ Filipiak is representing the birth of Em, but also the birth of a new mode of *material* queer being that arises through physical, erotic contact. As Em and the Incubus embrace, their contact is "unearthly" ("nieziemskie"). The movement from the physical to the spiritual plane is echoed by the temporal displacement of the historian and their subject. We could describe the kiss instead as "untimely" and posit this demonic figure, the Incubus, as a mode of queer historical encounter. As Elizabeth Freeman writes, "we might imagine ourselves haunted by bliss

⁷⁴ Filipiak, *Księga Em*, 53-54.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 228. Original: "Z jakiejś potrzeby rekompensaty, chciałam dać Marii na tę noc przyjemność i dlatego stworzyłam Inkuba."

⁷⁶ Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar, Book II. The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis, 1954-1955*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Sylvana Tomaselli (W.W. Norton & Co., New York, 1988), 229.

and not just by trauma; residues of positive affect (idylls, utopias, memories of touch) might be available for queer counter- (or para-) historiographies.”⁷⁷ Filipiak fills time and history’s holes with imaginative play, but also inserts her own embodied, possibly erotic, experience.

We can invoke the image of Walter Benjamin’s Angel of History--the divine being facing the past in horror, watching “one single catastrophe that keeps piling ruin upon ruin and hurls it in front of his feet” in empty, homogenous time.⁷⁸ This Angel badly wants to fly to the rescue, but nevertheless is unable to as he is swept along by the winds of Progress. Heather Love figures the Angel of History as a potential model for queer historiography that hurts and that ultimately fails or refuses rescue, but we can perhaps read Filipiak’s *Księga Em* as proposing another queer alternative--the Demon of History.⁷⁹ The Demon watches yet may interact pleasurably; he is not swept forward by the winds of Progress but rather sails effortlessly between times on the winds of Anachronism. Traditionally cast as the enemy of the family, the nation, and God, the figure of the demon has much in common with the abject queer. In his first configuration, he is an Incubus, and as such seductive, sensual, and material. Filipiak, embodied in the Incubus, drawing on personal lived experience encounters Em erotically through this textual wormhole into the past. Indeed, we as readers interact with Em in this way, but Em may also represent us--transformed, initiated into new forms of queer being through the queer historical touch. The Demon of Em’s childhood is yet another figure for this touch, but this instead of pleasure, we experience pain. The interplay of touching and holding back, of caress and strike, presents a fuller, richer picture of how we experience the past. In *Księga Em*, characterized by his sadism,

⁷⁷ Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 120.

⁷⁸ Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” in *The Holocaust: Theoretical Readings*, edited by Neil Levi and Michael Rothberg (Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 278.

⁷⁹ Love, *Feeling Backward*, 147-152.

his eroticism, and his fallibility, he represents that which is considered by society to be deranged, abject, and dangerous to the coherency of the nation. Indeed, if that which is not culturally legible in the present often arises in the form of “ghosts, scars, and gods,” then the tripartite Demon of *Księga Em* indicates a queer affective reality that does not make sense in our contemporary neoliberal world.⁸⁰ The feelings and bodily sensations evoked by historical experience subvert dominant linear narratives of progress and nation, problematize seemingly stable categories of sex and gender, and destabilize politicized identities in our present moment.

While contemporary queer identities and national identities are neither analogous nor follow the same trajectories, or are even structured by the same forces, in some cases (as in the case of Poland), they may resonate affectively with one another. Joseph Valente identifies shame as this main affect, writing, “shame... represents the common affective reality with which queer political movements of different stripes must reckon.”⁸¹ Thinking about shame as an index of not only painful queer pasts but also as linked to issues of national feeling may be productive in re-imagining queer history as well as contemporary subject-positions in Eastern European political and cultural discourse.

In this chapter, I read Filipiak’s methodological and emotional investments in her academic and fictional work. While Filipiak often articulates her research on Włast as a reparative or “rescue” project, I look to where she fails to rehabilitate or connect with the past, and read these failures as another kind of queer historiography. While Filipiak is ultimately able to imagine some sort of empathy with the poet, the bad feelings, or the erotic ones, that suffuse

⁸⁰ Elizabeth Freeman, “Introduction,” *GLQ* 13: 2-3 (2007): 159.

⁸¹ Joseph Valente, “Race/Sex/Shame: The Queer Nationalism of *At Swim Two Boys*,” *Eire-Ireland* 40: 3-4 (2005): 66.

Księga Em force a reconsideration of relationality not only to a queer past, but also to a national one. It is to these methodologies we might pay heed, as they may enrich queer historiographical projects in Eastern Europe. In this space where configurations of national identity are so organized by shame and historical trauma, an affective historiographical approach may be able to provide an otherwise inaccessible, profound understanding of not only the past, but of the present as well.

I read Izabela Filipiak's relationship with Włast as an intensely personal one, even though the shame that allows for the analogization between the national and gender identity in Filipiak's work on the poet has broader implications for both Włast's and Filipiak's readers, allowing them access to, or even infecting them with, contagious national shame. In the next chapter, I examine a contemporary of Izabela Filipiak, an artist-historian who also engages queer modes of historiography to uncover or rehabilitate "ruined figures of the past." Agnieszka Weseli-Furja, a friend of and sometimes-collaborator with Filipiak, has, through her activism around her historical subject Zofia Sadowska, publically performed a transhistorical kinship that has resulted in a reputation as one of Sadowska's primary biographers. I argue that Furja's struggle to connect with and represent queer forebears not only effects a reification of a contemporary, "liberated" identity, but also produces a collective experience of the past through the performance of it, allowing for queer modes of communion and community that resist totalizing national narratives of progress.

CHAPTER III.

Furious Histories and the Possibility of Transhistorical Publics

Looking through a cache of digital files that Agnieszka Weseli (or Furja [Fury], as she's also known) dumped onto my flash-drive, I stumbled across a book/art project proposal. The project, entitled only as *a*, was to be “an interdisciplinary graphic/textual project: an attempt at a non-linear description of a nonheteronormative relation between women (?) together with the emotional continuum accompanying that relation.”¹ Aleka Polis, or Aleksandra Polisiewicz, a contemporary feminist artist, would design the physical object, whereas Furja would write the texts. Intrigued, I began virtually leafing through the proposal-packet, watching a video of someone showcasing a mock-up of the project's design and reading the endorsements of Polish academic, literary, and queer luminaries. *a* would also include a digital edition of the book that would offer new ways of reading the materials contained within. What really caught my eye, however, was a sample of the page layout; included in the PDF were lines of poetry. One poem begins:

For the bitch the streets of the capital are carved into the heat. Walking a hundred streets in
search of her, a
quivering walk searching for her, the narrower the sidewalk, the more it picks up the
scent.

There is constant commotion in this city, any movement could be her gravestone, so faithfully
are they measured.
taut trousers partially filled with her.

¹ Agnieszka Weseli, “Project Proposal for *a*,” unpublished PDF file, 2010. Original: “interdyscyplinarnym projektem tekstowo-graficznym: próbą nieliniowego opisanie nieheteronormatywnej relacji między kobietami (?) wraz z kontinuum towarzyszących jej emocji.” This description of her project can also be found on her website: http://www.weseli.info/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=3&Itemid=3

wycięte w upale ulice stolicy dla suki. chodząc po stu ulicach szuka jej, chodzenie jest
szukające jej i drgające, chodnik im węższy, tym węższy.
W mieście są wciąż ruchy, które mogłyby być nagrobkiem jej, tak wiernie są wyważone.
są napięte spodnie niepełne jej.²

While the poem's last stanzas read more as meditation on the intricacies of queer bodies and their connections, partial or otherwise, in urban space, the first half of the poem struck me as particularly reminiscent of Furja's (and all) queer historical practices and activism. A life-long Varsovian, her passionate attachment to the city resulted in her becoming somewhat of an expert on Warsaw's history, especially as it intertwined with her search for signs of non-heteronormativity in archives, medical and court records, and interviews with older residents. This city, unnamed but directly implied as Warsaw via the use of *stolica* (capital) in the poem, is the site of a search. Not just any search, but a search for "her." Whether "her" represents the essence of Warsaw or the bitch for whom the streets are carved is up for debate, but given that one of Furja's larger historical projects has been to piece together traces of a woman named Zofia Sadowska, I read the poem as a search through urban space and time for her presence. Sadowska, who has since become a significant figure in Polish feminist and lesbian history, was a doctor practicing medicine in Warsaw in the 1910s and 1920s. Sadowska was also involved in feminist causes and never made a secret of her sexual preference for women. Accused of lesbianism and the seduction of "innocents," the rather masculine-presenting Sadowska became fodder for the tabloids and was turned into a figure of moral depravity, even losing her license to practice medicine for a time because she suffered from the "disease" of homosexuality.

Sadowska occupies, in some ways, a similar historical position to that of Piotr Włast; an early twentieth century gender and sexually transgressive figure who was persecuted because she

² Agnieszka Weseli, "Untitled poem," Sample layout for book proposal, 2010.

didn't fit certain models of Polish femininity, a woman who in fact threatened those models by her very existence. For a queer and/or feminist historian, the draw of such a figure is powerful. Both Filipiak and Furja may feel the need to make reparations through reintroducing these people into discourse, especially given the fact they inhabit a moment in which, ostensibly, they can read these figures for who they "really" are and can offer them societal tolerance, acceptance, and even celebration. However, this poem, as well as Furja's "fictionalized biographical" cabaret performances that I read later in this chapter, also expose and negotiate the emotional pitfalls and erotic charges of such a historical undertaking.

Furja's poetic use of the word *suka* (bitch) encapsulates the homophobic and misogynistic disgust and rejection that a woman who dares to confront heteronormative gender and sexual norms faces. Furja deploys it in order to signal the homophobia of both contemporary and historical Warsaw, but also, through the oblique imagery of a dog on the hunt and the repetition of the term later in the poem, stitches *suka* together with the figure of the historian, her subject of inquiry, and the female lover. It is an intensely physical, almost erotic hunt, one that entails "quivering," much like an excited bloodhound who picks up the smells that emerge from the narrow streets. Another line further in the poem, "it seeks her like a bitch, so that it can use her, suckle her," has multiple meanings, as does most of Furja's work. "It" could be anything or anyone, as our only clue is the third-person singular declension of *szukać* (to seek, to look for), leaving the signification open. In addition, *szukać* is a "false friend" to the Czech *šukat*, or similar-sounding words in different languages that have significantly divergent meanings. In this case, the Czech *šukat* means "to fuck," which imbues the poem with an additional, more explicit eroticism.³ "Using" and "suckling" indicate nourishment but not necessarily fertility; it

³ My thanks to Benjamin Paloff, who pointed out this possible connection to the Czech *šukat*.

engenders the image of a bitch suckling another bitch, a lesbian relation that embraces and repurposes the usually derogatory term into one that reconciles qualities traditionally thought of as mutually exclusive: selfish, powerful femininity, infertile maternity. I read *suka* as both representing the historian and the nonheteronormative women she seeks, their traces embedded in the “hundred streets” that the historian wanders in [the] heat, streets inscribed with the plaques and memorials that liberally pepper Warsaw’s landscape, marking a national(ist) obsession with shaping and commemorating certain historical narratives.

The gravestone as memorial is not, however, a static object, but manifests in the constant movement and life of the city. *Ruchy* (commotion) implies a social component: goings-on, social or political unrest, upheaval. The gravestone of the sought-after woman could either arise from the current political situation and the social movements which function to commemorate Sadowska’s persecution, or, conversely, it could mark the fate of those who fall outside or refuse the heteronormative scaffolding of the community, a social backlash that results in the burying of certain non-conforming subjects. The merging of death with life, of eternal rest with constant motion, is equalized in the act of “measuring”—of observation, of study. While death often bookends the historian’s research, Furja, in an interview in 2011, told me that for her it was important to celebrate Sadowska’s life, to bring her back into living memory, a project that deeply resonates with Filipiak’s attempt to bring *Włast* back to life in discourse.⁴ Furja’s historical activism, whether it be through gravesite vigils, lectures, or historically-themed parties, attempts to bring together the past and present, allowing the living to manifest testimony to Sadowska’s own life.

⁴ Agnieszka Weseli. Interview by Jodi Greig. Unpublished. Chicago, IL. April 1, 2012.

Reading the poem as an allegory for the affective and erotic pleasures and pains of historical engagement opens it up to queer theoretical interventions which were discussed in the Introduction and Chapter Two. Although Furja is committed to celebration, the specters of painful and damaging queer pasts remain difficult to grapple with. Heather Love reminds us, “the effort to recapture the past is doomed from the start. To reconstruct the past, we build on ruins; to bring it to life, we chase after the fugitive dead [...] the difficulty of reaching the dead will not keep us from trying.”⁵ The poem, while full of the erotic contact of bodies, in time and across it, is also very much about the incomplete, fragmented, doomed nature of the historical encounter and the insatiable impulse that propels it. The inability of the historian to truly meet the past is manifest in the line, “taut trousers partially filled by her.” The trousers could be read as a reference to Sadowska, whose masculine attire was described with much delight and in great detail by the press. Yet the adjectives *napięte* (“taut” but also “tense”) and *niepełne* (“partial” or “incomplete”) evoke both the contested relation society had with Sadowska’s expression of gender and the historian’s uncomfortable grasp of Sadowska as a person. The tension between Sadowska’s buried “truths” and that which can be extrapolated and interpreted in the present arises in a partial image of Sadowska (and of her bottom half, I am compelled to point out). Furja, discussing the archival material that comprises her understanding of Sadowska, admits that she was only able to uncover a few documents that come from Sadowska herself: a letter, some feminist writings, and a court complaint.⁶

Even though the past can never be grasped in its entirety, the impetus to connect to it, and in the historian’s case, to communicate it, endures. The poem continues:

⁵ Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History*, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2007), 21.

⁶ Weseli, Interview by Jodi Greig.

pleśń miłośna	amorous mold
boleśnie	painfully
łamane przez	slash
obleśnie	lewdly
piszę głodne kawałki	i write hungry chunks
ślinne i mięsne	slimy and fleshy
wszystko to	everything joyful
wesołe nie na żarty	is in earnest
daję słowo	i give my word
bez odbioru	radio silence

In the first of these stanzas, Furja plays with the visual and phonetic similarity between “pieśń miłosna” (“love song”) and “pleśń miłosna” (amorous mold). Passionate historical work, especially when experienced erotically, could certainly figuratively fit the bill of “love song,” yet Furja invokes mold instead. Mold, commonly linked with stasis, decay, disuse, and age, here is described as “amorous”—an unlikely and striking association, but one that is consistent with the play of juxtapositions in Furja’s poem. The mold stands for that which constitutes history, but “amorous mold” figures the irresistible impulse to reach out to an often toxic past, as “the history of queer damage retains its capacity to do harm in the present.”⁷

The following adverbs, separated by the symbol “/” written out as *łamane przez* (slash), maintains the push-and-pull of the pains and illicit pleasures of “doing” history. The pain of those identifications with the past coupled with (or perhaps divided by? A mathematical equation made in psychoanalytic heaven) a condemned voyeuristic eroticism grammatically sets up a link to the next stanza, which begins with the verb *piszę* (“i write”).

The hunt described earlier in the poem seems to be over; and now the historian must write. The writing process is described in terms of ingestion and food textures, characterized by

⁷ Love, *Feeling Backward*, 9.

the incompleteness discussed earlier (“chunks”), by desire and its attendant lack (“hungry”), disgust with an erotic twinge (“slimy”), and substance (“meaty/fleshy”).⁸ Historiography becomes corporealized, textured with different affects and psychic processes; the past becomes ingestible, thus forging an experienced merging of past and present.

Freudian psychoanalysis, although it has not been kind to homosexuality (or to anyone, really), structured much of the discussion around and characterization of homosexuality in the twentieth century, producing identifications as well as points of resistance for gays and lesbians. For instance, oral fixations, arising from a pathological arrestment in the oral stage, has, in Freudian psychoanalytic tradition, been linked to the symptoms of compulsive eating and of lesbianism, and in particular lesbian sex acts, (cunnilingus and suck[ing] of the breasts). As Freud describes the oral stage:

One of the first of such pregenital sexual organizations is the *oral*, or if we wish, the cannibalistic. Here the sexual activity is not yet separated from the taking of nourishment, and the contrasts within the same not yet differentiated. The object of the one activity is also that of the other, the sexual aim consists in the *incorporating* into one's own body of the object, it is the prototype of that which later plays such an important psychic rôle as *identification*.⁹

While today we tend to reject the idea of homosexuality as pathological, the discourses surrounding homosexuality in the early twentieth century, negative though they may be, provide much fodder for the erotic imagination. After all, queer power is often found in re-appropriating and experimenting with dominant cultural discourse and forms. In Furja's poem, the erotic economy of ingesting or incorporating the past is linked with the figure of the lesbian with

⁸ The phrase “głodne kawałki” (hungry chunks) returns as the title of a text/art project published in *Furia* in which Beata Sosnowska illustrates Weseli's texts. Other fragments of the untitled text I analyze in this chapter are also included, but in a different context create new meanings. Both the illustrations and the texts explore queer corporeality, and while Sadowska is not mentioned explicitly, Komornicka is invoked through the repeated image of the tooth. Agnieszka Weseli and Beata Sosnowska, “Głodne kawałki.” *Furia: nieregularnik lesbijsko-feministyczny*. Issue 5. 64-69.

⁹ Sigmund Freud, *Three Contributions to the Theory of Sex*, trans. A. A. Brill (New York: Nervous and mental disease Pub. Co, 1920), 59.

“excessive appetites.” While the historian and her audience are considered the consumers in the poem, Sadowska, who was accused of all manner of decadent deviancy, from prostitution to drugs, seducing underage girls to sadistic orgies, also represents such an inordinate glutton. The stanza immediately following can be read as a sort of aside—a half-joking reminder that historiography undertaken with passion breeds joy (although of course that is not all it breeds). And finally, the “I” of the poem, the historian, makes a promise or, literally, gives her word, a speech act that binds her to her historical subject. It represents a covenant, a pact that is related to other performative speech acts (like “I do” in the marriage ceremony, for example). *Daję słowo* implies a specific directionality; *dać*, or “to give,” describes not an exchange, but an act of beneficence or sacrifice. While the phrase means “to give one’s word,” *słowo* evokes again the process of writing and communication. The historian’s task is to spread the word, and the communication of the past here also constitutes a promise to the past. However, there is no reply from the past. The desire for reciprocity is strong; one wants to at least see something reflected back in the mirror of history, an identification or hope or sign of progress. But history can be cruel and we must be prepared, as “turning back toward them seems essential, but it also demands something that is, in the end, more difficult: allowing them to turn their backs on us.”¹⁰

Thus Agnieszka Weseli has much in common with Izabela Filipiak, whose relationship with Piotr Włast was explored in the preceding chapter. Both are artist-historians who grapple with the erotic and affective dimensions of queer historiography; both take up negative dominant cultural forms and practices; both move away from national narratives of patriotism and progress. But whereas Filipiak negotiates her transhistorical relation to Włast through her personal and political struggle with Polish national identity, resulting in a play that tries to figure

¹⁰ Love, *Feeling Backward*, 43.

both the historical encounter and a working-through of the present, Furja adapts her individual historical experiences with Sadowska for the cabaret stage, drawing the audience into her relation and thus allowing for a more communal encounter with the past.

I begin my analysis of Furja's performances by defining them as a kind of historical activism and contextualizing them within in her artistic and political projects. As a prominent feminist and queer activist, Furja herself is a significant figure in the history of the LGBTQ rights movement in the last fifteen years or so, and her work has spanned everything from abortion rights campaigns to queer culture festivals, film reviews to translations, and of course, her work on Varsovian, feminist, and queer histories. However, my specific interest in Furja lies in her cabaret performances as Maria Konopnicka, an important literary and cultural figure in the Positivist period whose long and intimate friendship with another woman has been reclaimed as lesbian by the Polish LGBTQ movement, and her performances as and/or referencing Zofia Sadowska. Furja, in translating her archival work and interest in Konopnicka and Sadowska for the stage, explores the possibility of reappropriating Polish nationalist rhetoric and historical narratives for queer ends; in particular, I argue that her performances allow for an expansion of existing theories of queer world-making and a transhistorical generative relationship between publics/counterpublics. I contend that the concept of Bakhtinian dialogism, as well as some of Bakhtin's later writings on the relationship of historical texts to the present, helps us to broaden our understanding of queer transhistorical relations, particularly when thought together with Michael Warner and Lauren Berlant's conception of queer world-making. I demonstrate how Furja's performances make possible affective transfers between past subjects and contemporary audiences, of bringing "historical feelings" into the present in a transformative way, within a larger, more community-oriented project of queer-world making.

Hell Hath No Furja: Agnieszka Weseli as Activist-Historian

Agnieszka Weseli, born August 19, 1975, has become one of the most recognizable faces of the LGBTQ rights and feminist movement in Poland today. It seems that the only thing she hasn't done is run for political office; she has a dizzyingly diverse resume that includes performance art, sexual education, translation, archival research, conferences, publications in both the academic and popular press, graphic design and digital projects, co-founder and co-organizer of numerous festivals, queer and activist collectives, journals, and more.¹¹ And from whence this interest in all things queer? In an interview with Agnieszka Szyk for the Polish LGBTQ bimonthly *Replika*, she explains:

Once upon a time I was a young, responsible Polish wife, I did everything I was supposed to, and I was very unhappy with my life until I fell in love with a woman (yes, it happened because of a woman!). I've happily accepted the fact that for the last eight years my world has been turned upside down. I've used that to start doing many different things, things that before I thought were unattainable, impossible, and generally fell under the word "no."¹²

Indeed, Furja has accomplished much in the last decade or so; she's studied sexology and psychology through Adam Mickiewicz University and anthropology and psychology at the University of Warsaw. She has also worked with the Foundation to Promote Sexual Health (Fundacja Promocji Zdrowia Seksualnego) as a sex educator, and has given classes on polyamory or "relationship anarchy," the G-spot, and female ejaculation.

In addition to her academic training, she has long engaged in historical research. While her interests cover a broad range of topics, she is mostly concerned with women and sexuality in

¹¹ More information can be found on Furja's website, weseli.info.

¹² Agnieszka Weseli, "Rozbieram dom Pana," Interview by Agnieszka Szyk, *Replika*, no. 30 (2011): 4. Original: "Dawno, dawno temu byłam obowiązkową, młodą żoną-Polką, robiłam wszystko, co należy, i było mi źle w życiu, póki nie zakochałam się w kobiecie (tak, zdaje się, że to była kobieta!). Przed ośmioma laty z radością przyjąłam, że mój świat wywraca się do góry nogami. Korzystając z tego, zaczęłam... robić mnóstwo rzeczy, które wcześniej uważałam za nieosiągalne, niemożliwe i w ogóle "nie". [...] Z rozmysłem nie rozdzielałam życia osobistego, naukowego, zawodowego, aktywistycznego i artystycznego. Wszystkie te sfery łączy jedno: nie jestem związana z żadną formalną instytucją."

nineteenth and twentieth century East Central Europe. In 1999, she began research on the sexual practices of Varsovian students and the sexuality of children and youths at the turn of the twentieth century, as well as prostitution in interwar Warsaw. A few years later, in 2002, she began researching homosexuality and prostitution in the Nazi concentration camp at Auschwitz-Birkenau.¹³ Since then, she has undertaken a number of historical projects, most notably her investigation into the life and trials of Dr. Zofia Sadowska.

Weseli's wide range of interests and projects often bleed into one another. As she has repeatedly said, "I purposely don't separate my personal life from my professional, academic, activist and artistic life. One thing connects all these spheres: I'm not bound to any formal institution." In the *Replika* interview, Furja invokes black feminist Audre Lorde to explain her distaste for hierarchies and institutional top-down models of power ("The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house").¹⁴ Instead, she is attracted to communal projects and collective organization. For instance, she was one of the original co-founders of UFA (Unidentified Flying Abject, although the acronym, much like queerness itself, is open to interpretation), a non-hierarchical collective that provides a communal library, performance space, concerts, film screenings, dances, workshops, etc. for the local community.¹⁵ Weseli penned an article for the journal of queer studies *Interalia* in which she describes UFA in the negative, in other words, as that which it is not. The article is titled as "UFA is Tao," "because the tao that can be defined is not the real tao."¹⁶ UFA as a collective avoids structures and definition so as to maintain its radical efficacy, much the same way Judith Butler warns us that

¹³ For more on topic, see Agnieszka Weseli, "Puff w Auschwitz," *Polityka*, November 4, 2009, www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/historia/260561,1,puff-w-auschwitz.read

¹⁴ Weseli, "Rozbieram dom pana," 4.

¹⁵ For more information, see UFA's website: <http://www.u-f-a.pl/>

¹⁶ Agnieszka Weseli, "UFA is Tao," *Interalia: a journal of queer studies* 5 (2010). http://www.interalia.org.pl/pl/artykuly/2010_5/04_ufa_to_tao.htm

too narrow a definition of “queer” robs it of “its democratizing force.”¹⁷ Butler reminds us that if queer “is to be a site of collective contestation, the point of departure for a set of historical reflections and futural imagines, it will have to remain that which is, in the present, never fully owned, but always and only redeployed, twisted, queered from a prior usage and in the direction of urgent and expanding political purposes, and perhaps also yielded in favor of terms that do that political work more effectively.”¹⁸ For Furja and other queer and feminist activists in Warsaw, cultivating flexibility and fluidity within their activist work is crucial in addressing intersectional concerns not limited to LGBTQ identity politics, and also allows them to slip away from institutional regulations and the NGOization (or, as Furja defines it, “a process of specialization and professionalization of non-government organizations”) that has become a world-wide phenomenon.¹⁹ Keeping feminist and queer networks diffuse and permeable means more opportunities for cooperation with a greater range of people, and supports the integration of disparate realms of activism. One of the most common expressions of queer collaboration in Poland today are queer or feminist cultural festivals, which combine the academic with the artistic, the theoretical with the concrete, and the political with the personal.

Through UFA and Boyówki Feministyczne (another feminist/queer collective), Furja helped organize Dni Cipki (Pussy Days), an activist project/feminist cultural festival that focuses on body and sex positivity as well as sex education. The event was held annually from 2010-2012. Dni Cipki, named thus in order to cleanse the word *cipka* of stigma and allow its reclamation as an empowering term, included art exhibitions, artist-led workshops, screenings of feminist films, performances, and discussions touching on different aspects of female sexuality.

¹⁷ Judith Butler, “Critically Queer,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 1, no.1 (1993): 20.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁹ Weseli, “UFA is Tao.”

Beata Sosnowska, a graphic designer, artist, activist, and Furja’s occasional collaborator, ran one of the workshops. She described her interest in Dni Cipki and the impetus behind her involvement: “The “face” of pussies interests me. I’m going to lead workshops about pussy faces, drawing pussies. I believe every woman should draw a pussy, their own pussy, in order to better know it.”²⁰ The promotion of sex positivity and body acceptance, as well as sex education, through art is both fun and empowering, and utilizes a multivalent approach that characterizes much queer activism in Poland today.

Another such festival, but on a larger scale, is Pomada. Pomada, a festival of queer culture that incorporates local and international art exhibitions, scholars, music, films, parties, and more, was founded in 2010 by a group of queer artists and activists (among which number Karol

Radziszewski, Katarzyna Szustow, and Agnieszka Weseli) who wanted to “present [their] points of view – the perspective of nonheterosexual sensitivity.”²¹ It was largely through this festival, and through Furja, that I was introduced to the vibrant LGBTQ community in Poland.

When I first met Furja in 2011, I had just finished presenting at an international queer studies conference held in Warsaw. I was looking for a place to stay for the summer, as I wanted



3-12 CZERWCA 2011

GANC POMADA! - OFICJALNA IMPREZA POPOMADOWA
11.06.2011 / 1500m² / WSTĘP: 15 PLN

Figure 3.1. Pomada Festival 2 Program Cover, Illustration by Karol Radziszewski (Source: Pomada Festival 2 Program, 2011.)

²⁰ “Pierwsze Dni Cipki!” *Onet.pl*, <http://wideo.onet.pl/rozrywka-i-kultura-pierwsze-oficjalne-dni-cipki,10944,w.html>.

²¹ Karol Radziszewski, “Pomada (2010-ongoing),” <http://www.karolradziszewski.com/index.php?collaborations/pomada/>

to make the most out of my trip to Warsaw and was hoping to continue my research on Izabela Filipiak and Piotr Włast. A colleague I met during the conference, a Polish-Yiddish queer scholar and drag king, introduced me to Furja over post-conference drinks. Furja just happened to be going on a short trip; I could stay in her apartment while she was gone and take care of her cats. When she returned, she offered to rent me one of the two rooms in her cozy Mokotów apartment. Thus situated as Furja's (and the three cats') roommate, I was invited to the events of Pomada and introduced around.

The festival reflected an impressive dedication to intertwining different spheres of queer existence. It included everything from panels on queer Islam to lesbian sports, a sex party (in which there was, apparently, only one confirmed instance of actual sex—it was heterosexual, but as Furja told me later, “It still counts as a success!”), concerts by American and Polish musicians, dance parties, and feminist pornography. The following year, I was invited by Furja to participate in an “anti-conference” called “barcamp,” held through the festival. The topic at hand was the critical potential of histor(ies), but it included participants from all walks of life. The traditional academic hierarchy of expert vs. layperson was levelled by both the structure of the discussion and the structure of the space. Overall, the mix of grass-roots, DIY style and academic rigor was very much reflective of a philosophy of integrative activism.

While Furja admits her path to feminist and queer activism may be cliché (she fell in love with a woman, after all), her holistic approach to her life and work has led to some truly interesting and unique projects. She elaborates a bit more on her motivations and creative process, “I always feel like I’m on the border of something, shifting between worlds, communities, times. For me it a state of ultimate attentiveness and critical creativity.”²² That the

²² Weseli, “Rozbieram dom pana,” 4. Original: “Czuję się zawsze na jakiejś granicy, na przelomie światów, środowisk, czasów. To dla mnie stan największej uważności i krytycznej kreatywności.”

wellspring of her creativity is a kind of liminality that includes feeling between “times” is readily apparent in her performance art, as she often uses historical texts and people as source material.

One of Furja’s most widely recognized performances is a series of sketches she did as national poet and author Maria Konopnicka within the purview of the cabaret group Barbie Girls. In 2005, Małgorzata Rawińska and Ewa Tomaszewicz founded Barbie Girls as the first all-lesbian, about-lesbians cabaret group in Poland. Furja and Anna Świrek joined them soon afterward, and together they performed around Poland as a troupe. At first they appeared only on special occasions: queer festivals, pride events, etc. However, as a curiosity (an all-female AND lesbian cabaret group!), they attracted mainstream attention and consequently performed a few times for broader audiences.

The name “Barbie Girls,” of course, was meant to be kitschy; as Tomaszewicz related in an interview for *Wysokie obcasy*, “So it doesn’t fit us? That’s the point! We wanted it to be perverse.”²³ Their jokes are based on a type of comedy that is relatively common to cabaret; “Our sketches often are based on misunderstandings, delusions, poor judgement,” explains Furja. “They’re funny, but they also make you think.”²⁴ For example, one of their skits revolves around a misunderstanding between a priest and a penitent mountaineer. The mountaineer confesses to hoping her female partner wouldn’t “make it” (“życzyłam [...] żeby nie doszła”), presumably up the mountain. This also, however, could mean that she wished her partner wouldn’t reach orgasm. The priest, overly intrigued by what he interprets as a case of lesbianism, probes the mountaineer for details. Of course, everything that comes out of the mountaineer’s mouth can

²³Monika Goll, “Barbie Girls- pierwszy polski lesbijski kabaret,” *Wysokie obcasy*, October 27, 2009, http://www.wysokieobcasy.pl/wysokie-obcasy/1,96856,7175455,Barbie_Girls___pierwszy_polski_lesbijski_kabaret.html

²⁴ Ibid., Original: “nasze skecze często operują się na nieporozumieniach, złudzeniach, błędnych ocenach. Skłaniają do śmiechu, ale też do myślenia.”

both describe a mountain and a woman's body. Discussing the holes in the cliff-face, the mountaineer excitedly explains, "Najlepiej, jak można włożyć kilka palców!" ("It's best when you can stick a couple fingers in!"), the double entendre eliciting laughter from the crowd.²⁵ Barbie Girls often performed skits that poked fun at lesbian stereotypes as well as topics dear to the hearts of lesbians everywhere (Showtime's hit show *The L Word*, for instance) in order to encourage their audiences to have fun and laugh at themselves as a way to combat homophobia, especially because at that time the Polish LGBTQ community was becoming more visible and thus more vulnerable to political, and physical, attacks.

It was in 2008 at the Lesbijki, Geje i Przyjaciele (Lesbians, Gays, and Friends) festival in Wrocław that the character of Maria Konopnicka and the series „Ze sztambucha Maryji Konopnickiej” (“From the Album of Maryja Konopnicka”) first debuted. In an interview on *Strefa wolnych myśli (Independent-Thought Zone)*, an online talk-show that takes up “controversial” topics, Rawińska points to Furja as the historian of the group, identifying Furja's desire to “odbrązawiać przeszłość” or “debunk the past.” Furja, taking the microphone, explains that the cabaret is more than just cracking jokes and making fun of themselves: it's also “a very important social initiative.”²⁶ Furja, from her perspective as a historian of sexuality, believes the inclusion of Maria Konopnicka in their show has implications for the way Polish history is discussed. “There are many things that one simply does not talk about in the context of Polish history,” she explains, “one of those things is, for example, the personal, private, sexual lives of

²⁵ “Kabaret Barbie Girls: Spowiedź alpinistki,” Youtube.com video, posted by Rudedewredne, September 20, 2009. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A45k2ydpqBk>.

²⁶ “Lesbijski cabaret o występach,” Interview by Ola Mańkiewicz, *Strefa Wolnych Myśli*, June 19, 2011. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gDqYL0DC80k>. Original: “to jest bardzo ważna misja społeczna.” The talk show host also seemed much more interested in sensationalizing the cabaret troupe's sexuality than in their artistic work. For a reaction to and critique of the interview, see Ewa Tomaszewicz, “Strefa wolnych piersi!” *Trzydzięciowy garnitur* (blog), August 27, 2009, <http://trzydzięciowygarnitur.blogspot.com/2009/08/dzis-miaysmy-nagranie-do-programu.html>.

different important historical figures.” Bringing Konopnicka into their sketches was a way to directly address certain biographical dimensions that had been ignored for decades. She adds jokingly, “and as everyone knows, Maria Konopnicka was a lesbian.”²⁷ While this statement may seem like support for a blanket anachronistic reading of historical sexual subjectivities, the sketches themselves are not so much concerned with fitting Konopnicka with a reclaimable label, but rather with re-familiarizing the audience with a well-known national figure in a way that both acknowledges the invisibility of female same-sex desire in historical and contemporary discourse and critiques the heteronormative scaffolding of Poland’s national literary canon.

Maria Konopnicka, a poet, author, and columnist during the Positivist period in nineteenth century Poland, has been a subject of both fascination and derision for philologists of the twentieth and twenty-first century. Born in 1842, her literary career began when she published a poem in 1875, catching the attention of none other than Henryk Sienkiewicz (although this was before he had published his most famous works), and his effusive, if somewhat sloppy, review stuck with her for the rest of her life.²⁸ She continued to publish; in addition to poetry that bore the indelible print of Polish Romanticism, she also engaged social issues through her prose: poverty, workers and peasants’ rights, and Jews, among others. One of her most famous works, a poem entitled “Rota” or “The Oath,” was written in response to the suppression of Polish identity under Prussian rule. The pro-Polish, anti-German poem was later set to music by Feliks Nowowiejski, and has since become a national anthem and patriotic hymn

²⁷ Ibid., Original: “jest bardzo wiele takich rzeczy o których sie po prostu nie mowi jezeli chodzi o polska historie”; “jedną z takich rzeczy jest na przykład życie osobiste, życie prywatne, życie seksualne, rozmaitych ważnych postaci historycznych.”

²⁸ Lena Magnone, *Konopnicka: Lustra i symptomy*, (Gdańsk: słowo/obraz terytoria, 2011), 39-43. Magnone discusses the extent to which Sienkiewicz’s review of Konopnicka’s poem “W górach” (In the Mountains) impacted Konopnicka’s identity as a writer. Sienkiewicz cast her as the young *wieszczka* (female poet-prophet), a role Konopnicka strove to fulfill, even to her detriment.

(if not the official anthem of Poland, although it was under consideration for that role in 1927).²⁹ “Rota” has a long history of ideological appropriation; both the nationalist right and the socialist left have, at different points in the twentieth century, claimed it for their respective movements. Lena Magnone, commenting on the ideological exploitation that characterized Konopnicka’s twentieth century reception, writes, “No one has really read Konopnicka for the past hundred years—she’s been used. One can find in her work arguments in support of almost any convenient socio-political thesis, and that work—‘Rota,’ for example—could be utilized almost anywhere and for anything.”³⁰ Most recently, “Rota” has been appropriated for the ultra-nationalist movement in Poland. For instance, members of the All-Polish Youth (Młodzież Wszechpolska) often sing the song during their protest marches.

However, Konopnicka’s reception by the twentieth and twenty-first centuries has been mixed, to say the least; she’s both lauded as a model patriot in the fight for Polish independence, and dismissed for sentimental, bathetic, imitative poetry and overly didactic prose. Grażyna Borkowska points out that while “she was universally compared to the great Romantic poets, and it was predicted that she would attain the fame of the *wieszcz*” during her lifetime, “today she is considered a second-rate poet.”³¹ Krzysztof Tomasik, in his chapter on Konopnicka in *Homobiografie*, claims, “her works have become synonymous with nationalist drivel.”³² Her

²⁹ You can listen to the song with English subtitles here: “Rota (Polish anthem - English subtitles),” posted by svetlan, 14 January 2009. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-IRLzNsn_0g

³⁰ Magnone, *Konopnicka*, 115. Original: “Konopnickiej przez ostatnie sto lat praktycznie nie czytano—nią się posługiwano. W jej twórczości znajdowano argumenty na poparcie niemalże każdej wygodnej społeczno-politycznej tezy, ten sam utwór—na przykład *Rotę*—można było wykorzystać niemalże wszędzie i do wszystkiego.”

³¹ Grażyna Borkowska, “W kręgu poezji i noweli—Konopnicka i inne autorki,” in *Pisarki polskie od średniowiecza do współczesności: Przewodnik*. (Gdańsk: słowo/obraz terytoria, 2000), 80-81. Original: “Powszechnie porównywano Konopnicką do wielkich poetów romantycznych, wróżono jej sławę wieszczów.” And “Dziś uchodzi za poetkę drugorzędą.”

Wieszcz is a term that means roughly “poet-prophet” and is reserved for only the most preeminent national poets of the Romantic period. For example, Adam Mickiewicz, Juliusz Słowacki, and Zygmunt Krasiński are known as the *Trzech wieszczów*, or the Three Bards.

³² Krzysztof Tomasik, *Homobiografie*, 2nd ed. (Warsaw: Krytyka Polityczna, 2014) 25. Original: “Jej twórczość stała się wręcz synonimem narodowej garfomanii.”

biographers have utilized different approaches in order to complicate (or reinforce, as the case may be) her image as either patriotic national poet or as dreaded required school reading; in Marcin Romanowski's article "Biografia kobieca. Przypadek Marii Konopnickiej" ("Female biography: The case of Maria Konopnicka"), he compares three different biographical monographs, their publication dates spanning seventy years. He identifies "biographical idolatry" and "the construction of Maria Konopnicka as object of a patriotic cult" in one manuscript, whereas in another the author attempts to uncover the "truth" of Konopnicka, not as a national poet, but as an "ordinary person" based on documentary evidence of her life.³³ Konopnicka's personal life, whether told in mythologized anecdotes or extrapolated and reconstructed from letters and diaries, has become the subject of intense scrutiny, and its interpretation politicized for different ideological ends.

This brings us to Konopnicka's alleged lesbianism: historical fact or wishful thinking? Of course, it is problematic to use the label or identity of "lesbian" for the author, even if we could establish her same-sex desire as fact, as such a claim would be anachronistic and would surely distort or occlude Konopnicka's own understanding of her sexuality. In any case, while the truth of Konopnicka's sexual life remains unclear, there is evidence to suggest that, at the very least, the author had a long-standing romantic friendship with artist and suffragist Maria Dułębianka (who dressed in masculine attire and whom Konopnicka nicknamed Piotrek-with-the-shabby-elbows). Historians have interpreted their relationship in various ways, from the feminist-familial (a kind of alternative sisterhood) to the romantic-sexual, represented as definitively lesbian in

³³ Marcin Romanowski, "Biografia kobieca. Przypadek Marii Konopnickiej" in *Kobiety i historie: od niewidzialności do sprawczości* (Gdańsk: Uniwersytet Gdański, 2015), 233.

nature.³⁴ Yet there is cause beyond her sexuality for the LGBTQ movement to take her up as one of their icons; Krzysztof Tomasik explains:

We can recognize Konopnicka as an icon of the LGBTQ movement first and foremost because of her unusual, non-normative biography. The strong personality, independence, and courage of the poet/columnist attracts attention. The radical decision to leave her husband while having six kids to raise and her attempt to support herself independently in the capital, living with another woman... even today that must make an impression. That's why today she can become a point of reference for anyone looking for their own, different, unusual path.³⁵

Konopnicka thus also functions as an early feminist icon; after her initial literary success, she decided to leave an unhappy marriage and move to the capital with her children, where she supported her family through her writing. Her relationship with Dulębianka, whether it was sexual, romantic, or completely platonic, allowed her certain freedoms that her marriage had stifled. Konopnicka was able to travel, write, engage in political activity, and enjoy an equal partnership with Dulębianka.

Even though there is little definitive evidence regarding Konopnicka's sex life, the ambiguity surrounding it has nevertheless been seized upon by contemporary historians and activists who have turned Konopnicka into an important historical symbol for the LGBTQ community, especially because she occupied such a prominent place in Polish patriotic discourse. As a figure for non-heteronormativity and as an exemplary Pole, she is attractive to LGBTQ rights groups who seek visibility and social and legal recognition. According to Krytyka Polityczna's guide to the tri-city area of Gdansk, Gdynia, and Sopot, the statue of Maria

³⁴ Ibid., 246.

³⁵ Michał Fal, "Narodowcu, co Ty wiesz o Marii Konopnickiej? Autorka "Roty" ikoną ruchu LGBT," *Natemat*, November 13, 2012. <http://natemat.pl/39073,narodowcu-co-ty-wiesz-o-marii-konopnickiej-autorka-rot-y-ikona-ruchu-lgbt>. Original: "Konopnicką można uznawać za ikonę ruchu LGBT przede wszystkim ze względu na jej nietypową, nienormatywną biografię. Uwagę przyciąga silna osobowość poetki i publicystki, jej samodzielność i odwaga. Tak radykalna decyzja, jak odejście od męża z szóstką dzieci i próba samodzielnego utrzymania się w stolicy, związanie się z kobietą, nawet dziś musi robić wrażenie. Dlatego w dzisiejszych czasach jej postać może stanowić punkt odniesienia dla wszystkich tych, którzy szukają dla siebie swojej własnej, innej, nietypowej drogi."



Figure 3.2. Poster of Maria Konopnicka, Europride Warsaw 2010. (Source: Photograph by Piotr Tukałto, in "Mało golizny (niestety), dużo słońca (za dużo), świetna atmosfera," *Homikoteka* (blog post), July 19 2010, <http://homiki.pl/index.php/2010/07/mao-golizny-niestety-duo-soca-za-duo-wietna-atmosfera/>)

Konopnicka is not only a popular spot for hetero- and homosexual dates, but also a site of public activism. The LGBTQ organization Campaign against Homophobia, or KPH (*Kampania Przeciw Homofobii*), planted a floral rainbow made of pansies for their project "Tolerance Blooms in Gdansk."³⁶ There was also a push to name proposed legislation concerning domestic

partnerships after Konopnicka and Dulębianka (as of the writing of this dissertation, any kind of same-sex relationship remains unrecognized by the state).³⁷ In addition, she's become the subject of numerous essays and entries featured on lesbian websites like *kobiety-kobietom.com* and *queer.pl*, and even made it onto a placard during the Warsaw Europride Parade in 2010 (see Figure 3.3).

Rumors surrounding Konopnicka's sexuality do not seem to sit well with contemporary nationalists. The importance of Konopnicka's patriotic persona to Polish nationalism, as well as nationalists' inability to reconcile homosexuality with national belonging, was demonstrated

³⁶ Agnieszka Szyk, Anna Urbańczuk, "Tęczowa Solidarność" in *Trójmiasto: Przewodnik Krytyki Politycznej* (Warsaw-Gdańsk: Krytyka Polityczna, 2010), 220-221.

³⁷ Grzegorz Gauden, "Preambula ustawy o związkach partnerskich," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, October 12, 2012. http://wyborcza.pl/1,75968,12655295,Preambula_ustawy_o_zwiazkach_partnerskich.html

when her status as an LGBTQ icon became more widely known; around November 11, 2012, the head of the Feminoteka Foundation, Joanna Piotrowska, posted an internet meme with the text “Nationalist! Do you know that when you’re singing ‘Rota’ you’re propagating the work of Maria Konopnicka, who lived for years in a relationship with Maria Dulębianka and is an icon of the Polish LGBTQ movement?”³⁸ The meme circulated rapidly, and the response to it was predictably defensive, even threatening. Artur Zawisza, a far right-wing politician, told the news program *Panorama* that “the theory of Maria



Figure 3.3: "Narodowcu! Co wiesz o Konopnickiej" meme. (Source: Accessed 6/11/16, imgur.com/Ct4zy)

Konopnicka’s alleged lesbianism is a propagandistic feminist lie. Lies about Konopnicka should be punished in the same way lies about Auschwitz are punished.”³⁹ He later walked back his statement as “ironic,” but the media coverage of both the meme and Zawisza’s response had incited a polarizing conversation on the topic of Konopnicka’s sexuality and whether same-sex desire was compatible with her status as canonical poet.

Furja’s performances as Konopnicka preceded the meme and Zawisza’s response, although they were probably a factor in the popularization of the idea (amongst the LGBTQ

³⁸ “Zawisza: teza o rzekomym lesbizmie to plotki feministek,” *WP: wiadomości*, November 15, 2012. http://wiadomosci.wp.pl/kat,1374,title,Zawisza-teza-o-rzekomym-lesbizmie-to-plotki-feministek,wid,15095066,wiadomosc.html?ticaid=117451&_ticrsn=3

³⁹“Zawisza: “Kłamstwo konopnickie jak kłamstwo oświęcimskie,”” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, November 15, 2012. http://wyborcza.pl/1,76842,12861328,Zawisza_Klamstwo_konopnickie_jak_klamstwo_oswiecimskie_.html
Original: “Teza o rzekomym lesbizmie Marii Konopnickiej to kłamstwo propagandy feministycznej. Kłamstwo konopnickie mogłoby być tak samo karalne jak kłamstwo oświęcimskie”

community, at least) that Konopnicka was a lesbian. Furja wrote several well-received sketches featuring a patriotically amorous/amorously patriotic Maria Konopnicka, which she performed with Barbie Girls. The skits begin in 1862 with a young Konopnicka experiencing her first same-sex attraction, and end with Konopnicka meeting Maria Dulębianka in 1889. The series of five monologues include a fictionalized cast of actual historical figures, only some of whom appeared in the actual Konopnicka's personal milieu. These figures are mostly referred to by their first names, or diminutives, and occasionally a last initial if the reference is more obscure. Furja deftly weaves fact into her fictionalized account of Konopnicka's life, including snippets of letters or poems (or re-workings of those texts) in addition to fantasizing about and eroticizing Konopnicka's personal relationships with other female writers of that period.

The first skit introduces the album as the recipient and repository of Konopnicka's most intimate thoughts and desires. Furja takes the stage, dressed in a chaste black outfit complete with black wig, and reads from a pink "album" as if she were recording an entry. The album functions as a device that facilitates Konopnicka's interior monologue and acts as an audience



Figure 3.4. Furja performs "From the Album of Maryja Konopnicka, Part 1" (Still from a recording of the performance. August 20, 2009. Usta Mariana Club. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SA4wV_H9Zec)

surrogate; we essentially have direct access to an expression of sexuality that historical evidence denies us. The nineteenth century album was also an important symbol of social and national belonging. Albums typically resembled scrapbooks: they included

letters, songs, inscriptions, and other private or social writings. Justyna Beinek explains that the album “functioned as a carrier of individual and national memory, ensuring symbolic permanence against mortality through physical preservation of human traces.”⁴⁰ While the album in Furja’s sketches functions more as an individual diary than a collection of various artifacts from Konopnicka’s social milieu, the entries reflect a very strong identification with Polish nationality that is inextricably intertwined with Konopnicka’s desire for women.

The first entry, dated April 1, 1862, details an encounter between young Konopnicka and a teacher at an all-girls boarding school. Of course, the trope of the all-girls’ school romance is a common in twentieth-century lesbian narratives. The advent of sexology at the turn of the century led to the identification of same-sex boarding schools as particularly dangerous to heterosexual development. For example, the 1931 lesbian cult film *Mädchen in Uniform* portrays a student’s “unhealthy” attachment to her teacher, which leads to a suicide attempt.⁴¹ However, for most of the nineteenth century, romances (ostensibly chaste) between girls was considered a normal part of development; indeed, it could be considered a space where adult heterosexual relations were “practiced.” Furja, as Konopnicka, excitedly and breathlessly relates how a teacher came to her room to gift her the album in which she records her amorous adventures. The teacher’s name is Narcyza, a probable reference to nineteenth century author and feminist Narcyza Żmichowska. In reality, Żmichowska and Konopnicka didn’t know each other personally, but Żmichowska’s pioneering work on feminist issues and her promotion of *posiestrzenie*, or close sisterly ties between women (which characterizes a number of high-profile nineteenth century pairings that are now referred to by many scholars as “romantic

⁴⁰ Justyna Beinek, “Forget-Me-Not: National Identity in Nineteenth-Century Polish Albums,” *Sarmatian Review* 3, (2004): 1064.

⁴¹ *Mädchen in Uniform*, directed by Carl Froelich (1931; Germany: Germanwarfilms.com, 2000), DVD.

friendships” or interpreted as lesbian relationships) undoubtedly had a great effect on Konopnicka.⁴² Narcyza was also of the previous generation, having been born in 1819. That the sketch envisions a teacher named Narcyza spending the night with a young Konopnicka is no accident, but rather a reimagining and eroticization of the method of transmitting the feminist knowledge that Żmichowska imparted to her contemporaries and the following generation. Young Konopnicka is struck by Narcyza’s beauty and poise, and in an almost spiritual ecstasy falls to her knees. Furja pauses her monologue, her hand rising to her mouth in an overwhelmed gesture, and turns her back to the audience, breathing heavily. After the laughter from the audience subsides, she turns around, and rapidly recites in her best schoolgirl impression, “Wanting to please her with my diligence, I eagerly put forth my best effort. And I had always been a clever student, for me the subject held no secrets, soon I had completely satisfied her,” ending with a swift curtsey.⁴³ The sexual act isn’t described directly, but rather is alluded to through breathless/breathy pauses and double entendre, drawing on the erotics of the power dynamics in the (single-sex) classroom. When Narcyza leaves Konopnicka’s bed in the morning, her parting words are those of both lover and patriotic educator: “Don’t forget... about me. Or the homeland.”⁴⁴ The imperative to remember the sexual initiation/instruction is paired with the obligation to honor the memory of Poland, which didn’t exist as a geo-political state in the nineteenth century. Much like Polish language and national identity survived the Partitions through generational transmission in the familial, and sometimes educational, sphere, the knowledge and practices of lesbian sex is secretly passed from one generation to the next. The

⁴² Magnone, *Konopnicka*, 361-363.

⁴³ Agnieszka Weseli, “Ze sztambucha Maryji Konopnickiej I,” Youtube.com video, posted by Rudedewredne, September 20, 2009. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SA4wV_H9Zec Original: “Pragnąc ucieszyć ją swoją pilnością, dołożyłam gorliwych starań. A że uczennicą zawsze byłam pojętną i przedmiot ów nie ma dla mnie tajemnic, wkrótce zadowoliłam ją całkowicie”

⁴⁴ Ibid. Original: “Nie zapomnij... o mnie. I o ojczyźnie.”

lesbian sex act and its place in the economy of knowledge is equated and blurred with patriotic duty and nationalist-martyrological constructions.

Parts II and III reference Konopnicka's marriage and its disintegration, as well as introduce the audience to a new figure in Konopnicka's life: Henia (a diminutive of Henryka). Konopnicka expressly does not give Henia's full last name, although she does give us an initial: "S." It doesn't take much effort to deduce that "Henryka S." is most likely a fictionalized, and feminized, version of Henryk Sienkiewicz. Konopnicka's admiration for Sienkiewicz, whose review so deeply and, as Magnone suggests, problematically impacted her, is reworked into an erotic relation with Henia, a passionate (but fickle, it turns out) social butterfly. Part IV begins with an entry dated August 19, 1889, a retelling of a social encounter wherein Konopnicka enters a salon to see Henia surrounded by admiring men. Konopnicka, taken with the sight of her "little houri" (a possible nod towards Sienkiewicz's, and his contemporaries', Orientalist tendencies), describes Henia's smile in rapturous detail, painting an almost angelic portrait of her latest lover. Henia notices Konopnicka watching her and makes the "secret sign" with her fan.⁴⁵ Henia's furtive gesture of passion, which goes unnoticed by her surrounding admirers, further ignites Konopnicka's amorous fervor. The invisibility of lesbian desire once again works in Konopnicka's favor; the social milieu through which the women maneuver is blind to their liaison, mitigating any social or professional consequences. This theme of lesbian invisibility, and how the illegibility of same-sex desire works to Konopnicka's advantage, is explored throughout all the sketches. Konopnicka's father, for instance, views heterosexual extramarital sex as a sin, but believes that women are protected from such passions when amongst one

⁴⁵ Agnieszka Weseli, "Ze sztambucha Maryji Konopnickiej IV," Youtube.com video, posted by Rudedewredne, September 20, 2009. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fk6ChP5LLww> Original: "nasz tajemny znak"

another. Young Konopnicka turns to Holy Scripture for an answer on whether her desires are sinful, but only finds an interdiction against coveting another man's wife. From this, she concludes maidens and widows are fair game, and that she may pursue them without spiritual consequence.

Part IV continues with a transition into the next entry, which takes place the following morning, August 20, 1889. Hand on heart, she exclaims "Oh...what a night! The last time I was this exhausted was when we defended Warsaw from the Moskals!" to the raucous laughter of the crowd.⁴⁶ The jokes function as a reference to the January Uprising of 1963, though the historical Konopnicka never fought the Russians, nor was she in Warsaw in 1863, as she had only recently been married to Jarosław Konopnicki. Furja, however, in an exaggeration of Konopnicka's own carefully crafted image of national poet and promotor of Polish martyrdom, implies she was at the heart of the action. The joke's humor once again relies on the equation of (apparently intense) lesbian sex and Polish patriotic duty.

The night's passion inspired her to write a love poem for Henia. She hasn't decided on a title yet, vacillating between "G-rota czy W-rota, jakoś tak" ("The Cave" or "The Gate," something like that). She then recites the poem with great feeling, much to the delight of the audience:

⁴⁶ Ibid. Original: "O! Co za noc! Ostatni raz tak wyczerpana byłam kiedyśmy Warszawę przed Moskalami bronili."

I won't abandon Henia! After all,
tis a provocative and wild miracle
which on honey feasts nightly in the cave
the sisterly flower of Sappho
We won't let it be trampled by an
enemy of the ways of feminine tenderness!

Let us guard the gates of love!
Let us guard the gates of love!

To the last drop of blood in our wombs
We'll defend the alcove
Where awaits her cavern
as the throne of love, a fairy-tale treasure
The threshold of our bed will be a fortress
There I will fall at your feet

To guard the gates of love!
To guard the gates of love!

The father won't spit in our face
Nor will we be hoodwinked by a husband
Our armed host will leave your cave, dear lady!
We will go when the singing of Venus resounds
And the call will lead her songs

To the gates of love
To the gates of love

Nie rzucę Heni! Wszak to cud,
drażniący i szalony,
co w grocie nocy toczy miód
siostrzany kwiat Safony
Nie damy, by go zdeptał wróg
czułości żeńskiej dróg

Miłości strzeżmy wrót
Miłości strzeżmy wrót

Do krwi ostatniej kropli z łon
Bronimy tej alkowy
gdzie czeka jak miłości tron
jej grota, skarb bajkowy
Twierdzą łożnicy będzie próg
Tam padnę Ci do stóp

By strzec miłości wrót
By strzec miłości wrót

Nie będzie ojciec pluł nam w twarz
I mężem nas nie zmami.
Orężny wyjdzie hufiec nasz z twej groty, jasna pani!
Pójdziem, gdy zabrzmie Wenus śpiew
I pieśni jej powiedzie zew

Aż do miłości wrót
Aż do miłości wrót⁴⁷

The text is immediately recognizable to the audience, and most likely to anyone educated in Poland; it is a rewriting of Konopnicka's national hymn "Rota" as a Sapphic love poem. This means that "Rota's" origin story is also rewritten; one of Poland's most recognizable patriotic poems and songs is no longer inspired by the (sometimes violent) repression of Polish language and culture in German schools, but rather by a romantic night spent with Henia. Again Furja plays fast and loose with the historical timeline; the album entry is dated 1889, but the historical Konopnicka didn't write "Rota" until the end of 1907, and published it in 1908. The humor here, as in most of these sketches, lies within the poem's violation of Polish nationalist sentiment; as a parody, it uses the conventions of nationalist expression and Polish nationalist investment in

⁴⁷ Ibid.

“Rota” as a bearer of patriotic feeling in order to render it ridiculous. As one of the audience members reported, “After that skit I will never be able to seriously listen to ‘Rota’ again.”⁴⁸

The stanzas of “Rota” that Furja draws from are as follows (Furja doesn’t parody the third verse):

We won't abandon the land whence our kin.
We won't let our native tongue be buried,
Polish people we are, Polish folk,
We are of the Royal Piast clan.
We won't let the enemy Germanize us!
So help us God!
So help us God!

Nie rzucim ziemi skąd nasz ród,
Nie damy pogrześć mowy,
Polski my naród, polski lud,
Królewski szczep piastowy.
Nie damy by nas zniemczył wróg!
Tak nam dopomóż Bóg!
Tak nam dopomóż Bóg!

To the last drop of blood in our veins
We'll defend our spirit,
Till dissipates into powder and dust
The Teutonic gale.
Every threshold will be a stronghold for us.
So help us God!
So help us God!

Do krwi ostatniej kropli z żył
Bronić będziemy ducha,
Aż się rozpadnie w proch i w pył
Krzyżacka zawierucha.
Twierdzą nam będzie każdy próg.
Tak nam dopomóż Bóg!
Tak nam dopomóż Bóg!

[...]

[...]

The German won't spit in our face,
Nor Germanize [sic] our kids!
Our phalanx armed will arise,
The spirit will command us.
We'll go when the golden horn calls.
So help us God!
So help us God!

Nie będzie Niemiec pluł nam w twarz,
Ni dzieci nam germanił!
Orężny wstanie hufiec nasz,
Duch będzie nam hetmanił.
Pójdziem, gdy zabrzmi złoty róg.
Tak nam dopomóż Bóg!
Tak nam dopomóż Bóg!⁴⁹

The very first line of Furja’s version begins with “I won’t abandon Henia!” which clearly echoes the original, more patriotic “We won’t abandon the land whence our kin.” In Furja’s version, Henia stands in for Poland, and is equally worth defending. The beginning of each stanza draws enough material from the original to mark it as parody. Furja’s first stanza even attempts to match the rhyme scheme of the original poem’s A/B/A/B/a/a/a with the parody’s A/B/A/B/a/a/a.

⁴⁸ Goll, “Barbie Girls- pierwszy polski lesbijski kabaret”

⁴⁹ Maria Konopnicka, “Rota: The Oath,” trans. Peter K. Gessner, *InfoPoland at the University of Buffalo*, http://info-poland.buffalo.edu/web/arts_culture/music/hymns/rota/Oath.html

There is also phonetic similarities in the rhymes across the two versions; *ród* and *lud* from the original rhyme with *cud* and *miód* of the parody, and *mowy/piastowy* are half-rhymes with *szalony/Safony*. While the rest of the stanzas more or less echo the rhyme scheme of the original, most similarities in phrasing are found in the first line of each stanza. The second stanza, beginning with “To the last drop of blood in our wombs/we’ll defend the alcove” feminizes, corporealizes, and sexualizes the original line, “To the last drop of blood in our veins/we’ll defend our spirit.” The parody, a thinly-veiled homage to Henia’s vagina (represented by the metaphors cave, alcove, and gates of love) uses the language of Polish defiance and sacrifice (defend, last drop of blood) to describe an intense attachment to the female body. The Polish nation and the female body are linked through the parody, a common enough trope, but here, instead of defending the nation/female body against the invading ethnic Other (the Germans, in the case of Konopnicka’s “Rota”), they are defending the lesbian body from patriarchal male authority. Instead of “The German won’t spit in our face/Nor Germanize our kids!”, Furja recites ferociously, “The father won’t spit in our faces/we will not be hoodwinked by a husband.” The original poem, narrating the ideal of an ethnically and religiously homogenous nation and its people’s promise to liberate that nation at all costs, is transformed into a feminist anthem, where love is the highest value and the right to same-sex desire is defended. As Furja explains after her recitation: “I feel that my poem will become famous throughout the country! It will become a hymn that tens of future generations will sing, feeding hope of liberation from the yoke of custom and tradition. And all thanks to Henia, through Henia, for Henia!”⁵⁰ However, that utopia inspired by the goddess-like Henia doesn’t last long; when Henia leaves Konopnicka for “Eliza”

⁵⁰ Weseli, “Ze sztambucha Maryji Konopnickiej IV.” Original: “Czuję, że wiersz mój zasłynie w całym kraju! Stanie się hymnem, który dziesiątki przyszłych pokoleń będą śpiewać, karmiąc nadzieję wyzwolenia z jarzm zwyczaju i tradycji. A to wszystko dzięki Heni, przez Henię, dla Heni!”

(a reference to famous nineteenth century Positivist author Eliza Orzeszkowa) and remains “by the Niemen river” (“nad Niemnem,” or *Nad Niemnem*, the title of Orzeszkowa’s famous novel), Konopnicka tweaks the poem into its original form, a patriotic hymn, out of spite.

Furja’s “From the Album of Maria Konopnicka” sketches are present-day fantasies of lesbian possibility in nineteenth century partitioned Poland; they draw heavily upon historical fact, but are not necessarily faithful to it. They make explicit the (somewhat anachronistic) conjectures that historians of homosexuality like Krzysztof Tomasik have made about Konopnicka’s sexuality, and provide fictionalized evidence to underscore Konopnicka’s relationship with Maria Dulębianka as lesbian. Tomasik, who saw the sketches, commented, “The performance destroyed our conception of Konopnicka, it showed that a female writer recognized as a national *wieszczka* could have relations with women, and it emphasizes the fact that people like gays or lesbians were everywhere.”⁵¹ This kind of anachronistic reading of Konopnicka as a *lesbian*, especially as the term is strongly connected with identity politics, is often deployed, as in Tomasik’s case, to achieve the “outing” of historical figures as symbolic allies to the contemporary cause. However, while Furja’s sketches certainly enact a process of reclamation that serves contemporary identity politics, they also question the patriarchal and heteronormative basis of national belonging and present an alternative vision of Polish patriotism. Furja’s Konopnicka, constrained by certain duties to the national cause (bearing children, for instance), is able to re-envision those duties, or at least place them on equal footing, with the sexual pleasure afforded her by the female body.

⁵¹ Goll, “Barbie Girls- pierwszy polski lesbijski kabaret.” Original: “Ten występ zburzył nasze wyobrażenie o Konopnickiej, pokazywał, że pisarka uznawana za narodową wieszczkę miała relacje z kobietami, i podkreślał, że takie osoby jak geje czy lesbijki były wszędzie.”

The Case of Sadowska and Transhistorical Publics

“Seriousness burdens us with hopeless situations, but laughter lifts us above them and delivers us from them”- M.M. Bakhtin

The members of Barbie Girls amicably parted ways in 2010, but Furja was not yet finished with cabaret. Her reinterpretation of Konopnicka’s biography had been largely based on historical work others had undertaken, and was an attempt to undermine the ties that bound Konopnicka as a figure of national importance to heteronormative constructions (reproduction and fertility in terms of both biology and transmission of national identity, and the masculine defense of a feminized nation) that subtend Polish nationalism, yet it was engaging a pre-existing narrative that had been shaped and re-shaped by the political upheavals of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Furja’s historical work on the interwar figure of Zofia Sadowska, however, enabled her to shape a new narrative, that of the largely forgotten persecuted doctor, bringing her straight into the twenty-first century and the burgeoning LGBTQ rights movement. Furja’s familiarity with the archival traces of Sadowska, her status as one of the few authorities on Sadowska’s biography, and her affective attachments to the subject of her research manifested a kind of historical activism that included skits featuring Furja’s now-signature embodiment of lesbians of the past.

Imagine yourself in Warsaw, the year 2012. Outside and aboveground, it is a chilly night in early March, but below in the basement of the club Eufemia, warm bodies crowd into tiny brick-walled rooms. As people mingle, laughing, a figure steps onto a rickety stage, adjusts wire-frame spectacles, and peers out into the dim and din. Dressed in a dapper black suit and tie, Furja grabs the microphone authoritatively and begins in an ominous tone, “May the hand of God

protect you all! For I am... WSadowska.”⁵² And so commences the raunchy, 1920s-themed cabaret which Furja, together with Warsaw-based queer-feminist collective UFA, organized to mark Zofia Sadowska’s 125th birthday.

The “discovery” of Zofia Sadowska and her subsequent popularization as a Polish lesbian and feminist forebear were almost entirely based on second-hand information, rumor, and faded memories. LGBTQ historians like Krzysztof Tomasik were initially intrigued by early twentieth century feminist Irena Krzywicka’s mention of Sadowska in her memoirs *Wyznania gorszycielki* (*Confessions of a Dissolute Woman*). Krzywicka recalls a scandal involving a gynecologist accused of seducing young girls and inciting them to lesbianism.⁵³ Krzywicka’s recollection of the case inspired several investigations into Sadowska, but information was difficult to come by. In my interview with Furja, she related how difficult it was to find court documents, given that World War II had destroyed many files from the district court. All that were left were fragments: a document from the Chamber of Physicians, records of her education in Saint Petersburg, a few feminist articles penned by Sadowska herself, brief mentions in the letters of famous authors like Jarosław and Anna Iwaszkiewicz and Maria Dąbrowska, and tabloid coverage of her trial. From these fragments, Furja and others were nevertheless able to piece together Sadowska’s life, and what emerged from their painstaking work was a fascinating story in which “many different threads from Polish history meet.”⁵⁴

⁵² A sexually suggestive pun on *Sadowska*; from the Polish *wsadzić*, which can mean “to put (in).” Original: “Niech Was broni ręka boska! Jam... WSadowska.”

⁵³ Tomasik, *Homobiografie*, 127-128. Krzywicka’s description of the case contains several statements that were later determined to be erroneous, e.g that Sadowska was a gynecologist. According to other documents, Sadowska was an internist. The very nature of Krzywicka’s error points to the ways Sadowska was rewritten in the public imagination; a gynecologist, having direct access to the female genitalia of girls and women, somehow is more sinister than a doctor who treats a wide range of patients and illnesses.

⁵⁴ Weseli, Interview by Jodi Greig. Original: “to temat, w którym się spotyka mnóstwo różnych wątków z historii Polski właśnie.”

The story unfolds as follows: Zofia Sadowska, born February 28, 1887 in Warsaw, was by all accounts an ambitious and talented physician. She studied medicine at the Medical



Figure 3.5. Dr. Zofia Sadowska, image from the Główna Biblioteka Lekarska (Source: Magdalena Dubrowska, "Przedwojenna skandalistka świeczka dla wymazanej z pamięci," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, November 6, 2011. http://warszawa.wyborcza.pl/warszawa/1,34889,10592801,Przedwojen_na_skandalistka__swieczka_dla_wymazanej)

Institute for Women in Saint Petersburg from 1904-1911, and was the first Polish woman to defend a doctorate at the Academy of Military Medicine in that city. There is documentation indicating that she practiced medicine in Russia for a time, and during World War I worked in the Russian Red Cross. While studying in Russia, she also became very involved in political activity concerning women's rights; she belonged to a number of feminist organizations and published articles in the feminist publication "Ster"

("Helm").⁵⁵ Shortly after the October Revolution, she returned to Warsaw in 1918 to work in the University of Warsaw's Department of Medicine and set up her own private practice.

Krzywicka's description of the Sadowska trial implies that it was Sadowska who stood accused in court; however, it was Sadowska who initiated the proceedings. On November 16,

⁵⁵ According to Furja, only two of Sadowska's articles have been found. For more on the history of "Ster," see Daria Anna Domarańczyk, "'Ster' – pierwsze w Polsce radykalne czasopismo feministyczne przełomu XIX i XX wieku," *Acta Universitatis Lodzianis Folia Litteraria Polonica*, 1 (23). 2014. 187-208.



Figure 3.6. Part of a cartoon depicting a masculine Sadowska dragging Plewiński to court on a leash. (Source: in Wojciech Szot, *Obrazek Inwersji* (Warsaw: Stowarzyszenie Otwarty Forum, 2012), Online publication. <https://issuu.com/innahistoria/docs/obrazkiinwersji>)

1923, the tabloid *Express Poranny* (*Morning Express*) published an article claiming that at 7 Mazowiecka Street a certain “Dr. S” hosted drug-fueled sado-masochistic lesbian orgies in her office. According to the article, her “clientele” consisted of several well-known figures from Warsaw’s high society and artistic circles. Dr. S also allegedly seduced young girls into lesbian relations with the help of narcotics, tricked women into abandoning their duties in the home, and even inspired suicides. The scandalous article was based on the claims of two men who were determined to ruin Dr. Sadowska’s career. Furja explains, “One of them claimed that she had seduced his sister and niece, and the second accused her of stealing his wife. They hired a detective who spread denunciations [of Sadowska] to the Chamber of Physicians, the university, and to the tabloids. There were accusations of seducing underage girls, distribution of narcotics,

and of running a lesbian brothel.”⁵⁶ Soon after the article in *Express Poranny* was published, other newspapers propagated stories of the “staro-grecki skandal” (Greek scandal). Of course, as the address of Sadowska’s practice was explicitly given, and as Sadowska was a relatively well-known doctor in Warsaw at the time, it was easy to deduce that “Dr. S” was indeed Dr. Zofia Sadowska.

Sadowska, understandably upset by these allegations and the effect they would have on her practice, took Jerzy Plewiński, editor of *Express Poranny*, to court for libel (she also challenged the detective Antoni Wotowski in a separate lawsuit for his role in disseminating denunciations). The trial was a media sensation, although the wild stories and speculation surrounding Sadowska’s sexuality meant that the fact Sadowska was actually the plaintiff was often obscured.⁵⁷ The lawsuit began February 11, 1924 and lasted until February 16. The press seemed particularly fascinated by Sadowska’s masculine attire and bearing; for instance, in one magazine, she was described as, “medium height, with a pince-nez and a briefcase, her movements resolute and energetic. She sat before the plaintiff’s table, legs crossed, hands in her pickets, head held high... like a man. All the women in the room were staring at her, staring... what they thought, God only knows.”⁵⁸ Sadowska was continually mocked in cartoons

⁵⁶ Magdalena Dubrowska, “Przedwojenna skandalistka świeczka dla wymazanej z pamięci,” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, November 6, 2011. http://warszawa.wyborcza.pl/warszawa/1,34889,10592801,Przedwojenna_skandalistka_swieczka_dla_wymazanej.html Original: “Jeden twierdził, że uwiodła mu siostrę i siostrzenicę, drugi – że odbiła mu żonę. Wynajęli detektywa, który roznosił donosy – do Izby Lekarskiej, na uniwersytet, do prasy bulwarowej. Były tam oskarżenia o uwodzenie nieletnich, podawanie narkotyków, prowadzenie lesbijskiego domu schadzek.”

⁵⁷ Tomasiak, *Homobiografie*, 132.

⁵⁸ Wojciech Szot, “Zofia Sadowska w relacjach prasy brukowej (2)” *Homiki.pl*, November 10, 2011. <http://homiki.pl/index.php/2011/11/zofia-sadowska-w-relacjach-prasy-brukowej-2/> Original: “Średniego wzrostu, w binoklach, z teką, ruchy energiczne, stanowcze. Usiadła przy stoliku oskarżyciela prywatnego, założyła nogę na nogę, ręce do kieszeni, głowę podniosła do góry... Jak mężczyzna. Wszystkie panie, obecne na sali, patrzą tak nań, patrzą... Co sobie myślą – Bóg jeden wie.”

and cabaret texts, as well as described as “an enemy of morality.”⁵⁹ She became a trope; the name “Sadowska” quickly became code for non-heteronormative women.⁶⁰

Sadowska won the first case against Plewiński, and the editor was sentenced to a week in jail and ordered to pay the court costs. However, he appealed the ruling and won. She lost her second case against the detective. Sadowska’s reputation, deeply damaged by the scandal, never fully recovered. In 1925 she appeared before the Chamber of Physicians. The medical board deprived her of her license to practice medicine for one year, because, according to their logic, a woman who desired other women was too ill to treat patients effectively. However, she continued to participate in public life (she was an avid automobilist, for example, and took part in the 1927 II Rajd Pań [2nd Women’s Rally]... she came in 4th place). She eventually began a new practice in a different location in Warsaw. She died in 1960 in Warsaw at the age of 73.

Furja gave me a few reasons for her interest in Sadowska. The first was that she was intrigued as a historian of sexuality, given that Sadowska’s trial seemed to mark an important moment in lesbian visibility in interwar Poland. The fact that there was so little information at the time about Sadowska’s life (and that some of it was erroneous) was a challenge worth taking up. She also wanted to return Sadowska to (public) memory; not as an icon of the LGBTQ community, Furja pointedly explained, as Sadowska herself wasn’t motivated by a political lesbian identity, but rather because her life intersected and illustrated significant narratives from different discursive spheres, especially concerning sexuality and the history of Polish feminism. Sadowska’s activism in the emancipation movement certainly could be connected to her successes in medicine and science, for instance. These things also affected the way the press

⁵⁹ Dubrowska, “Przedwojenna skandalistka”

⁶⁰ Tomasiak, *Homobiografie*, 130.

discussed her; as a lesbian and a feminist, she was cast as an “wróg społeczeństwa i narodu” (enemy of society and the nation) and that the timing of the trial—shortly after Poland had achieved independence after 123 years of occupation—also impacted how lesbianism was conceptualized as a moral and national threat. Sadowska had long been involved in feminist activism and she didn’t go out of her way to hide her same-sex desire before the war, Furja pointed out, yet she had never attracted the level of scrutiny or vitriol that was later to tarnish her reputation.⁶¹

While Furja emphasized her attraction to Sadowska from a historical perspective, she also distanced herself from what she described as a strong emphasis in Polish historiography on objectivity. Her research was “personally very significant” (osobiście istotna) for her and that she felt a special connection to the figure of Sadowska that was hard to express. She emphasized that while she knows that there is no way to fully understand the past, it is important to try and find points of identification with it. Yet, identification is never mimetic, but rather processes of misrecognition, appropriation, and disidentification.⁶² The lack of Sadowska’s own voice in the documents and interviews that evidence her life both frustrates and intrigues the historian; the attempt to uncover a kind of personal truth beneath layers of second-hand accounts laden with ideological baggage seems an impossible task, yet those very narratives that attempt to circumscribe Sadowska also make space for such partial and imperfect identifications. The blank spot that is Sadowska’s interiority is a source of fascination for the historian, and while Furja is wary of making any truth claims about Sadowska’s understanding of self, the transhistorical relationship, that felt connection, lies in the space between the unknown and society’s gaze.

⁶¹ Weseli, Interview by Jodi Greig.

⁶² Carolyn Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press: 1999), 35.

Furja said she felt Sadowska’s guiding hand in the summer of 2011, when she went in search of her grave. When Sadowska died, not many attended her funeral; this was due in part to the fact that her obituary was published on the day of her internment, and also because the obituary listed her first name as Maria, not Zofia. Furja decided that she would find and visit the grave, but it turned out to be a difficult task. She eventually discovered that Sadowska was buried in Powązki Cemetery, a historic site where many famous Poles are buried. Digging through the archives, she eventually found the location in a list of doctors’ graves from 1966. With the location in hand, she travelled to the gravesite... but nothing was there. Only a large maple tree. “It was incredible. I knew where it was, I knew the number of the plot, I walked around it, but I didn’t see anything.”⁶³ Suddenly she almost tripped over something—it was the headstone. “I think it was her intervention, you know, that I found it.”⁶⁴ The gravestone was behind the tree, covered in ferns, and although the date of birth was inscribed incorrectly, it belonged to Sadowska. Furja emphasized how symbolic the overgrown grave was of Sadowska’s erasure and subsequent re-emergence into memory; when other activists proposed clearing the gravesite and even replacing the headstone with a new one, Furja vehemently opposed. She felt that the grave, untended for decades, held special significance, and that any renovations would further erase Sadowska’s history. She also disapproved of the way other LGBTQ activists approached community expeditions to Sadowska’s grave: “The organization of these group outings meant concentrating on the fact that something had ended: she was here, she lived, now take a look at her grave.”⁶⁵

⁶³ Agnieszka Weseli, Interview by Jodi Greig. Original: “Było niesamowite. Wiedziałam, gdzie to jest, wiedziałam, za numer kwatery, chodziłam dokolo I nie widziałam tego”

⁶⁴ Ibid. Original: “Myślę, że była jej interwencja, wiesz, że ją znalazłam.”

⁶⁵ Ibid. Original: “Robienie wycieczek na grup to jakieś koncentrowanie się na tym, że coś się skończyło, że wiesz nie wiesz, była była żyła żyła, teraz patrzcie na jej grób”

At the beginning of 2012, Furja suddenly realized that soon it would be the 125th anniversary of Sadowska’s birth. She decided that the best way to celebrate her life, rather than her death, would be to throw a birthday party. The event, she imagined, would be in the style of the 1920s/1930s, and would include performances, perhaps with interludes for discussions of Sadowska’s history. She reached out to friends, artists, and activists to see if anyone was interested in contributing, and to her surprise and delight, everyone was incredibly enthusiastic. A flier was designed to mimic the front pages of the tabloids in which the Sadowska scandal had been discussed almost ninety years prior. Advertised with the slogan “Skandal! Skandal! Zofia Sadowska ma URODZINY!” (“Scandal! Scandal! It’s Zofia Sadowska’s BIRTHDAY”) the dance party included drag performances, burlesque, a tango performance by Izabela Filipiak and her partner Lilly-Marie Lamar (Filipiak and Lamar adopted personas for the event—Kitoushka Mrauer and Bianka Morska), a strip tease number by Lamar entitled “Pandora of the Opera Hot Vintage Lesbian Strip,” erotic poetry and cabaret, dildo exhibitions, notable local queer DJs, and an appearance by Sadowska herself (played, of course, by Furja). Organizers encouraged participants to “retro cross-dress,” or to “przebierz się za płęć przeciwną i przenieś w przeszłość” (“Dress as the opposite gender and transport yourself into the past”), and to dance in styles popular in the interwar period. The party invited attendees to “Zanurz się w podziemne klimaty przedwojnia, poznaj prawdę o ‘starogreckim skandalu’ z lat 20. i świętuj 125 urodzin Zofii Sadowskiej!” (“Immerse yourself in the underground climate of the pre-war era, find out the truth of this ‘ancient Greek scandal’ from the 20s and celebrate Zofia Sadowska’s 125th birthday!”). A period piece with contemporary erotic twists and flourishes, the event was

arguably a huge success, with around 250 people in attendance. “[Sadowska] returned, in a certain sense,” Furja told me, “she returned to memory.”⁶⁶

3 MARCA 2012
Warszawa

KLUBOJADALNIA EUFEMIA
Krakowskie Przedmieście 5, ASP, wejście od strony Traugutta

10/15 PLN
benefit

SKANDAL! SKANDAL!

SADOWSKA MA URODZINY!

Kim jest owa tajemnicza dr Zofia Sadowska (1887-1960), prymuska, feministka i automobilistka?

Jakie tajemnice skrywa pod garniturem?!
 Czy "wyzyskiwała przewrotną miłość do kobiet dla celów osobistych"? Czy naprawdę uwodziła pacjentki, rozbijała małżeństwa i organizowała lesbijsko-sadystyczne orgie w swym domu schadzek w Warszawie? Czy miała romans z Ordonówną? Zanurz się w podziemne klimaty przedwojnia, poznaj prawdę o "starogreckim skandalu" z lat 20. i świętuj 125. urodziny Zofii Sadowskiej!



18.00 historia na żywo
o Sadowskiej pogadanka z obrazkami - Agnieszka Weseli/Furja (Sprawy Sadowskiej/inne_istorie)

20.00 seksowny cwiszenruf
dzieje wibratora opowiadają Pussy Project

21.00 szalony dancing w stylu lat 20. i 30. Retro crossdressing!
Dziewczyno, przyjdź jako Rudolf Valentino!
Mężczyzno, bądź raz Messalką... lub Messaliną!
Przebierz się za pleć przeciwną i przenieś w przeszłość.
(A jeśli akurat nie masz ochoty na genderbending, to po prostu przebierz się stylowo, ponieważ dla przebranych niespodzianki!)
Zaś w taneczny trans poprowadzą Was:
Panny Bewlayanki
DJ Fairyboy
Benita

21.30 REWIA, SZOŁ, SZĄŁ I VARIETE



DK Tivv



DK Dieter Van Tease



Duo Milonguita czyli Kitoushka Mrauer & Bianka Morska (Izabela Filipiak & Lilly-Marie Lamar)
Tango de Amor oraz Pandora of the Opera Hot
Vintage Lesbian Strip...
Gorący Lesbijski Striptease w Stylu Epoki

z repertuaru **Barbie Girls**
nieznane bajki na dobranoc...
erotyka i poetyka!

Betty Q
Premierowe wykonanie nowego numeru! Jej "Ewa" zgrzeszy, a potem cofnie czas!
Czar kobiecości, niedopowiedzenia i burleski...



PO RAZ PIERWSZY NA SCENIE: DRAGKING I PIN-UP GIRL W JEDNYM NUMERZE!

suweniry
sesje foto
stoisko z gadżetami
erotycznymi

Impreza w ramach wokółmanifowego festiwalu Rewolucje Kobiet. Zapraszają Agnieszka Weseli/Furja (Sprawy Sadowskiej /inne_istorie) i UFA.

www.sprawysadowskiej.pl
www.u-f-a.pl
www.rewolucjekobiet.blogspot.com

matronaty



Figure 3.7. Flier for Sadowska's Birthday Party, 2012 (Source: Agnieszka Weseli)

⁶⁶ Ibid., Original: “Wróciła, w pewnym sensie. Na pamięć jako wróciła”

However, Sadowska's birthday party was more than just one night of wholesome queer fun. In addition to being an opportunity for the queer (and the queer-friendly) community to gather and enjoy themselves, it was (and still is, in its afterlife on the internet) part of a larger process which Michael Warner and Lauren Berlant term "queer world-making." Queer world-making is defined as "the mapping of commonly accessible worlds that allow for the creation of counterpublics"⁶⁷ and "relations and narratives that are only recognized as intimate in queer culture."⁶⁸ Their concept of world-making seems very similar to that of counterpublic, but is not necessarily reducible to one. Rather, world-making is a condition of its (or their) possibility. I imagine world-making as characterized by its emphasis on constant and unquantifiable movement, as well as its absolute refusal of coherency. Counterpublics are equally unquantifiable and transient; however, they seem to gesture towards a consistency that, while illusory, nevertheless grants a kind of stability that allows labels like "camp discourse." Unlike the verbal noun "world-making," which indicates a process, "counterpublic" is a noun that denotes a "thing," even though its boundaries are unstable. Like publics, counterpublics are also, above all, discursive, rather than concrete or comprised of an identifiable group of people, and are "mediated by print, theater, diffuse networks of talk, commerce, and the like."⁶⁹ Queer world-making encompasses the existence or deployment of queer cultural forms that circulate unevenly, subversively, resulting in an ephemeral, spatial, temporal, or affective topography of a counterpublic whose borders are in constant flux. I argue that Sadowska's birthday extravaganza participates in this world-making project, and that the cabaret-style performances particularly resonate throughout the queer discursive landscape. Cabaret, Shane Vogel writes, "has

⁶⁷ Shane Vogel, "Where are We Now? Queer World Making and Cabaret Performance." *GLQ* 6:1 (2000): 35.

⁶⁸ Michael Warner and Lauren Berlant, "Sex in Public," in *Publics and Counterpublics*. (New York: Zone Books, 2002), 199.

⁶⁹ Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 56.

functioned as a crucible not only for artistic collaboration but also for the counterdiscourses to dominant ideologies.”⁷⁰ Vogel considers cabaret a “mode of performance, characterized by fluidity and improvisation, intimacy and contact, immediacy and spectacle- a mode that confuses distinctions between performer and spectator.”⁷¹ He offers cabaret as a particularly fruitful and generative site for queer relationalities and intimacies.⁷² The entire event functions not only in this mode of performance, but also as a mode of world-making that allows for the generation of queer counterpublics.

While the event certainly resonates throughout the contemporary moment, I want to suggest that Furja’s performances in particular highlight the historical or temporal dimension of queer world-making that is somewhat glossed over both in Warner and Berlant’s model. I look to Mikhail Bakhtin’s writings on dialogism and what later critics have termed “intertextuality” in order to further theorize “the queer historical encounter” and to explore the possible mechanisms at work in a trans-temporal relationship between individuals, as well as between historical publics and contemporary counterpublics. A queer reading of Bakhtin’s notions of dialogism and heteroglossia (as well as a Bakhtinian reading of “queer”) offers us a way to explore the generative aspect of discursive interaction across time, which in turn can produce affective experiences and/or eroticism as a form of queer world-making.

In *Discourse and the Novel*, Bakhtin attempts to formulate a new approach to literary criticism centered around the unique structural and stylistic properties of the novel. In this seminal essay, he works towards a philosophy of language that the novel seems to embody *par excellence*. Bakhtin’s concepts *dialogism* and *heteroglossia* are crucial elements of this

⁷⁰ Shane Vogel, “Where are We Now? Queer World Making and Cabaret Performance,” 34.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 53.

philosophy, and offer us a more complex, expansive, creative vision of language.⁷³

Heteroglossia, as Michael Holquist and Caryl Emerson succinctly define it in the glossary of

The Dialogic Imagination, is:

The base condition governing the operation of meaning in any utterance. It is that which insures the primacy of context over text. At any given time, at any given place, there will be a set of conditions—social, historical, meteorological, physiological—that will insure that a word uttered in that place and at that time will have a meaning different than it would have under any other conditions; all utterances are heteroglot in that they are functions of a matrix of forces practically impossible to recoup, and therefore impossible to resolve.⁷⁴

The multiplicity of voices, discourses, and utterances that constitute heteroglossia in novels, as in social reality, are always dialogized, or exist in complex, evolving relationships with each other.

This dialogized heteroglossia, Bakhtin asserts, is necessary for any conceivable stylistics of the novel.⁷⁵ What is important for our purposes is that Bakhtin clearly includes a temporal dimension

in his theorization of heteroglossia, and especially of the dialogic interrelationships of these multitudinous voices in language(s), as language “represents the co-existence of socio-

ideological contradictions between the present and the past, between differing epochs of the past,

between socio-ideological groups in the present, between tendencies, schools, circles and so

forth, all given a bodily form.”⁷⁶ Dialogized heteroglossia thus constitutes a kind of trans-

temporal and trans-spatial field; discourses of the past reach us through genealogical traces in

present-day utterances, but also in texts that survive and circulate today.

⁷³ Todorov prefers the term “intertextuality,” to “dialogism,” as he explains, “dialogism... is, as one could expect, loaded with such an embarrassing multiplicity of meanings.” While Todorov’s substitution is helpful in many respects, I find the “embarrassing multiplicity of meanings” of the term “dialogism” very pertinent to a queer reading. Tzvetan Todorov, *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogic Principle*. Trans. Wlad Godzich, (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 60.

⁷⁴ Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Ed. Michael Holquist. Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, (Austin: University of Texas, 2011), 428.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 263.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 291.

This spatio-temporal field comprised of dialogic relations has huge implications for understanding or experiencing the past, and not only on an individual level. Bakhtin asserts that dialogism belongs to a metalinguistic realm, as relations between utterances, or individual speech acts, are shaped by all sorts of extralinguistic factors: context and contextual meaning, and the tripartite model of dialogue- addresser, addressee, and superaddressee (each of which, of course, can be multiple simultaneously, thus representing members of a social body). These factors can be thought of as the social threads that constitute the fabric of our social or cultural experience. As such, Bakhtin's theories concerning language are essentially theories of the production of social reality, with an emphasis on the individual's experience of or role in the creation of said reality. Bakhtin identifies utterances as the smallest unit through which this creation takes place, writing, "the living utterance, having taken meaning and shape at a particular historical moment in a socially specific environment, cannot fail to brush up against thousands of living dialogic threads, woven by socio-ideological consciousness around the given object of an utterance; it cannot fail to become an active participant in social dialogue."⁷⁷ These "living dialogic threads" do not necessarily have to reside in the present, either, hence Bakhtin's contribution to a more trans-temporal view of the social. Every utterance is, by necessity of its existence, in "dialogue" with other utterances, even if that utterance was made long ago. He concludes his fragmentary essay "Towards a Methodology for the Human Sciences" rather dramatically:

There is neither a first nor a last word and there are no limits to the dialogic context (it extends into the boundless past and the boundless future). Even *past* meanings, that is, those born in the dialogue of past centuries, can never be stable (finalized, ended once and for all)—they will always change (be renewed) in the process of subsequent, future development of the dialogue. At any moment in the development of the dialogue there are immense, boundless masses of forgotten contextual meanings, but at certain moments of the dialogue's subsequent development along the way they are recalled and invigorated in renewed form (in

⁷⁷ Ibid., 276.

a new context). Nothing is absolutely dead: every meaning will have its homecoming festival.⁷⁸

Dialogic relations, then, produce new utterances that are shaped by previous ones, and so on and so forth. The boundless creativity of this process is apparent--as Bakhtin asserts, "an utterance is never just a reflection or an expression of something already existing outside it that is given and final. It always creates something that never existed before, something absolutely new and unrepeatable...But something created is always created out of something given [...] What is given is completely transformed in what is created."⁷⁹ History, or historical traces, therefore, live on in this chain, and contribute endlessly to the expansion of present and future meaning.

One such historical trace became the basis for Furja's first performance of Sadowska's birthday extravaganza.⁸⁰ Furja, while conducting her archival research, discovered an excerpt from a satirical *szopka* originally performed by cabaret-revue Pod Picadorem (Picador) (1922-26) in the Qui Pro Quo theater in Warsaw.⁸¹ Entitled "WSadowska," it was published in a March 1924 edition of the *Kurier Informacyjny i Telegraficzny* journal.⁸² The Qui Pro Quo theater, like other cabarets, often battled explicitly with right-wing politics and catered to an urban, left-wing, artistic class that tended to embrace diversity and sexual emancipation, rather than decry them. Among its regular contributors numbered literary luminaries Julian Tuwim, Antoni Słonimski, and Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński.⁸³ Picador, like many of the cabaret revues at the time, used politics

⁷⁸ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, eds. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, trans. Vern W. McGee (Austin: University of Texas Press 1986), 170.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 120.

⁸⁰ "Sadowska Clip One," Agnieszka Weseli performing "Wsadowska," Youtube.com video, uploaded by alienfiendess1, December 5, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f6yVLQFaVO0>.

⁸¹ A *szopka* is a satirical puppet show

⁸² Agnieszka Weseli-Furja, in an email with the author, September 6, 2013. ; "Wsadowska," in *Kurier Informacyjny i Telegraficzny*, March 15 1924, nr 63, 2.

⁸³ Beth Holmgren, "Acting Out: *Qui pro Quo* in the Context of Interwar Warsaw," *East European Politics and Societies and Cultures* 27, no.2 (2013): 205-223.

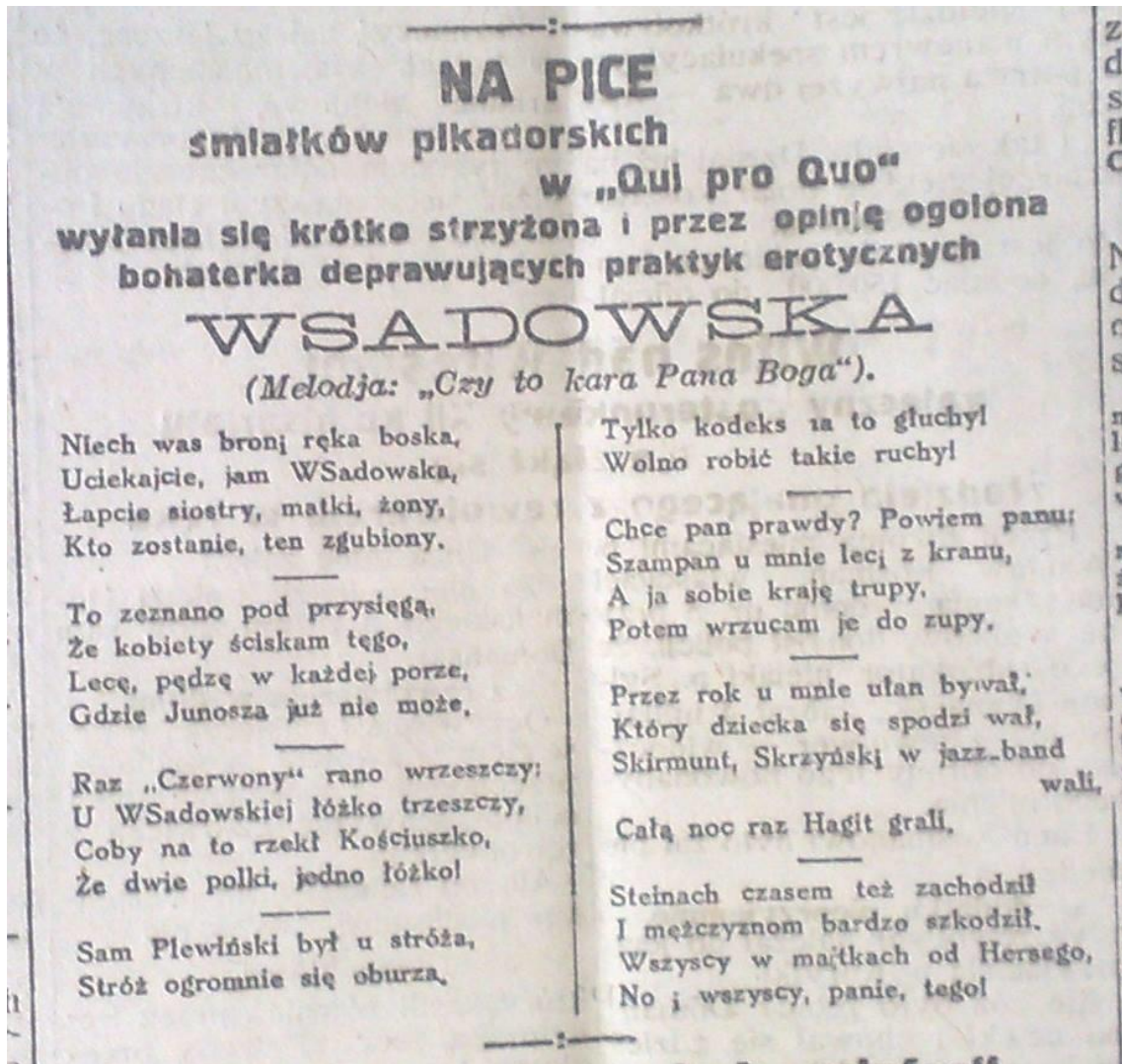


Figure 3.8: The original script written by artists from Pod Pikadorem, as published in Kurier Informacyjny i Telegraficzny in 1924. (Source: Agnieszka Weseli, Personal collection)

and headlining stories as fodder for performances, and this “ancient Greek scandal” made for exceptional entertainment. The text, while poking fun at Sadowska, seems mainly to mock the conservative reactions and moral outrage that the accusations of predatory lesbianism elicited. The pseudo-stage directions above the poem’s title read, “A short-haired, and shaved-by-public-opinion, heroine of corruptive erotic practices emerges.” The media’s obsession with Sadowska’s masculine appearance is evoked and transformed into criticism of Sadowska’s trial

not in the courtroom, but in the press. The poem mentions the editor Plewiński and some of the other tabloids that initially stoked the fires of scandal, as well as politicians from the era.

Furja decided to perform a modified version of the text as Sadowska, dressed in a suit and tie. The following is a transcription of Furja's performance:

Niech was broni ręka boska,
Jam WSadowska.
Łapcie siostry, matki, żony
Kto zostanie, ten zgubiony.
Zeznawano to pod przysięgą,
że kobiety ściskam tęgo.
Pędzę, lecę w każdej porze,
gdy mężczyzna już nie może.
Chce pan prawdy? Powiem panu.
Przez rok u mnie ułan bywał,
który dziecka się spodziewał.
U mnie szampan leci z kranu,
A ja krajam sobie trupy,
Potem kładam ich do zupy.
Sam redaktor był u stróża.
Stróż ogromnie się oburza
tylko kodeks na to głuchy,
wolno robić, takie ruchy?
Raz gazeta rano wrzeszczy
U Sadowskiej łóżko trzeszczy
Co był na to rzekł Kościuszko,
Że dwie Polki, jedno łóżko?⁸⁴

May the hand of God protect you all
For I am WSadowska
Hold tight to your sisters, mothers, wives
For they will be lost, she who is left behind
They swore it was the case
That women I liked to embrace
I rush, I fly, ever unflagging
When and where men are lacking.
Do you want the truth, sir? I will tell you.
For a year an uhlan came to visit me
He was expecting a child, you see
In my office champagne flowed from the tap,
And corpses into tiny pieces I cut,
And then into soup I put
The authorities received a visit from even the
editor
And was outraged at this predator
But the law turned its face away
Can it be, such foul play?
Once the morning paper read
Creaking is Sadowska's bed!
What would have Kosciuszko said
Two Polish ladies, one bed?

Furja, performing not as Sadowska per se, but rather as a satirical, mediated version of the doctor, breathes new life into a decades-old text, the subject matter and the text itself having been erased from public memory. While the original poem's main target is not necessarily Sadowska herself, but rather the "gay panic" that threaded the papers, Sadowska nevertheless becomes the butt of the joke. While celebratory in her performance, Furja refuses to turn her

⁸⁴ "Sadowska Clip One," Agnieszka Weseli performing "Wsadowska," Youtube.com video, uploaded by alienfiendess1, December 5, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f6yVLQFaVO0>

retelling of Sadowska's story into an assimilatory or rehabilitative project; instead, she embraces the original joke. Sadowska isn't a figure to be "sanitized" and rewritten into the Polish national narrative, but rather is someone who threatens it. She even explicitly juxtaposes Sadowska with eighteenth/nineteenth century national hero Tadeusz Kościuszko, "Oh, what would Kościuszko



Figure 3.9. Furja performing "Wsadowska" (Still from Youtube recording of performance, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f6yVLQFaVO0>)

say? Two Polish women, one bed?" Furja's snickering Sadowska rejects the idea of being written into the center of any national narrative, at least one in which Kościuszko might have a say. In addition, a

palpable complicity between performer and audience acknowledges the wounds of homophobia and, albeit uncomfortably, uses that negativity to engage in discursive world-making. Sadowska jokingly refers to cutting up corpses and adding them to her soup—a reference to the inherent depravity of witches who lie outside the sacred bounds of Christianity, but also perhaps an oblique nod toward blood libel, a common myth in the European persecution of Jews, which in Poland has resulted in numerous pogroms. Furja thus links painful histories of racial violence with homophobic discrimination while holding them just outside a coherent national narrative. She also uses Sadowska and the painful yet familiar accusations of pedophilia, predatoriness, corruption, and perversion to forge an uncomfortable link between the present and past. Furja's text strongly echoes the original document, although in many ways it erases the markers of

historical specificity with which “WSadowska” is mottled. She leaves out names that now have little to no resonance with a contemporary audience. “Plewiński,” for example, is removed, as well as Skirmunt and Skrzyński (politicians in interwar Poland).⁸⁵ Nevertheless, her performance is clearly a citation of the original text, and as such, participates in a Bakhtinian “homecoming festival.” Furja gives the original text new life in her utterance-as-performance, and releases it into the contemporary discursive sphere to proliferate and mutate meanings.

Bakhtin, however, often characterizes the historical dimensions or interrelations of utterances (and texts as utterances) as “a problem,” which he tries to work through in his rather enigmatic and therefore compelling essay, “The Problem of the Text in Linguistics, Philology, and the Human Sciences: An Experiment in Philosophical Analysis.” Related problems include the limits of the text and the “problem of the second subject who is reproducing... a text (another’s) and creating a framing text (one that comments, evaluates, objects, and so forth).”⁸⁶ Bakhtin writes about reproduction (citation) as essentially impossible, as “the reproduction of the text by the subject (a return to it, a repeated reading, a new execution quotation) is a new, unrepeatable event in the life of the text, a new link in the historical chain of speech communication.”⁸⁷ Bakhtin seems to have struggled with mapping the precise nature of interactions of utterances separated by spans of time, although I believe one possible answer lies in his theorization of “understanding” as intrinsic to discourse. Understanding “is not at all a question of an exact and passive reflexion, of a redoubling of the other’s experience within me

⁸⁵ Furja also replaces the name “Junosza” with the more generic “mężczyzna.” The original text refers to the famed Polish interwar actor and “ladies’ man” Kazimierz Junosza-Stępowski. An excerpt on Furja’s website dedicated to Sadowska gives us a bit more insight into why he might be included in the satire: “according to the papers, she kissed the hands of Messalka, who called her ‘Pan Doktor,’ she allegedly claimed that the greatest success amongst the women in Warsaw were had by Junosza and Sadowska herself.” Original: “wg gazet całowała po rękach Messalkę, która tytułowała ją "panem doktorem", podobno twierdziła, że największe powodzenie wśród kobiet w Warszawie mają Junosza-Stępowski i ona sama.” <http://www.sprawysadowskiej.pl/index.php/sadowska>

⁸⁶ Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, 104.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 106.

(such a redoubling is, in any case, impossible), but a matter of translating the experience into an altogether different axiological perspective, into new categories of evaluation and formation.”⁸⁸ Bakhtin later opposes “understanding” with “knowledge” in order to differentiate the objective of the human sciences from that of the natural sciences (a problematic binary, to say the least), but his point that “true understanding... is always historical and personified” is well taken.⁸⁹ Indeed, in the case of the present-day performance of “WSadowska,” understanding is literally personified (and felt) in Furja-as-Sadowska. This kind of performative understanding is inherently dialogical, or responsive; however, it should not be limited to an intellectual, or even discursive, relationship. After all, “in maintaining a disjuncture between immediate experience and ‘extra-local’ symbolic representations, and by privileging the latter, such approaches subsume the open-ended and ‘messy’ qualities of real-life communicative and social acts into an all-encompassing explanatory system. For Bakhtin, this suppresses the ‘eventness’ of the everyday social world, its sensuous particularity.”⁹⁰

The “sensuous particularity” of the everyday social world also applies to the historiographical project. Dinshaw, in her book *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern*, describes queer historiography in terms that perhaps are the logical continuation, on an erotic or affective plane, of Bakhtin’s own articulation of “understanding”:

Appropriation, misrecognition, disidentification: these terms that queer theory has highlighted all point to the alterity within mimesis itself, the never-perfect aspect of identification. And they suggest the desires that propel such engagements, the affects that drive relationality even across time: “To overstress the incommensurability of temporal or cultural difference,” writes Louise Fradenburg, “prevents us from asking: how have I loved the other? How is the

⁸⁸ Quoted in Tzvetan Todorov, *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogical Principle*, trans. Wlad Godzich (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 22.

⁸⁹ Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, 162.

⁹⁰ M. E Gardiner, “Wild publics and grotesque symposiums: Habermas and Bakhtin on dialogue, everyday life and the public sphere,” *The Sociological Review* 52 (2004): 32.

other *in* me, in the ‘same’?”... Pleasure can be taken in the assertion of historical difference as well as in the assertion of similarity, and any such pleasure should not be opposed to “truth”...⁹¹

A historical encounter with a text or figure, then, is never mimetic--and that is its creative potential. The impossibility of mimesis is based in the dialogic nature of the encounter, and results in the aforementioned experiences of appropriation, misrecognition, disidentification... as well as similarity or sameness. These processes quite frequently are fraught with emotion, and register as highly intimate. Queer historical practices, then, and especially embodied practices of the kind in which Furja engages, are not concerned with an objective truth, but are invested in a political, affective, or erotic translation of the past into the present as part of a trans-temporal relation. Furja’s adaptation of the original text can be thought of as such a translation, or as positioned responsively to both the figure of Sadowska as represented in Picador’s *szopka* and the historical circumstances inherent to the text itself, which in turn functions both discursively and as affect-as-utterance.

Discourse and its corresponding affects are not the only modes of dialogism, however. David Ruffolo’s reading of Bakhtin in his book *Queer Interventions: Post-Queer Politics* radically posits bodies themselves as “dialogic relations that are negotiated in highly contextualized moments.”⁹² Ruffolo uses Deleuze and Guattari’s “politics of becoming” to re-read Bakhtin in a way that sets aside any framework or structuring subjectivity in favor of what he terms “dialogical-becomings.” He writes:

Dialogical-becomings as utterances offer a creative and productive politics for a post-queer time and space because they are not purely constructed by individual

⁹¹ Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval*, 35.

⁹² David V. Ruffalo, *Queer Interventions: Post-Queer Politics*, (Farnham, Surrey, GBR: Ashgate Publishing Group, 2009), 61.

Bodies, Ruffalo writes, “are not limited to physical, material, and corporeal realms but extend to bodies of theoretical work, bodies of knowledge, knowledge of bodies, institutional bodies, bodies of thought, systemic bodies, cultural bodies and so forth. Bakhtinian *stylistics* can be used to describe the characteristics that differentiate dialogical-becoming ‘bodies.’” *Ibid.*, 72.

subjects; they are not linguistic references of a language system; they are not subjected to norms that individualize subjects; and they are not materialized through language or discourse. Dialogical-becomings as utterances are rhizomatically produced through relations that do not refer back to a center or core root because they are directed outwards rather than inwards.⁹³

Ruffolo's politics of dialogical-becomings emphasize the eternal creativity and unpredictability of utterances as intensifications of resistance in the relationship between Foucauldian notions of power and resistance. Bakhtinian dialogism, as articulated by Ruffolo, moves away from binaries such as power/resistance, self/other, mind/body etc., thereby allowing for a more complex and fluid model of politics freed of subject formation/action *against* an other, power, etc. Ruffolo uses Bakhtin's utterance to describe dialogical-becomings as essentially social and future-oriented. Although these dialogical-becomings, "*reference past utterances (something given), they are never reduced to them (something created)*" (original emphasis), and therein lies their creative potential.⁹⁴ The body, for instance, can be thought of as continuously changing or meaning differently because, "as a chain of utterances," it is constantly encountering new contexts. Here he connects utterances to the materialities of life, or to continue his example, bodies negotiated as culture rather than through culture. Ruffolo therefore does not reduce utterances (or bodies) to signification and representation.⁹⁵ He writes, "significations and representations rely on and refer back to individualized subjects; post-queer dialogical-becomings are not reducible to any singular body because meaning is produced dialogically through a system of interruptions: utterances are part of a chain of utterances."⁹⁶ While I may not agree with Ruffolo's characterization of these dialogical becomings as necessarily "post-queer" (as Judith Butler in her essay "Critically Queer" discusses the concept of "queer" in similar

⁹³ Ibid., 69.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 76.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 65.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 67.

terms), the social and political model he presents utilizing Bakhtin's theories are useful when contemplating the processes of queer world-making, especially in the context of performance, where corporeality communicates.

While ostensibly I might analyze a single body (or even a club full of individual bodies), Furja's performance, her corporeal presence and circulation throughout the room, engages in precisely this dialogical profusion, linked inextricably to past and contemporary corporealities-in-flux. Bodies as utterances are circulated through the social and are cumulatively constituted through previous body-utterances. Bodily sensation is highlighted through this process and is divorced from individual sensation contained within an individual skin, becoming a communicative medium. Elizabeth Freeman, in her meditation on queer temporalities, identifies the experience of bodily response to the past as *erotohistoriography*:

Erotohistoriography is distinct from the desire for a fully present past, a restoration of bygone times. Erotohistoriography does not write the lost object into the present so much as encounter it already in the present, by treating the present itself as hybrid. And it uses the body as a tool to effect, figure, or perform that encounter. Erotohistoriography admits that contact with historical materials can be precipitated by particular bodily dispositions, and that these connections may elicit bodily responses, even pleasurable ones, that are themselves a *form of understanding* [emphasis mine]. It sees the body as a method, and historical consciousness as something intimately involved with corporeal sensations.⁹⁷

“Treating the present itself as hybrid” is perhaps another way of describing our social reality as comprised of discursive and corporeal utterance-chains. It is a recognition that goes beyond an intellectual grasp of this concept, a recognition that resonates physically. These bodily responses, as Freeman explains, are forms of understanding. We can characterize the transtemporal relations between bodies and times as inherently dialogic.

⁹⁷ Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 95-96.

Furja's second performance makes more explicit use of the body as embodied understanding. She once again engages in a re-writing of an older text, although this time it is she that forges the connection to Sadowska. The original poem was written by Stanisław Jachowicz in the mid-nineteenth century as a didactic tale for children warning against the evils of gluttony. I present the Jachowicz's original poem on the left, and Furja's reinterpretation on the right for comparison:

Mr. Kitten is sick and was lying in bed,
In came Dr. Cat. "How are you, Kitten?"
"Very poorly" Kitten says, and stretches
out a paw.
The doctor takes the pulse
of his seriously ill patient
and says to him: "You have overeaten,
and what's worse, it's not mice, but ham or
lard---
Very bad... a fever! It is very bad, Kitten!
Oh, long will you lie in this bed.
And you won't eat, and that is the end of
that.
God forbid sausage, bacon or cake!"
"And no mice?" asks Kitten,
"a small bird or a pair of thighs?"
"God forbid! Leeches and a strict diet!
That is why this treatment is successful."
And Kitten lay there, kielbasa and blood
sausages
untouched, from afar he smelled mice.
Behold this evil gluttony! Kitten had gone
too far
and had to pay the price for his sins!
And so it is with you, children:
May God protect you from gluttony!

Pan kotek był chory i leżał w łóżeczku,
I przyszedł kot doktor: „Jak się masz,
koteczku”!
- „Źle bardzo..” – i łapkę wyciągnął do
niego.

Kitten is sick. And lies in bed.
In comes Miss Doctor. "How are you, Kitten?"
"Very poorly" Kitten says, and stretches out a
paw.
The doctor takes the pulse
of her seriously ill patient,
and says to her: "You have eaten too much.
I detect signs of serious overindulgence.
Too often, too fast, too heavily, too much.
Very bad... a fever! It is very bad, Kitten!
Oh long will you lie alone in this bed.
And you will not eat, and that is the end of that.
God forbid cakes, buns, or butter."
"And no mice?" asks Kitten.
"Mice of marzipan or sugar icing?"
"A glass of water instead! A strict diet.
That is why this treatment is effective."
Kitten lay there, little doughnuts and puff pastries
untouched, the smell of mice wafting in from afar.
Behold this evil gluttony!
In this respect Kitten went too far.
She had to pay for her sins.
And you—girls, ladies, women, who are also
tormented by such an excessive appetite—
Come see me.
I will heal that evil, when, without mercy,
I will put you on a diet.

Koteczka jest chora i leży w łóżeczku.
I przyszła pani doktor. „Jak się masz, koteczko?”
„Źle bardzo”- i łapkę wyciąga do pani.
Wzięła za puls doktorka poważnie swej chorej
i dziwy jej prawi: „Za wiele się jadło.

Wziął za puls pan doktor poważnie chorego
 I dziwy mu śpiewa:–„Zanadto się jadło,
 co gorsza, nie myszki, lecz szynki i sadło;
 Źle bardzo... gorączka! Źle bardzo,
 koteczku!
 Oj długo ty, długo poleżysz w łóżeczku,
 I nic jeść nie będziesz, kleiczek i basta:
 Broń Boże kielbaski, słoninki lub ciasta!”
 – „A myszki nie można?-zapyta koteczek-
 Lub ptaszka małego choć parę udeczek?”
 –„Broń Boże! Pijawki i dieta ścisła!
 Od tego pomyślność w leczeniu zawisła.”
 I leżał koteczek; kielbaski i kiszki
 Nie tknięte, zdaleka pachniały mu myszki.
 Patrzcie, jak złe łakomstwo! Kotek
 przebrał miarę,
 Musiał więc nieboraczek srogą ponieść
 karę.
 Tak się i z wami dziateczki stać może:
 od łakomstwa strzeż was Boże!⁹⁸

Dostrzegam objawy poważnych nadużyć.
 Za często, za szybko, za mocno, za dużo.
 Źle bardzo.... gorączka! Źle bardzo, koteczko!
 Oj długo ty sama poleżysz w łóżeczku.
 I nic jeść nie będziesz, z tym koniec i basta.
 Broń Boże babeczki, bułeczki i masło.”
 „A myszki nie można?” zapyta koteczka-
 „Z marcepanu myszki czy z lukrem ciasteczka?”
 „Szkłanka wody zamiast! Dieta ścisła.
 Od tego skuteczność leczenia zawisła.
 Leżała koteczka, pączuszki i ptyszki
 nie tknięte, z daleka pachniały jej myszki.
 Patrzcie, jak złe łakomstwo. Kotka przebrała w
 nim miarę.
 Musiała nieboraczka srogą ponieść karę.
 A jeśli dziewczęta, panie, kobiety
 Was także dręczy nadmierny apetyt,
 przyjdźcie do mnie. Ja to zło wyleczę.
 Kiedy bez litości, wezmę was na dietę.”⁹⁹

Furja replaces the (grammatically and semantically) masculine protagonists, kotek (kitten) and pan Doktor (Mr. Doctor) with feminine ones: koteczka, (female kitten) and pani Doktor (Ms. Doctor). While “pani Doktor” is never mentioned by name, Sadowska is understood as the admonishing protagonist. My experience of the term “koteczka” is almost exclusively within the Polish lesbian community as a term of endearment, and conversations with other Poles have indicated that the term is rarely used among straight couples. Furja also replaces the longed-for food items, often phallic in Stachowicz’s version (kielbasa, sausage, “little bird,” slang for penis), with food items that connote the female body and/or sexuality, mostly of a soft or round nature: babeczki (a cupcake, but also a euphemism for “babe”), bułeczki (rolls, reminiscent of breasts), myszka (little mouse, a euphemism for vagina), pączuszki (Polish doughnuts, also

⁹⁸ Stanisław Jachowicz, “Chory Kotek,” <http://www.linux.net.pl/~wkotwica/tbg/chorykotek.html>

⁹⁹ “Sadowska Clip Two,” Agnieszka Weseli-Furja performing “Chora Kotka,” Youtube.com video, uploaded by alienfiendess1, December 5, 2012. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KP22vUs5I2A>

suggestive of breasts) and *ptyśki* (puff pastries). Replete in black clothing and riding crop, Furja's suggestive recitation thus turns a cautionary tale into a delightfully sexual, sado-masochistic performance.

The audience's laughter mixed with a few telling groans index a homophobia, or rather an experience of homophobia, which permeates present Polish culture. Furja's chosen genre, children's didactic poetry, recalls the accusations of seducing underage patients that Sadowska grappled with in her time. The original poem utilizes many diminutives to evoke a cute and

child-like tone. The same diminutivization in Furja's version renders the tone both infantile AND sexual, the text holding the two meanings in tension with one another. Her "perversion" of these texts, both in the sense of fashioning a pastiche and of sexualizing the content, directly confronts fantasies of the



Figure 3.10. Furja performing "Koteczka" (Still from recording of the performance, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KP22vUs5I2A>)

homosexual sexual corruption of children imagined by a heteronormative or patriarchal culture. Far from reproducing the accusations against Sadowska, much less indicting her for her supposed crimes, Furja, running her riding crop over her body suggestively and occasionally cracking it, humorously celebrates queer sexual subculture. This erotohistoriographical performance can be thought of as both containing the past (socially and textually, insofar as those things can be separated), and as a responsive understanding that inevitably affects the

creation of new utterances in the chain. The idiom of S/M in which Furja performs additionally holds significance. According to Freeman, “it is inescapably true that the body in sadomasochistic ritual becomes a means of invoking history—personal pasts, collective sufferings, and quotidian forms of injustice—in an idiom of pleasure.”¹⁰⁰ “Dr. Sadowska’s” closing invitation, “And you—girls, ladies, women, / who are also tormented by such an excessive appetite/Come see me. I will heal that evil, when, /without mercy, I will put you on a diet” uses language that could characterize homophobic speech (*zło* [evil], *nadmierny* [excessive], *wyleczyć* [to treat, to heal]), which contains within it a genealogy of Polish homophobia and trauma, and playfully infuses it with a reparative eroticism.

To come full circle, let us return to Michael Warner’s conception of publics and counterpublics and its subsequent connection to queer world-making. While we have been discussing transtemporal dialogic relations amongst individuals or groups (even if those individuals or groups have largely functioned as a stand-in for larger collective processes which stretch or dissolve such subjectivities), an extrapolation of our conclusions to the formation of publics and counterpublics can expand upon Warner’s model. Publics (and counterpublics) themselves are dialogically constituted. Warner writes, “the circularity is essential to the phenomenon. A public might be real and efficacious, but its reality lies in just this reflexivity by which an addressable object is conjured into being in order to enable the very discourse that gives its existence.”¹⁰¹ If we separate or conceive of a historical public with which the original text(s) functioned dialogically, an event like Zofia Sadowska’s birthday extravaganza allows both past and present intended publics to rub up against each other. The recitation/reimagining of

¹⁰⁰ Freeman, *Time Binds*, 138.

¹⁰¹ Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 67.

the original texts, performed in the present, produces precisely this transtemporal dialogic relation treated throughout this essay, but it also simultaneously blurs the distinction between the public of the 1920s and today's queer Polish (counter)public. The awareness of those long-deceased readers/viewers and the discourses about homosexuality to which they belonged shape the dialogic response in the present. These two publics become permeable to one another, even if they remain separated by ninety years. They slip into one another, saturated with feeling and bodily desire, but also erect new boundaries between themselves in an endless dialogic process. Bakhtin writes, "The event of the life of the text, that is, its true essence, always develops *on the boundary between two consciousnesses, two subjects.*"¹⁰² If we replace "consciousnesses" and "subjects" with "publics" and/or "counterpublics," we approach this new temporal dimension of Warner's model. What becomes possible, then, is the formation of a counter-public that is precipitated by a historical public (and the presence of a historical public shaped by present). This peculiar formation has the capacity to produce unexpected affect, erotic desires, and new possibilities for political and personal relations, as one of the main effects of counterpublics is to make, "stranger relationality normative, reshaping the most intimate dimensions of subjectivity around co-membership with indefinite persons in a context of routine action."¹⁰³

Historical circumstance was not only an occasion for this party, but also its driving force. The event is one ephemeral instance of a collective process of queer world-making, which allows for the entertainment and embodiment of nonheteronormative genders and sexualities, of unlicensed pleasures, and for an experience of the past that resonates affectively and erotically today. Fraught as they may be with misrecognition and misunderstanding, these personal and

¹⁰² Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, 106.

¹⁰³ Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 76.

collective experiences of “feeling historical” may provide new, more inclusive models for thinking LGBTQ history in Poland. While the making of queer worlds and counterpublics can never isolate itself from the authority of heteronormative, national publics, there are ways in which the process can interrogate their coherency and effect change from their own discursive turf, while providing lines of communication and opportunities for queer relations for those who participate in them. Polish national narratives, in other words, can be suspended within the discursive space of a constantly evolving queer world, interrogated, and ultimately imagined (and felt) otherwise.

Furja navigates prescribed and proscribed national and sexual identities by ushering in queer counterpublics, communal relations that offer points of identification outside of identity politics as such, and are based rather in affective experience and bodily sensation. My next chapter focuses on a novel which also takes up a Polish, “historical” eroticism as a theme and (anti-social) model of community, but explicitly and aggressively pits it against post-socialist, “Western” identity politics and a Polish post-colonial national narrative. Michał Witkowski’s *Lubiewo* situates its sexual utopia in the “bad Communist past,” specifically in a version of Poland that he represents as colonized by a highly masculine, “authentically” Slavic, Russian empire. It is in this colonial relation that Witkowski locates sexual pleasure, his preferred Poland being one that is figuratively fucked, and its citizens literally fucked, by colonial power. While Furja “queers” a national patriotism that is largely rooted in establishing an independent Poland free of foreign domination, Witkowski embraces that domination as productive of sexual pleasure, and in doing so rewrites Polish history from the perspective of those excluded by it.

CHAPTER IV.

Anal-yzing *Lubiewo*: Soviet Tops and Colonial Bottoms

*This is repulsive. Repulsive and fascinating at the same time. But I can't publish it. How could I? What am I supposed to do with this? A story for "Politics"? "Eyewitness"? How? You can write about prostitutes, thieves, murderers, smugglers, traitors, but this won't fly. Even though no one's hurting anybody. There's just no language for it, except maybe ass, dick, blowjob, trade. Maybe if these words could be repeated enough times, they'd rid themselves of all that nasty barracks-baggage. Like the word "vagina" in the *Vagina Monologues*. I'm not surprised that this hasn't been written about yet.¹*

So thinks the narrator of Michał Witkowski's *Lubiewo* as he escapes to the toilet during his interview with two aging queens, Patrycja and Lukrecja. They had just been regaling him with stories from their glory days in the communist Polish People's Republic (Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa or PRL), a time when the parks that served as their cruising grounds were packed with drunk, masculine Orpheuses (as the queens fondly nickname their sexual partners, after the lyrics of an Anna German song), and one didn't have to worry about employment, housing, or food, as these necessities were ostensibly guaranteed by the state. Their sexually explicit, sometimes violent, always flamboyant anecdotes prove too much for the

¹ Michał Witkowski, *Lubiewo*, 5th ed. (Krakow: Korporacja Ha!art, 2006), 24. Original: "To jest ohydne. Ohydne i ciekawe jednocześnie. Nie opublikuję tego przecież. No bo jak? Co mam z tego zrobić? Reportaż dla „Polityki”? „Na własne oczy”? Jak? Można zrobić o tirówkach, o złodziejach, o zabójcach, o złomiarzach, o zdrajcach, a tylko o tym jakoś nie da rady. Choć nikt tu nikomu nie wyrządza krzywdy. Nie ma języka, żeby o tym mówić, chyba, że „dupa”, „chuj”, „obciągać”, „luj”. Chyba że tak długo powtarzać te słowa, aż wypiorą się z całego koszarowego nalotu. Jak słowa „pochwa” w *Monologach waginy*. Nie dziwię się, że nikt nigdy nie napisał o tym reportażu!”

narrator Michał, who flees to the bathroom to lament his journalistic predicament. Michał is a writer in search of a story, but the one he finds turns out to be unspeakable, much less publishable.² The narrator implies that the gender play and sexual practices of this community from the 1970s and 80s are not only foreign to the public face of the contemporary Polish LGBTQ movement, but that they exceed the boundaries of what is politically respectable (or even palatable) in the 2000s. The queens articulate a past that is unassimilable, incompatible, and unrepresentable in the narrative of the “progressive” present. Indeed, the effusive nostalgia and ecstatic joy in the illicit that permeates each of the queens’ anecdotes indexes a refusal to submit their bodies and desires to the current regime of respectability (irrevocably entwined with Poland’s accession to the EU and its Western “homecoming”) so crucial to the nascent LGBTQ rights movement in Poland, which was just finding its political footing in 2004. The novel details the ways in which the queens are repeatedly the targets of a politics of containment, or

those delineations of value inherent to epistemological, political, or social forms of suppression, delimitation, and control... These structures flatten, silence, or manipulate subjects and objects in an attempt to stabilize race, sex, and gender identities. Yet containment projects can also ironically include resistance movements intended to be productive... Resistance movements can tend towards containment due to such a movement’s structuring ideological constraints that can marginalize some members.³

The policing of deviant gender presentations or sexual acts occurs both explicitly and more insidiously throughout *Lubiewo*. Witkowski, who treats the notion of respectability with considerable derision, links what he describes as a new, foreign (Western), economically privileged rhetoric of equality with an oppressive gender order. He highlights promiscuity as a

² The narrator appears in the first chapter as Michał, but reappears as Michaśka, a feminized form of the masculine Michał, as well as Śnieżka, or Snow White, a play on both the association of “princess” with effeminate men and a reference to the color of ejaculate. In this chapter, I refer to the narrator as Michał or Michaśka, and to the author as either Michał Witkowski or Witkowski.

³ Kirin Wachter-Grene, “‘On the Unspeakable’: Delany, Desire, and the Tactic of Transgression,” *African American Review* 48, no. 3 (2015): 333.

particular threat to respectability, weaponizing it through the constant juxtaposition of the gender-normative, middle-class gay Polish men who insist on monogamy and stable, loving relationships (they are particularly concerned about the representation of these relationships in media) with the cruising habits of the queens, shamed for their “sex-addiction.” Thus the traditions and rituals of the *pikieta*, or picket (the queens’ term for their communal cruising grounds), are censored by those representing the “modern,” post-socialist, politically engaged and environmentally friendly gay community. In one characteristic exchange, Michaśka, the narrator’s more feminine alter ego, is lying on the beach when he approached by a man he hopes is cruising him. He describes the exchange:

I opened my mouth slightly and I wanted to start already, when the two thighs moved anxiously, no-- adoption, emancipation, the right to marry, the Green Party, close friends, life partner, safe and intimate sex, condoms. We are cultured people who want to do things neatly, and also morally, with society’s blessing, in white gloves (only so we won’t dirty ourselves with you). And immediately he let me know that it is people like me who give gays a bad name in our society, that we (me and the Old Girls and the Blond and others from the dunes), we do it like dogs in the bushes, and that they’d come to us with their volleyball, their sports, their physical fitness because they wanted to free us from our pre-emancipatory, post-cruising gutter, in other words, they wanted us to do something useful. If you’re fat or flaming you need not apply. And as for me, I open my mouth as soon as I see naked flesh, but no it’s love, understanding, mutual respect that we need now. Sometimes other things matter. What, you say? Friendship, intimacy.⁴

Anonymous and frequent sex (“like dogs in the bushes”) is cast as an essentially antisocial activity, devoid of community or civic engagement and pride (“they wanted us to do something

⁴ Witkowski, *Lubiewo*, 147. Original: “Usta tylko lekko rozchyliłam i już chciałam zaczynać akcję, kiedy te dwa uda się poruszyły niespokojnie, że nie, że adopcja, że emacypcja, prawa do małżeństw, partia Zielonych, a w ogóle to przyjaciel, stały partner, bezpieczny seks (przyjacielski), kondomy. Jesteśmy ludźmi kulturalnymi, którzy chcą to robić czysto, także moralnie, za społecznym przyzwoleniem, w białych rękawiczkach (żeby wam się tylko nie ubrudziły). I zaraz jał mnie uświadamiać, że przez takich to właśnie jak ja wizerunek geja w społeczeństwie jest tak fatalny, że my (tzn. Ja i te Emerytki oraz Blondynek i inni z wydm) to robimy jak pieski w krzakach, a tymczasem oni tu do nas z piłką, ze sportem, z tężyzną fizyczną, bo wyswobodzić nas chcieli z tego upadku jeszcze postpikietowego, przedemacypcyjnego, słowem—chcieli nas zająć czym pożytecznym. Przegięci i grubi—nie odpisujecie. I że ja od razu usta otwieram, jak tylko co gołego zobaczę, a to trzeba miłości, zrozumienia, wzajemnego szacunku. Czasami liczą się inne rzeczy. Jakie? Przyjaźń, bliskość.”

useful”), the enemy of tolerance and emancipation (“people like me who give gays a bad name”). The shaming of the narrator by the Two Thighs in the latter half of the quote is preceded by a prescriptive vision of the ideal gay man which draws upon different discourses that are largely driven by homonormative imperatives (adoption, civil rights, liberal politics, monogamous intimacy, etc.).

The queens of *Lubiewo* fiercely defend their status as “unemancipated,” refusing to assimilate into Poland’s neoliberal reality. In her study of how neoliberalism now structures identity politics in the American context, Lisa Duggan describes homonormativity not only as a politics of assimilation, but as deeply shaped by free-market principles and a de-politicized sense of individual responsibility. She writes, “it is a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption.”⁵ Nuclear families bound by monogamous, responsible partnerships make good agents (and subjects) of the free-market, which in turn, especially in the new capitalisms of Eastern Europe, becomes a patriotic duty. Those who fall outside these parameters, like the queens of *Lubiewo*, are relegated to the backwards past, as they reject Poland’s newly-cemented identity as a post-socialist, capitalist, EU member state, the result of a decade-long process of economic and cultural transition. Now elderly and impoverished, they represent the victims of Poland’s ostensibly successful transition to capitalism and privatization.

⁵ Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality? Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2003), 50.

Queer subjects and their histories are often deemed problematic for the present because they carry within them a history of loss and of injury that, as Heather Love suggests, “can serve to disrupt the present. Making connections with historical losses or with images of ruined or spoiled identity in the past can set into motion a gutting ‘play of recognitions,’ another form of effective history.”⁶ In other words, our interactions with painful pasts can produce affective recognitions that undermine our identities as “post”: post-homophobia, post-secrecy, post-solitude. In the case of *Lubiewo*, we may add “post-socialist” to the list. Because of this, these queer pasts fall outside of mainstream historical narratives and can only be assimilated through the sanitization of their discourse through certain performative cultural processes—much like, as the novel suggests, the normalization/reclamation of the word “vagina” through public repetition (although I would counter that the word is still often deployed in service to misogyny). The “nasty barracks-baggage” that accompanies the language of *Lubiewo* (to which I will later return) must be cleansed of the words “dick,” “ass,” “blowjob,” and “trade” so that they might be used without invoking that which is now considered painful or shameful. However, while Michał the narrator worries about the impossibility of these pasts in the present, Michał the author gleefully takes up the “Old Girls” language and uses it to construct a world outside the politics of respectability, before the destructive power of capitalism, and in opposition to the teleology of Polish nationhood. In doing so, he confronts the present with the narratives it has constructed about itself, reframes those narratives through the violation of their national sanctity, and ultimately offers an alternate, erotohistoriographic encounter with the traumas of Poland’s past.

⁶ Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2009), 45.

Witkowski's novel builds a fictional ethnography of a lost era, permeated with nostalgia for socialist Poland and for the seemingly plentiful queer sexual encounters in parks and Soviet barracks. *Lubiewo* is comprised of three related sections; the first of these is "The Book of the Street," in which Patrycja, Lukrecja, and Michał recall cruising in 1970s and 80s in Wrocław, a city on Poland's western border. The second section, "The Lewd Beach,"⁷ describes the capers of Michaśka and fellow queens on Lubiewo, the eponymous nude beach, again close to the German border (figured in the novel as the border of Europe). Here they reminisce about the past, but also have multiple unsettling encounters with "emancipated" gay men. In the last section, the "Atlas of Polish Queens," each chapter is loosely devoted to recurring characters in the novel, categorized into "types" of queens. Michał, the author's narrative proxy, blurs the line between the authorial and narrative voice which gives the book an "authentic," *reportage* feel, and the stories read as part autobiography, part ethnography, and part mythology, which results, as the narrator explains, in "a faggy Decameron."⁸

Perhaps "authenticity" is why *Lubiewo*'s narrative strategy oscillates between a kind of autofiction and the collection of oral histories. Autofiction, loosely defined, requires a narrator or main character who shares autobiographical details with the author. While autofiction can often confer a sense of veracity, it also lays bare the ambiguities inherent in story-telling. It both closes and widens the gap between author and narrator, inviting the reader to ascertain what is truth and what is fiction. The narrator Michał's biography closely echoes that of Witkowski--he is a Polonist from Wrocław, a doctoral student who experienced his sexual awakening amongst the

⁷ I've borrowed William Martin's excellent translation of the title of this section, as the original *Ciotowski Bicz* proves an exceptionally difficult pun to translate. *Bicz* is phonetically similar to both the English *beach* and *bitch*, and in Polish means *horsewhip*. Michał Witkowski, *Lovetown*, trans. W. Martin, (London: Portobello Books, 2010), 77.

⁸ Witkowski, *Lubiewo*, 80. Original: "Jakiś ciotowski *Dekameron* chcę tu odstawić."

queens and other outcasts in his teens (“It was 1988,” the story of the narrator’s first sexual encounter reads, “I was around fifteen.”⁹ Witkowski the author was born in 1975 and would have been thirteen---not a huge difference, but enough to mark the text as embellished, at the very least). But this authenticity also does something else--these similarities between author and narrator allow both to claim a certain gender and sexual identity that is referred to as *ciota* in the novel, to self-fashion as an “insider.” Literally, the word means “aunt,” but is probably best translated into English as a slang word meaning “queen” or the more pejorative “fag.” *Ciota* marks a very specific gender/sexual identity in Witkowski’s novel, one that is constructed as authentically “home-grown” Polish, but also as belonging to a socialist past (this is not generally true of the term outside of Witkowski’s novel-world, as it still functions today as a pejorative term). *Cioty* are effeminate, they “speak about themselves in the feminine, they pretend to be women,” although “they don’t want to be women at all, they want to be limp-wristed men. It’s what suits them, they’ve been that way their entire lives. The Dame Game.”¹⁰ In the post-socialist present, *cioty* (pl.) are represented as both irrelevant and endangered and are often pitted against the contemporary *gej*, or gay man, who tends to be obsessed with the discourse of LGBTQ rights and civic belonging. Similarly, Witkowski employs the word *luj*, a slang term specific to this queer culture of the 70s and 80s, to mark a very particular construction of masculinity. The closest English equivalent would probably be the term “trade” or “rough trade.” George Chauncey, in *Gay New York*, describes how terms like “trade” categorized types of homosexual masculinities, and specifically was used to mark heterosexual men who engaged in

⁹ Ibid., 38. Original: “Był rok osiemdziesiąty ósmy [...] miałem jakieś piętnaście lat.”

¹⁰ Ibid., 11-12. Original: „Mówią o sobie w rodzaju żeńskim, udają kobiety...” „Wcale nie chcą być kobietami, chcą być przegiętymi facetami. Tak im dobrze, to był ich sposób na całe życie. Zabawa w babę.”

homosexual activity.¹¹ The ideal *luje* in *Lubiewo* are uneducated, working class, highly masculine, heterosexual, and often are either Russian or imagined as such.

While Witkowski situates both himself and his narrator as participants in this sexual subculture through an autofictional narrative strategy and through strategic deployment of slang, the stories and anecdotes shared by other characters in the novel are equally important in establishing historical authority. Where the narrative “I” switches to other characters in the novel, it reads like a collection of interviews, much like oral histories. As Ann Cvetkovich observes, “oral history can capture something of the lived experience of participating in a counterpublic, offering, if nothing else, testimony to the fact that it existed. Often as ephemeral as the very cultures it seeks to document...oral history is loaded with emotional urgency and need.”¹² While oral histories often present methodological problems for the historian, they also can function as testimony, “an attempt to represent the unrepresentable.”¹³ They attest to the existence of this sexual subculture which otherwise would disappear, traces only existing in documented arrests or in personal archives like Patrycja’s and Lukrecja’s military paraphernalia. Whether these stories are factually accurate (or whether they even aspire to absolute factual accuracy within the novel-world) is beside the point; what matters is these narratives mark the subjective experiences that constitute this history--they constitute an “archive of feeling.” This is the history Witkowski seeks to explore--not a collection of dates and facts, but of ephemeral encounters, ecstasies and traumas that take place outside of, alongside, and even despite, larger national narratives.

¹¹ George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World 1890-1940*. (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 21-22.

¹² Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 166.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 167.

However, *Lubiewo* doesn't just chronicle the otherwise unrepresentable histories of marginalized sexual communities. One of the most "blasphemous" aspects of Witkowski's novel is its transformation of a political and military occupation of Poland into a sexual playground. We return now to the "nasty barracks-baggage" which saturates the words "dick," "ass," "blowjob," and "trade." The Old Girls wax nostalgic about their favorite spot—the barracks full of lonely Soviet soldiers. They share their memorabilia with the reporter Michał—a leather bag full of decrepit mementos and relics from those Russian soldiers that is only opened on special occasions, "to preserve the fragrance." They shout,

"The fragrance will get out! For God's sake don't open it! We only open them on anniversaries..." They'd stashed their sorry relics in the bags: soldiers' belts, knives, foot wrappings, a few sepia or black-and-white photos torn from identity cards with the purple half-moons of large invalid seals, on them mugshots of twenty-something Russian musclemen with potato noses, wholesome, shoemakers' faces. Or ugly and crooked mugs, forelocks of hair hanging over their foreheads. Dedications in Cyrillic on the back. Over the kitchen door, instead of a holy icon, they have a length of rusty barbed wire hanging from a nail. They'd cut it down recently; it came away easily, they twisted it a bit to the right, left, done. They stuffed their pockets with the barbed wire, so they'd have some for Uterina and the others, for later on, when there was nothing left.¹⁴

They've painstakingly gathered materials from the ruins of the barracks, as those reminders of Soviet occupation are being bulldozed to make way for new malls, office buildings, parking lots, and other hallmarks of capitalism (and by extension, consumerism). Their nostalgia indexes the ever-widening gap between their youth under socialism and Poland's new capitalist reality, but it also belies a fetishization of the soldiers who were stationed in Poland as a reminder of Soviet

¹⁴ Witkowski, *Lubiewo*, 21. Original: „--Zapach, zapach, wywietrzeje zapach! Boże broń nie otwierać! Otwieramy tylko w Rocznice.—W środku trzymają swoje zawsze relikwie: żołnierskie pasy, noże, onuce, jakieś brązowe albo czarno-białe zdjęcia wyrwane z legitymacji, z fioletowymi półksiężycami wielkich, nieakualnych pieczęci. Na nich ruskie mordy dwudziestoletnich osiłków, kartoflane nosy, gęby szewskie i dobre. Albo złe, krzywe ryje. W ząbek czesane. Z tyłu dedykacje grażdanką. Nad drzwiami do kuchni, zamiast świętego obrazka, na gwoźdźniku zawieszony mają kawałek zardzewiałego drutu kołczastego – urwały sobie teraz, niedawno, łatwo odpadł, trochę pokręciły w lewo, w prawo, i już. Napchały tego drutu całe kieszenie, żeby i dla Macicznej i dla innych było na potem, gdy nic tu nie będzie.”

dominance, a longing for those potato-faced Russian recruits who literally dominated the queens as they kneeled on the dirty barrack floors or spread their legs joyfully, lying on slag heaps. The above scene is suffused with religious imagery, as the *cioty* have replaced the icons and other religious paraphernalia common to Catholic Polish households with items representative of Russian military occupation: barbed wire hangs where the Virgin Mary might otherwise be; official military identification papers replace the prayer cards given for sacraments, funerals, and other moments of religious significance; revered holy relics are comprised of various accoutrements of Soviet army uniforms. Blasphemous indeed, given that Polish Catholicism, considered the bedrock of Polish national identity, was antithetical to Soviet ideology, not to mention the fact that Polish national identity itself constructs itself, at least in part, to historical opposition to Russia and Russian control. The *cioty* have created their own archive, one that evidences their sexual experiences, but also speaks to the Soviet Union's military presence in Poland. This is the "nasty barracks-baggage"--not only are their illicit sexual ecstasies unrepresentable, but their willingness to give themselves up freely (specifically, their orifices) to Russian penetration interrogates the coherence and legitimacy of the Polish narrative of resistance. The Russian soldiers fuck the Polish queens in what is presented as the most coveted sexual experience in the entire novel, an encounter between the colonizer and colonized which I also read as a relation between a top and bottom, dominant and submissive. The designation "top" and "bottom" can be prove problematic, as these designations are not necessarily coterminous with "dom" and "sub," although they occasionally overlap. In *Lubiewo*, however, I argue that they do indeed correspond, although the relations of power are flexible.¹⁵

¹⁵ Błażej Warkocki notes that the *cioty*, who are highly feminine and feminized in the novel, can be read as somewhat misogynistic; women in the novel are meant to be imitated, but are also looked down upon. Błażej Warkocki, *Różowy język: Literatura i polityka kultury na początku wieku* (Warsaw: Krytyka Polityczna, 2013), 120.

Lubiewo, therefore, performs a (contested) colonialism, that, as I later explore, is unique to Eastern European experiences of Russian or Soviet political or territorial expansion. The novel plays with tropes of colonial narratives, often enacting specific features of Polish postcolonial academic and political discourse in order to challenge the conservative ideology that underlies the idea that Poland is a postcolonial space. *Lubiewo* Others the colonizer (in this case, Russian soldiers), as many countries and cultures west of Russia do, positing them as rough, backwards, simple--but it deviates from the former satellite states' script, so to speak, by positioning them as the ultimate object of desire. Whereas Poland is often talked about in terms of servility to the West/European Union (Tomasz Kitlinski and Joe Lockhard characterize Poland's political and military slavery to the US as "spreading its buttocks" in a master-slave dialectic¹⁶), Witkowski's heroines locate a sexual utopia in Russian occupation and enact a "colonial bottoming," or an ecstatic masochistic position with national and sexual signification, to the East, producing unexpected pleasures. Polish national identity, is, after all, as Timothy Garton Ash notes, "historically defined in opposition to Russia."¹⁷ In *Lubiewo* the power dynamic of Polish-Russian relations not only makes possible the pleasurable sexual contact between the two nationalities, but also the "radical disintegration and humiliation of the [national] self," to misquote Leo Bersani.¹⁸ Witkowski, enacting a kind of colonial roleplay in *Lubiewo*, interrogates the mainstream Polish historical narrative of moving from oppression to freedom, occupation to autonomy, stagnation to development, as well as narratives of progress tied to capitalism and globalization. *Lubiewo* challenges these tropes through a mapping of pleasures derived from occupation; it takes its pleasure in the "bad" socialist past, and in a decidedly queer Slavic

¹⁶ Tomasz Kitlinski and Joe Lockhard, "Sex Slavery and Queer Resistance in Eastern Europe," *Bad Subjects* 69 (June 2004). http://bad.eserver.org/issues/2004/69/kitlinski_lockard.html

¹⁷ Timothy Garton Ash, *The Polish Revolution: Solidarity* (London: J. Cape, 1983), 5.

¹⁸ Leo Bersani, "Is the Rectum a Grave?" *October* 43 (1987): 217.

brotherhood, one that allows flexible and pleasurable power relations between the Russian and the Pole. However, it also falls into the same trap that it purports to avoid. The novel, through its proffered, playful, erotic alternative to processing the postcolonial traumas used by conservative forces for ethno-nationalist ends, problematically essentializes those very traumas by positing the possibility of a Polish ethnonational authenticity that predates the alleged colonial moment, therefore ultimately enforcing the ideology behind the colonial narrative it works so hard to undo.

***Lubiewo* as Literary Phenomenon**

In order to better understand how *Lubiewo* functions as a reaction to late twentieth and twenty-first century discourses around Polish national identity and its relation to Russian “colonialism,” it is important to explore the conditions of the novel’s possibility and the circumstances of its reception in Poland. Defiantly explicit and stylistically flamboyant, *Lubiewo* garnered immediate recognition within the mainstream press. While other Polish novels had already broached the subject of same-sex desire (mostly between men, although Izabela Filipiak and Ewa Schilling are notable exceptions), none had ever come close to attaining the commercial and critical success of *Lubiewo*.

Lubiewo was first published in January 2005 by Kraków-based publisher Ha!Art.¹⁹ Ha!Art began printing novels in 2001, but *Lubiewo* perhaps constitutes its first large-scale commercial success. The press is known for publishing texts by new or marginal authors whose

¹⁹ Some sources list *Lubiewo* as first published in 2004. In a private communique with literary scholar Błażej Warkocki, I was informed that it was indeed released in December 2004, but the quality of the print run was so bad (missing pages, etc) that the press re-released it a month later with a 2005 publishing date. Błażej Warkocki, Facebook message with author, November 28, 2015.

titles “sometimes penetrate forbidden, peripheral territories and unrepresented worlds.”²⁰ Indeed, *Lubiewo* fits the bill perfectly, as most of the (sexually explicit) action takes place in dark corners of parks, or piss-stained public toilets. Witkowski, however, had also worked closely with the editors of Ha!Art and had co-produced an anthology in 2002 entitled *Tekstyli: O rocznikach siedemdziesiątych (Tekstyli: Born in the 70s)*, a heterogeneous tome of literary works, criticism, and biographies. Witkowski’s familiarity with Ha!Art, their willingness to publish controversial material, and their reputation as an intellectual, artistic press all provided a nurturing environment for *Lubiewo*’s publication and eventual critical success.

Witkowski’s substantial literary talent was highlighted in almost every review; even his detractors admitted it was a well-crafted, original novel and that Witkowski had an extraordinary ear for language. Dariusz Nowacki notes that the merit of *Lubiewo* stems from Witkowski’s ability to weave together heterogeneous voices and styles. He writes, “Witkowski alludes to the style and imagination of Genet (dark, saturated with evil and marred by crime), where elsewhere he tries to elevate the stories of aging queers, making speeches like Stasiuk in ‘The Walls of Hebron,’ in many places he writes comically, using subtle irony....it seems that it’s a kind of mixture of revulsion and fascination, of identification and distance.”²¹ It is precisely this type of praise that critics use to distance Witkowski from a social agenda. As one reviewer put it, “Above all, it’s wonderful prose, a literary masterpiece, but not a social manifesto; Witkowski is perhaps one of the most interesting writers of the younger generation, but he’s not a gay

²⁰ Filip Modrzejewski, “Korporacja Ha!art, Kraków,” *Culture.pl*, July 2008. <http://culture.pl/pl/miejsce/korporacja-haart-krakow>.

²¹ Dariusz Nowacki, “*Lubiewo*, Witkowski, Michał,” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, January 3, 2005, <http://wyborcza.pl/1,75517,2475361.html#ixzz3yttlPq7c>, Accessed May 5, 2014. Original: “Witkowski nawiązuje do stylu i wyobraźni Geneta (mroczne, nasycone złem i naznaczone zbrodnią klimaty), gdzie indziej opowieści podstarzałych pedałów próbuje uwznioślić i wówczas przemawia jak Stasiuk w „Murach Hebronu”, w wielu miejscach pisze dowcipnie, z użyciem subtelnej ironii [...] wydaje się, że jest to jakaś mieszanina obrzydzenia i fascynacji, utożsamienia i dystansu.”

activist.”²² Indeed this distance is in part fashioned by the author himself.²³ In an early digital foreword to the novel, Witkowski somewhat preemptively complained, “I’m afraid that if this book was to appear in the press or on TV it would be transformed to fit the media’s own needs. Something individual and unique would be silenced while something that isn’t actually there would be highlighted—Holland, adoption, etc. They’d want to connect the book to the fight for rights, make it into a ‘manifesto,’ ‘the first Polish gay novel,’ etc.”²⁴ Notwithstanding that this novel is by no means the first “gay” novel in Polish literature,²⁵ Witkowski appears to reject his role as activist or spokesperson and wants instead to be acknowledged as an artist. This deferral of identity politics in favor of art can be read as purposeful self-fashioning, especially as the success of the novel can in part be attributed to the activities promoting the visibility of the LGBTQ movement in Poland (and the subsequent scandal) at the time it was published. Witkowski could therefore pursue his persona as an “authentic” *ciota* while distancing himself from the activism he criticizes in the novel, the very activism that provided a discursive context for the reception of his book.

The historical moment in which *Lubiewo* was published constituted the very possibility of its success, particularly in relation to growing visibility of LGBT identity politics. While it is difficult to pinpoint the precise origins of Poland’s LGBT rights movement, most scholars agree

²² Marek Radziwon, “‘Lubiewo’ Michała Witkowskiego,” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, June 4, 2006. <http://wyborcza.pl/1,81845,3394889.html#ixzz33Q496uSS> Accessed May 5, 2014.

²³ Warkocki, *Różowy język*, 110.

²⁴ Witkowski, “Pedalstwo a Dominujący Dyskurs Medialny,” January 12, 2005, <http://ksiazki.onet.pl/fragmenty-ksiazek/wirtualne-poslowie-do-lubiewa/yzht3> Original: “Boję się jednak, że - jeśli książka ta miałaby zaistnieć w prasie czy TV - media będą musiały przerobić ją na swoją modłę. To, co prywatne i jednostkowe - przemilczeć, wydobyć zaś to, czego w rzeczywistości wcale tam nie ma: Holandię, adopcję, itd. Podłączyć książkę pod "walkę o prawa", zrobić z niej "manifest", "pierwszą polską książkę gejowską" itd.”

²⁵ Numerous projects collecting and “uncovering” “Polish homosexual literature” exist. See Wojciech Śmieja, *Literatura, której nie ma: szkice o polskiej "literaturze homoseksualnej"* (Kraków: Universitas, 2010); German Ritz, *Nić w labiryncie pożądania: Gender i płęć w literaturze polskiej od romantyzmu do postmodernizmu*, (Warsaw: Wiedza Powszechna, 2002); and Błażej Warkocki, *Homo niewiadomo: Polska proza wobec odmienności* (Warsaw: Sic!, 2007).

that it began under Communism, before the collapse of the PRL and the various transitions into a capitalist economy. Homosexuality was a taboo topic both in popular and scientific discourse under Communism; in the fifty years or so of the PRL's existence, there were only about fifty published articles that mentioned homosexuality.²⁶ In the 1980s, however, there was some informal organization around sexuality, mostly in the form of zines and AIDS awareness. In 1985, the Communist government launched "Operation Hyacinth," a police action whose task was to identify and document the homosexuals in the country, as well as gather as much information about the individuals as possible (especially if they were involved in Solidarity, the trade union opposition movement). The operation resulted in a database of "pink cards" which sometimes included signed statements testifying that the individuals were not interested in children. The government justified its actions as a preventative measure against the spread of HIV, and claimed this was an attempt to keep tabs on the gay community ("criminogenic" by nature) and associated spread of prostitution.²⁷ The operation officially ended in 1987, although the collection of "pink cards" didn't stop until 1988. By the end of Operation Hyacinth, the database held files on over 11,000 individuals. The threat of police harassment and fear of being politically manipulated by the government led many gay men and women to hide their sexuality. Although many gays and lesbians view "Hyacinth" as the catalyst for what would later develop into a coherent LGBTQ movement (sometimes analogized as a Polish "Stonewall"), it wasn't until the late 1990s/early 2000s that large-scale LGBTQ activism went "mainstream."²⁸

Campaign Against Homophobia (KPH), the largest LGBTQ NGO in Poland, was formed in 2001. This non-profit organization seeks to provide psychological and legal services to non-

²⁶ Paweł Kurpios, *Poszukiwani, poszukiwane. Geje i lesbijki a rzeczywistość PRL*, quoted in Błażej Warkocki, *Różowy język*, 58.

²⁷ Krzysztof Tomasik *Gejereł. Mniejszości seksualne w PRL-u* (Warsaw: Krytyka Polityczna, 2012)m 43-44.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 44.

heterosexual Poles, institute educational programs on sexual and gender identity, build a Polish LGBTQ identity through cultural events (movies, exhibits, lectures), as well as conduct social awareness initiatives. In 2003, KPH spearheaded a national visibility campaign called “Let Them See Us” (*Niech nas zobaczą*) the first major LGBTQ initiative of its kind in Poland. Working with galleries in major cities, KPH curated a photo exhibition comprised of same-sex couples holding hands. Eventually these portraits of couples were translated into billboards and were picked up by newspapers/periodicals. As a media blitz, the exhibition’s purpose was to demonstrate that gay couples were just “regular people.”²⁹ The images were exclusively of gay and lesbian couples (no inclusion of transfolk) and all represented a kind of middle-class respectability that was presented as “unremarkable,” hence “normal.”



Figure 4.1. Image from KPH's "Let Them See Us" Campaign (Source: “Niech Nas Zobaczą” Campaign website, <https://web.archive.org/web/20110817075516/http://niechnaszobacza.queers.pl/strony/galeria.htm>)

²⁹ Rafał Majka, “ Polityka tożsamościowa organizacji gejowsko-lesbijskich w Polsce a polityka ‘queer,’” *Interalia 3* (2008/2009) http://www.interalia.org.pl/pl/artykuly/20082009_3/08_polityka_tozsamosciowa_organizacji_gejowskolesbijskich_w_polsce_a_polityka.htm

The campaign spawned a massive discussion about homosexuality in the press, generating headlines (mostly in right-leaning publications, although the campaign was covered, and sometimes attacked, in more mainstream sources) like, “Deviant Campaign” and “Advertising Pathology OK with Directors of the EU.”³⁰ Billboards were destroyed and, under pressure from city governments, many of the galleries pulled support for the exhibitions. Some of the people who appeared in the photographs were fired from their jobs. Despite the negative backlash, the “Let Them See Us” campaign helped to produce a discursive territory in which topics like homophobia and same-sex desire could be talked about openly, albeit within the limiting framework of identity politics.³¹

Błażej Warkocki identifies an “epistemological shift” during this time period, beginning in the 1990s, of which both the “Let Them See Us” campaign (and the aggressive response to it) and Witkowski’s novel were a manifestation.³² Warkocki describes “a specific, tectonic shift in culture” which “revealed that which was invisible, and allowed one to speak of that which had been surrounded by walls of silence.”³³ He contends that though same-sex desire and sexual acts obviously existed and were already described in literature (explicitly or implicitly, although in the latter case often unrecognized), homosexuality-as-identity (and its correlates, heterosexuality and homophobia) were all but absent in Polish public discourse until the late 1990s. After this epistemological shift took place roughly around 2000, Warkocki asserts that sexual identity

³⁰ Krzysztof Tomasik, “Wtedy nas zobaczyli,” *Queer.pl*, March 15, 2010, <http://queer.pl/artykul/186869/wtedy-nas-zobaczyli>.

³¹ Warkocki claims that the word “homophobia” (or *homofobia*) never appeared in writing prior to the advent of the Campaign Against Homophobia. Błażej Warkocki, *Różowy język*, 9.

³² *Ibid.*, 144. Warkocki doesn’t pinpoint the date of the shift precisely, but uses the year 2000 as a point of orientation.

³³ *Ibid.*, 146. Original: “Chodziłoby o swoiste tektoniczne tąpnięcie klutury, które odsłoniło to, co widoczne, i pozwoliło mówić o tym, co otaczały kręgi milczenia.”

became thematized, along with the “coming-out” narratives that characterized much of Polish lesbian and gay literature at the turn of the twenty-first century. We may read *Lubiewo* as an intervention, or reaction, to the sudden adoption of gay and lesbian identities which Witkowski describes as “Western.” Against the backdrop of KPH’s activities and other expressions of an LGBTQ political identity, *Lubiewo* could attain the kind of media exposure that it ultimately attracted, as well as be shortlisted in 2006 for the prestigious, highly publicized literary award, the Nike.

Witkowski’s critics often used the word “opportunism” to describe the publication of the novel, as it appeared during the very turbulent era of the nascent Polish LGBTQ rights movement. While one could interpret the novel as opportunistic, a better term to describe it would be reactive—it vehemently reacted to the sudden, and selective, visibility of a so-called respectable urban gay middle class shaped by mainstream activism. The protagonists of *Lubiewo* are not middle class; after the economic transition to capitalism, they barely scrape by. They are also not respectable, as their “addiction to sex” drives them to roam parks and public toilets by night, chasing after potentially drunk and dangerous men. And finally, they are not *gej* (gay)... that term Witkowski reserves exclusively for the Americanized, buff, shaven men who storm the nude beach with their volleyballs and motorcycles. The novel very clearly draws a demarcation between the *ciota* of socialism who cannot adjust to life in the twenty-first century and the thriving *gej* of the new capitalist era with his emancipatory rhetoric. While lying on the beach, Michaśka is approached by the “group from Poznań”—one with bleached dreads, another with a tattoo, all highly masculine. The narrator mentions a book-in-progress about them, and the men immediately seize upon the idea:

You have to write a book about us, us Gays... it should be the story of two middle class gay men, educated, graduate students in management and finance, who wear glasses and sweaters... they spend the morning in one bed watching one tiny television, they eat tomato sandwiches for breakfast from one tiny plate... Oh and they have a long-term relationship and want to adopt a child, but they run into problems. Society, you know, doesn't want to accept them, although they're quiet and cultured, which the reader sees. You have to have a stark contrast, so make the neighbors have a horribly failed relationship, make them drink and beat their kids, but the state doesn't refuse them an adoption, but refuses the gays who could have had a little boy (a boy!) snug as a bug in a rug. Then the reader will see for himself how unfair it all is...³⁴

Once again, the author paints the modern gay man as educated, well-groomed, and middle-class, committed to a monogamous, loving relationship in which sex plays a secondary role; what's important to these men is sharing every banal aspect of each other's lives, down to their plateware. Witkowski pokes fun at the tragedy of such couples, namely, that they are the victims of a homophobic society even though they are ideal citizens and consumers. The centering of the adoption in this narrative again highlights that reproduction via the nuclear family is the goal. This picturesque gay couple is portrayed in stark contrast to the *ciota*, who is generally single (although often living with other *cioty* out of affection or, more likely, economic necessity), driven by sex, working or lower-middle class (or, in the postcommunist era, living off of a meager pension), and apolitical.

As Warkocki points out, the novel's success is partially dependent on a strategy of "divide and conquer." *Gej* is pitted against *ciota*, but other conflicts are also mapped onto this binary. Artificial and natural, Western and native (Eastern), active and passive, Capitalist and

³⁴ Witkowski, *Lubiewo*, 152. Original: "Napisz koniecznie książkę o nas, o nas—Gejach... Musi to być historia dwóch gejów z klasy średniej, z wyższym wykształceniem, doktorantów z zarządzania i finansów, w okularach, w sweterkach... Leżą rano w jednym łóżeczku, oglądają jeden telewizorek, jedzą na śniadanie kanapkę z pomidorem z jednego telerzyka... No i oni stworzyli trwałą związek i chcą adoptować dziecko, ale napotykają na problem. Społeczeństwo, rozumiesz, ich nie chce zaakceptować, choć są kulturalni i spokojni, co czytelnik widzi. Aby kontrast był większy, niech sąsiedzi mają potwornie nieudane związki, niech piją i biją swoje dzieci, ale im Państwo nie odmówi adopcji, a im, u których miałby chłopiec (chłopiec!) jak u pana Boga za piecem—odmówi. Żeby czytelnik sam widział, jakie to wszystko niesprawiedliwe..."

Communism, young and old, wealthy and destitute— these are all facets of the initial *gej/ciota* dichotomy.³⁵ *Lubiewo* “documents” a sexual culture that is relegated to a pre-emancipatory, pre-capitalist, pre-Western time-space; in many ways it is a return to what is now thought of and discussed as a colonial moment. The novel’s nostalgia for a time past is perhaps more than just a yearning for a dying sexual culture; as Dominic Boyer suggests, “nostalgia is an indexical practice, a mode of inhabiting the lived world through defining oneself situationally and positionally in it... it can never be entirely separated from ongoing politics of identification and belonging.”³⁶ In addition to registering disappointment, or even disgust, with present identity politics in Poland, the novel also indexes the social upheaval precipitated by the economic transition, or “economic shock therapy” as it was implemented in Poland in the early 1990s.³⁷ The “positive” aspects of the economic transition and its effects are embedded in an even broader postcolonial discourse that appears consistently, albeit in slightly different forms, across Eastern Europe, and shapes national narratives of progress and self-determination after 1989. In Poland’s case, only after escaping the clutches of a vilified, colonizing Russia (and Soviet Union) could the nation (re)join the “West.” Of course, this was considered a great feat, as Poland’s “destiny” had been repeatedly thwarted by Russia’s overwhelming desire to consume and control its neighbors.

³⁵ Warkocki, *Różowy język*, 135.

³⁶ Dominic Boyer, “Nostalgic Eastern Europe and Postimperial Mania,” in *Postcommunist Nostalgia*, eds. Maria Todorova and Zsuzsa Gille (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010), 20-21.

³⁷ Poland’s specific economic transition was engineered primarily by Leszek Balcerowicz and Jeffery Sachs. Poland’s “shock therapy” included withdrawal of price and currency controls, state subsidies, and the closure of many state-owned businesses. The economic transition disproportionately affected the elderly (as demonstrated in *Lubiewo*).

Coming Out of the Colonial Closet

Wystarczy, że pochodzę z kraju położonego na wschód od Zachodu i na zachód od Wschodu.

It's enough to say that I come from a country that's to the east of the West and west of the East.

-Sławomir Mrożek, *Contract* ³⁸

Lubiewo takes up the question of Russian colonialism and Polish victimhood by mobilizing and theatricalizing---or perhaps even caricaturing---certain threads of colonial and postcolonial narratives, among them military occupation, linguistic oppression or dilution, and gendered relations, metaphorical or otherwise, of sexual domination and rape. While the Russian soldiers themselves figure in only a few anecdotes, references to Russian culture and a certain kind of Slavic essentialism (sometimes blurrily combined with Russian imperialism) are littered throughout the novel. Indeed, in many cases, they structure not only the imagination and sexual desires of the queens, but are deeply engrained in the novel's dense intertextuality. Before I analyze these instances, however, it is worth taking a moment to outline the postcolonial debate and its relation to conservative nationalist discourses, both of which Witkowski gleefully attempts to skewer.

Whether Poland can be considered “postcolonial” has been debated heatedly in both Polish academic and popular discourses. Many consider the term appropriate in light of Poland's history; as the coveted object of imperial designs in the late eighteenth century, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was partitioned by Russia, Prussia, and the Austro-Hungarian Empires, and as a result Poland as a geo-political entity ceased to exist from 1795 until 1918. Then from 1918 until 1939 it functioned as an autonomous state, but World War II saw it divided

³⁸ Sławomir Mrożek, “Kontrakt,” in *Teatr I: Dzieła zebrane Tom III* (Warsaw: Noir Sur Blanc, 1995), 271.

between Nazi Germany and the USSR. After the devastation of World War II, Poland was reconstituted as the Soviet-backed Polish People's Republic. While the PRL technically lay beyond the borders of the USSR, many Polish historical narratives tend to regard this period as Soviet occupation. However, other critics argue that imperialist incursions into sovereign Polish territory in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries were fundamentally different from "classic" colonialist examples which have been theorized extensively in American and Western European academic circles, and therefore must be talked about in new, more geographically and historically specific terms. These debates, while they employ multiple arguments, are at heart not so much about the countries of Eastern Europe as authentic postcolonial space as they are about the ambiguous and mutable nature of "postcoloniality" itself, and the moral and cultural implications of identifying as postcolonial.

The term *postcolonialism*, it seems, has become somewhat overdetermined. Originally meant to describe relations of power between Western European colonial projects and colonized populations after the latter attained independence, scholars have applied it as a hermeneutic in literary studies, history, anthropology, economics and other fields.³⁹ In addition to being disciplinarily promiscuous, it is, in one way or another, theoretically applicable to every region and culture in the world. David Chioni Moore, in his call for the complete globalization of postcolonial theory, writes, "the worldwide encounters of the past two hundred years... were so global and widespread, in unstandardizable diversity, that every human being and every literature on the planet today stands in relation to them: as neo-, endo- and ex-, as post- and non-."⁴⁰ The flexibility of the term and its applicability to a wide range of phenomena puts it, however, at risk

³⁹ Alfred J Lopez, *Posts and Pasts: A Theory of Postcolonialism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 121.

⁴⁰ David Chioni Moore, "Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet?" in *On the Boundary of Two Worlds: Identity, Freedom, and Moral Imagination in the Baltics: Baltic Postcolonialism* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), 20.

of losing its analytical force. As Alfred J. López elegantly puts it, “the very overdetermination of the term... its very inflation as a signifier, comes as a quite mimetic consequence of its efficacy.”⁴¹ And yet, despite the term’s apparent ubiquity, Eastern Europe and Eurasia seem comparatively under-theorized.

Moore, in his widely cited article “Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet? Toward a Global Postcolonial Critique,” argues that Eastern Europe has been largely ignored in the context of postcolonial studies. He, and other well-known scholars of Eastern Europe like Clare Cavanagh and Ewa Thompson, point to former Soviet and Soviet-influenced territories as a “blank space” on the postcolonial map. Moore’s argument hinges upon a cursory literature review of recent postcolonial theory, yet his analysis of these works is convincing. For example, he lists all of the countries that Ella Shohat mentions in “Notes on the Postcolonial,” and the twenty-seven countries of Eastern Europe and Eurasia that comprise those regions are conspicuously absent. Shohat does allude to the Soviet Union, but those references are almost entirely associated with its collapse, and in addition are limited to a concern for the impact of its dissolution on Third World communities. Moore uses this example to demonstrate a kind of unconscious blind spot in postcolonial studies, which he and a handful of other scholars began to interrogate in the 1990s.

Moore is joined by Cavanagh, Thompson, and Dariusz Skórczewski in hypothesizing why this gap in the literature, especially in foundational texts, exists. An accusation common to these scholars is that the Marxist origins of postcolonial studies in the West blinded colonial/postcolonial theorists to the imperial nature of the Soviet Union and its predecessor,

⁴¹ Alfred J. Lopez, “Introduction: Whiteness After Empire” in *Postcolonial Whiteness: A Critical Reader on Race and Empire* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 7.

Tsarist Russia. Moore discusses the widespread belief that the First World largely caused Third World ills, and that the Second World seemed to be the best alternative. He claims Marxist or leftist scholars were “reluctant to make the Soviet Union a colonial villain on the scale of France or Britain,” especially as theories emerging in the 1980s located capitalist expansion as a key factor in colonialist projects.⁴² Cavanagh terms this absence a “strategic forgetfulness” on the part of postcolonialist theorists. Skórczewski, while agreeing with Moore and Cavanagh, gives a less theoretical and more concretely historical reason, which may be, ultimately, more convincing. The USSR officially supported independence movements in the “Third World,” in accordance with Marxist tenets, and financially and politically supported Communist activists struggling to assert themselves against Western colonial powers. This, of course, has been interpreted by most scholars as advancing Soviet interests, rather than Marxist idealism; however, solidarity between leftist academics and the USSR, both committed to actual political projects that tried to reclaim colonized territories and cultures, seems a reasoning more substantial than purely ideological affiliation. The irony, however, of Soviet anti-colonialism when it was engaged in its own imperial projects (such as in those countries that were militarily coerced into the USSR or satellite-statehood) is not lost.⁴³

⁴² Moore, “Is the Post- in Postcolonial,” 20.

⁴³ Perhaps the most convincing argument, seductive from my perspective, is Skórczewski’s assertion that the fault lies not entirely with postcolonial theorists or the region itself, but rather with the essentially imperial “archaic structure of Slavic Studies” formed in the 1950s, a discipline which “favors the metropolitan center at the expense of the periphery.” He writes: “American Slavic Studies, dominated by armies of Russian and Soviet historians and Russianists raised in the cult of Pushkin, Tolstoy, and Russian ballet, tirelessly minimize the import of national literatures of East-Central Europe, which leads to the perpetuation of their unequal status in relation to ‘great’ Russian literature, and therefore backs up the imperial vision of culture, with which English, Romance, and Iberian scholars have already dealt well.” This model, jokingly nicknamed “Tolstoevsky Studies,” is still alive and well today, however in recent years tremendous strides have been made in incorporating other regions and theoretical paradigms into Slavic Studies. Nevertheless, the study of Russia still dominates the field. Dariusz Skórczewski, “Postkolonialna Polska—projekt (nie)możliwy,” *Teksty Drugie*, 1-2 (2006): 102-103.

Ideological and political enmity aside, whether the Russian Empire/USSR and Eastern Europe “fit” a colonial/postcolonial model is another argument. This line of questioning more closely interrogates the criteria by which countries have been traditionally defined as “Western,” “colonial/imperial,” “colonized,” “postcolonial,” etc. Liviu Andreescu posits that Eastern Europe’s relations with Russia and the USSR simply don’t conform to a postcolonial paradigm. He argues that the political and administrative structure of “satellite” countries retained a level of autonomy that countries colonized by Great Britain or France, for example, did not have. He also points out that native languages and cultures were generally preserved, even though the USSR (and the Russian Empire preceding it) did attempt many forms of Russification, especially in the Soviet republics and amongst indigenous ethnic groups in Russia, and also pressured other ostensibly autonomous countries like Poland to mandate Russian instruction in schools. Andreescu also spends considerable time describing the internal differences between Soviet republics and Soviet satellite states in order to demonstrate the dangers of generalizing the region as postcolonial.⁴⁴ Moore, a proponent of seeing Eastern Europe through a postcolonial lens, takes a different approach and criticizes some seemingly arbitrary criteria by which colonialism is usually described. He points out the strange “primacy” of water, or overseas conquest, in Said’s *Culture and Imperialism*, and contrasts it to the development of Russian imperialism, which primarily expanded through acquiring territory adjacent to its borders. The geographic position of the colonized relative to the colonizer, Moore suggests, should not be a defining feature of colonial expansion, yet it seems this is one of the major sticking points.⁴⁵ Postcolonial theory, he and others argue, should not be limited to certain regions merely because of their geographical

⁴⁴ Liviu Andreescu, “Are We All Postcolonialists now? Postcolonialism and Postcommunism in Central and Eastern Europe” in *Postcolonialism/Postcommunism: Intersections and Overlaps*, eds. Monica Bottez, Maria-Sabina Draga Alexandru, and Bogdan Stefanescu (Bucharest: University of Bucharest Press, 2010), 57-74.

⁴⁵ Moore, “Is the Post- in Postcolonial,” 23.

proximity to the “center,” but rather should be thought in terms of economic and cultural relations.

Eastern Europe, and Poland in particular, occupy an ambivalent position in regards to any center, be it economic, geographic, or cultural. On the one hand, Poland belonged to a political, economic, administrative, and to some extent cultural empire with Moscow as the “center” for much of the nation’s history, whether it be under the Partitions or as a Soviet satellite state, and on the other, as many have claimed, Poles looked to the West for their intellectual and moral template. This strange positioning results in many deviations from the classic colonial/postcolonial model and, perhaps most strikingly, reverses the directionality of orientalization. Poland and many other Eastern European countries who found themselves under Russian influence orientalize their colonizers, or perhaps more accurately, orientalize Russia in the same way that the rest of Europe and the “West” does, while simultaneously succumbing to the complexes inherent in being orientalized by the West. As we will soon see, *Lubiewo* directly confronts this through an enactment of contested orientalized/orientalizing subjectivity, where Russians are both Eastern brothers united against the West and sexualized, exotic Others.

Nataša Kovačević, in describing the ways in which Eastern Europe orientalizes Russia, uses Polish author Joseph Conrad as an example:

Conrad establishes Orientalist themes that we will see reverberating throughout the texts written during communist and post-communist periods. For Conrad, Russia is a semi-Asiatic country which has no place meddling in European affairs; even the worst European autocracies guilty of militant imperialism preserve a sense of ethical decency, responsibility and rationality, but Russia is "an abyss of mental darkness" based upon irrationality, illogicality, mysticism and "the apathy of hopeless fatalism" (*The Works of Joseph Conrad* 98).⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Natasa Kovacevic, *Narrating Post/Communism: Colonial Discourse and Europe's Borderline Civilization*. (London: Routledge, 2008), 11.

Kovačević contends that Conrad's pre-revolution description of Russia and Russian culture as essentially "backwards" and "barbaric" continues throughout the twentieth century (and now, I might add, persists in the twenty-first), where Communism, often equated explicitly or implicitly with Russians, is also depicted in such terms, and always set against a more enlightened, civilized West. Kovačević uses the examples of Czesław Miłosz, Milan Kundera, and Joseph Brodsky to make her point; these authors are all emigre-exiles who found themselves in the awkward position of having to engage the same kinds of orientalizing discourses that they themselves were subjected to as "Eastern Europeans." These authors are well-known for their meditations on the moral implications of totalitarianism and its effects on the individual. Aleksander Fiut, following the line of reasoning set forth in Miłosz's *The Captive Mind*, describes the Communist regime: "insidiously, day after day, it was shaping reactions and attitudes, ways of thinking and of perceiving reality, influencing not only all aspects of daily life, but also morality."⁴⁷ Communism is thus constructed as foreign (Russian or Soviet, but definitely not Polish), fundamentally misguided, if not immoral, and diametrically opposed to all things "West."

In literary criticism, too, orientalist depictions of Russia abound. Ewa Thompson, in her book *Imperial Knowledge: Russian Literature and Colonialism*, a central text in Polish postcolonial studies, interprets some of the "great works" of Russian literature with an eye toward Russia's various colonial projects. Essentially, her aim is to prove that Tsarist Russia, the Soviet Union, and post-Soviet Russia all engaged in colonial projects, and have escaped Western criticism for the previously mentioned reasons. However, her project enacts the same type of

⁴⁷ Aleksander Fiut, "In the Shadow of Empires. Postcolonialism in Central and Eastern Europe—Why Not?" April 24, 2009, accessed May 25, 2014. <http://www.postcolonial-europe.eu/uk/essays/58--in-the-shadow-of-empires-.html>.

orientalism that she accuses Tolstoy, Lermontov, and Pushkin of perpetrating in their works. For example, she writes concerning Russia's imperial project, "the inordinate territorial appetite of the Russians was also to blame to lack of success in assimilating minorities; there is just so much that a relatively weakly developed culture can absorb and make its own. Most of all, Russian culture lacked a firm philosophical base, which the West so abundantly possessed and which served as an excuse for its 'civilising' conquest."⁴⁸ Even within an academic text that purports to describe historical phenomena, it is easy to read familiar essentializing tropes of Russian "backwardness," "barbarity," and "inferiority" vis-à-vis the West in her assessment of Russian colonialism, and these tropes strongly echo those found in Said's *Orientalism*. In response to the suggestion that perhaps a "dependence/post-dependence" model might better fit the specifics of Poland's relationship with Russia/USRR, she vehemently objects, "the word 'colonialism' loudly states that the situation of dependence is violence, and not a freely-entered-into agreement, and no one can consider that normal. Colonialism is directed by and sustained through force, which supporters of the model of Poland's 'addiction' to the Soviet Union act like they don't see."⁴⁹ According to Thompson, those who fail to recognize Poland's history as a series of violent Russian colonial projects are Russian and Soviet apologists.⁵⁰ This attitude is not uncommon amongst Polish scholars and politicians; in fact much of what it means to be Polish is based on an oppositional, antagonistic relationship to its "oppressors."⁵¹

⁴⁸ Ewa Thompson, *Imperial Knowledge: Russian Literature and Colonialism* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 2000), 35.

⁴⁹ Ewa Thompson, "A jednak kolonializm. Uwagi epistemologiczne," *Teksty Drugie* 6 (2011): 294.

⁵⁰ I don't mean to diminish the fact that trauma is a necessary byproduct of colonialism. I merely mean to point out that this kind of aggressive victimized stance is based on and bolsters ethnonationalist discourse, without allowing for a more nuanced discussion. Thompson herself references the ethical and emotional force of the word "colonialism"—it is not a neutral term in any sense, and firmly establishes the boundaries between victim and perpetrator.

⁵¹ Much of Polish literature of the nineteenth century, in fact, is related in some way to the ultimate goal of Polish independence from Russia, Prussia, or the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Romantic literature helped breed uprisings

Proponents of Polish postcolonialism often argue, implicitly and explicitly, that Poland's development as a cultural and economic power was interrupted, even stolen, by Russian imperialism.⁵² This, of course, speaks to Thompson's assertion that Russian culture was an inferior one, and that the political and economic changes in the 1990s constitutes a "home-coming" of sorts, or, perhaps more appropriately given the topic of this chapter, "coming out" as culturally belonging to the West. This same argument is made through claims of a stagnation of "morality" during the PRL, which is strongly connected to the reduced role of the Catholic Church in government affairs under Communism and its resurgence in the years immediately following the 1989 Round Table talks.⁵³ We return to Conrad, a famous example in international postcolonial theory, as he "present[s] Catholic Poland as torn between what he viewed (with typical chauvinism) as the barbarous, alien 'Russian Slavonism' of the imperial East and the empires of the rational, civilized West."⁵⁴ He writes, "In temperament, in feeling, in mind, and even in unreason, [the Poles] are Western, with an absolute comprehension of all Western modes of thought."⁵⁵ This, however, implies an equal footing with the West, which Polish postcolonial theorists argue has not been the case for some time. Others argue that Polish culture only truly participated in Western European culture in its own right in the era of Polish Sarmatism, in the pre-partition Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, which is marked as the last period of an

(which failed spectacularly), while the Positivist movement encouraged nation building/national consciousness through science, technology, education, and the economy.

⁵² This assertion has been argued against by some historians, claiming that Poland's feudal economy and its function as a kind of "internal colony" as a major supplier of cheap corn to the West affected its economic development. Incidentally, Tsarist Russia dismantled serfdom in the 1860s. See *Zrozumieć zacofanie. Spory historyków o Europę Wschodnią (1947-1994)*, ed. Anna Sosnowska (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Trio, 2004).

⁵³ The Church reasserted a public, governmental role in the early 1990s, and, the government, in an attempt to strongly differentiate itself from the previous Communist regime, enacted changes like instituting a ban on abortion. For more information on the Catholic Church and its influence on abortion law in Poland, see Andrzej Kulczycki, "Abortion Policy in Postcommunist Europe: The Conflict in Poland" *Population and Development Review* 12, no. 3 (1995): 471-505, and Joanna Mishtal, *Politics of Morality: The Church, the State, and Reproductive Rights in Postsocialist Poland* (Columbus: Ohio University Press, 2015).

⁵⁴ Clare Cavanagh, "Postcolonial Poland," *Common Knowledge* 10, no. 1 (2004), 86.

⁵⁵ Quoted in Cavanagh, "Postcolonial Poland," 86.

authentic Polish national identity unsullied by colonial powers. Poland's truncated existence as "Western" lends itself to an identitarian impasse with the West in the postsocialist period, as, stagnating behind the partitions in the nineteenth century and the Iron Curtain in the twentieth, Poland never had a chance to keep up, leading to its inferiority complex today.

The two related phenomena—a "Western" impulse to orientalize the "East," yet occupying (at the very least discursively) a colonized position-- is a function of what Moore calls "reverse cultural colonization," or the status of Eastern European countries as culturally and economically already-developed "colonial prizes," rather than a region "in need of saving." Others have tried to refine the description of this particular colonial experience, such as Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek's "filtered type of colonialism," which "has a double character and is realized through ideological, political, social and cultural means." This "double character" refers to not only Soviet domination of these spheres, but also an "intellectual colonization, whose centers are the main cultural centers of the West, so Germany, France, England and also in increasing degree the United States." Tötösy names this experience "in-between peripherality," and states that "East-Central Europe therefore is unique with regards to postcolonial theory, because it occupies a doubly peripheral position: from the perspective of the West (which exports ideas to Eastern Europe, and not in equal exchange) and also the East (literally as territory to acquire)."⁵⁶ Given Poland's long-standing connections to the Roman Catholic Church, and the Roman Catholic Church's importance as a philosophical and religious center, its "inferiority complex" is one of the more striking among the cultures and nations suspended in this in-betweenness, neither East nor West.

⁵⁶ Quoted in Skórczewski, "Postkolonialna Polska—project (nie)możliwy," 105.

Anyone familiar with twentieth century Polish literature will recognize this “inferiority complex,” as it is a common theme. Andrzej Stasiuk, an award-winning novelist and essayist, in his many musings on the fate of Eastern Europe in the face of Westernization, refers to the region as “Central Europe, Southern Europe, Eastern Europe- the worse Europe in any case.”⁵⁷ Here it is evident that some process resembling internalization of the Western invention of the “East” is taking place. Kovačević asserts that “this preoccupation of Eastern Europeans with their various reflections in the Western mirror and concomitant self-stigmatizations or self-celebrations are perhaps the most elusive and least discussed avatars of what could be called, for lack of a better theoretical term, Eastern European Orientalism.”⁵⁸

This inferiority complex vis-à-vis the West, ostensibly caused by Russian imperialism and Soviet control, is both motive and motif in conservative postcolonial discourse. In order to combat what is perceived as “the Polish mentality,” or a crisis of national identity and patriotic pride precipitated by colonization, conservatives try to uncover an “authentic” Polish culture untainted by Russia or the West. Stanley Bill identifies postcolonial theory as “useful to Polish conservatives because in its most simplified form it fundamentally represents an ethical and political project with strongly essentializing tendencies.” He argues that postcolonial theory as articulated in the Polish context provides a justification for both cultural essentialism and an anti-universalism.⁵⁹ This is apparent in both Thompson’s and Skórczewski’s work, as they both appeal to an authentic Polish culture that pre-dates the partitions—a culture rooted in tradition

⁵⁷ Andrzej Stasiuk, *Fado*, trans. Bill Johnston, (Champaign: Dalkey Archive Press, 2009), 20.

⁵⁸ Kovačević, *Narrating post/communism*, 4.

⁵⁹ Stanley Bill, “Seeking the Authentic: Polish Culture and the Nature of Postcolonial Theory,” *Nonsite.org*, no. 12, August 12 2014. http://nonsite.org/article/seeking-the-authentic-polish-culture-and-the-nature-of-postcolonial-theory#foot_src_29-7672

and Catholicism, and divorced from “modernist” notions of multiculturalism, equality, social justice, etc. as currently symbolized by the European Union.

In *Lubiewo*, however, Witkowski takes up these discourses surrounding Poland’s supposed colonial/postcolonial condition and does something very different; his novel enacts the much-maligned Communist period as a colonial moment, and a utopic one at that. In doing so he rejects both the West and its “civilized, privileged” status in the Eastern European imaginary, consequently denying purchase to the feeling of inferiority that the belated implementation of a capitalist economy and a democratic government entails. At the same time, the novel selectively embraces aspects of the postcolonial debate in order to engage it—Russian colonization, a quasi-Orientalization of the colonizer that is simultaneously an embrace of and identification with Western stereotypes of Eastern Europe, and an authentic Polish culture that is rooted in a kind of Slavic essentialism.

In *Lubiewo*, the queens much prefer their native products, vacation spots, and men to anything imported from the West. The Polishness of a given item or person is highlighted as very important to the queens, both in the sense of nostalgia for the Communist-era when Western goods (or men) weren’t available and out of contrast to the rapid modernity and foreign fetishes of the West. For the queens, authentic Polish culture had never disappeared—it was and always has been closely linked to a larger Slavdom dominated by Russia. Witkowski’s near-parody of Polish colonial/postcolonial discourse, instead of locating authentic Polish culture in the age of Sarmatism, rather draws upon a narrative that Maria Janion explores in her book *Uncanny Slavdom (Niesamowita Słowiańszczyzna)*. Contrary to scholars like Ewa Thompson, Janion argues that Poland’s first colonialization happened long before the Partitions. The aggressor was not Russia, in fact, but rather Western Christianity and the apparatus of the Roman Catholic

Church. She locates this moment in the historic year of 966--the year Mieszko I converted to Christianity and thus linked Poland evermore to the West. Janion claims that this religious (and thus cultural) colonization by the Roman Catholic Church cut Poland off from its Slavic roots, resulting in a kind of originary trauma. This, she explains, is the root of Poland's inferiority complex: "maybe, following in the footsteps of some Romantics, we should posit that many of the Slavic tribes were 'badly Christianized' and forcefully torn from their former culture. This is where we should search for the serious causes of rupture, humiliation, and a sense of deficiency that has been felt for centuries."⁶⁰

Janion also argues that the trauma of forced conversion to Christianity and the suppression of indigenous Slavic culture surfaces again and again in Polish literature in a return of the repressed. Aptly named "uncanny Slavdom," Janion describes this phenomenon as "foreign and familiar at the same time—it is a sign of rupture, of the repressed unconscious, it is the matrilineal, the native, the non-Latinate."⁶¹ This return of the repressed, especially in nineteenth century Romantic literature, is often represented as a vampire, but not just any old Dracula; this ghoulish figure is homegrown, embedded in pre-Christian or pagan Slavic mythologies. Adam Mickiewicz, one of the great vampirologists of the nineteenth century according to Janion, appears in *Lubiewo* obliquely through references to his famous *Forefather's Eve* (*Dziady*). The play features an *upiór*, or vampire/ghoul, and in his endless quest to lampoon

⁶⁰ Maria Janion, *Niesamowita Słowiańszczyzna: Fantazmaty literatury*, (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2006), 15. Original: "Może, postępując za niektórymi romantykami, należy przypuścić, że wiele plemion słowiańskich zostało drogą podboju „źle ochrzczonych” i oderwanych siłą od swej dawnej kultury. W tym trzeba szukać ważnych przyczyn jakiegoś pęknięcia, jakiegoś poniżenia, jakiejś ułomności odczuwanej przez wieki."

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 29. Original: "Niesamowita Słowiańszczyzna—obca i bliska zarazem—jest znakiem rozdarcia, stłumioną nieświadomością, stroną macierzystą, rodzimą, nie-łacińską."

national sentiment, Witkowski includes it as a campy cameo, complete with a vampiric parody of the “Great Improvisation” (“Wielka Improwizacja”) of Act III.⁶²

During Michał’s interview, Patrycja recounts a strange, ghostly encounter with the Countess, a fellow *ciota* killed long ago by a violent john who now haunts the picket. Patrycja, chasing an elusive *luj* into the bushes, instead comes face-to-face with the Countess. She dramatically describes the meeting: “Terrifying slut. She pulsed with a white glow; from her eyes, mouth, ears, as if someone had stuck a candle in her. She was dressed in her greenish jacket from the market, but it looked covered in mud, in caked dirt, as if there in her grave everything had mixed with rain and mud.”⁶³ Not just your typical ghost, then, but an entity risen from the grave, caked in what we can assume is native dirt. The glow (seemingly from the flame of a candle) emanating from the corpse and the sepulchral mud caking her body echoes a stanza of Mickiewicz’s poem “Upiór” wherein the eponymous spirit accuses the morning star:

Cursed spirit, why do you kindle
the fire of life in this ravine of unfeeling earth?⁶⁴

However, the Countess, also summoned forth from beyond the grave by the power of Forefather’s Eve, has a rather unusual craving, one that eschews the traditional blood and gore of typical vampiric fare.

⁶² *Dziady* is probably one of the best-known works of Polish literature in Poland, and arguably occupies a place at the top of the literary canon. It has a long history of political mobilization and has become a symbol of protest (given the anti-Russian sentiment with which it is written). In fact, government censorship of a performance of *Dziady* for its “Russophobia,” “Anti-Soviet sentiment,” and religious overtones precipitated the events of the Polish political crisis in March 1968.

⁶³ Witkowski, *Lubiewo*, 18. Original: “Straszyszmata. Poświata od niej biła, z oczu, z gęby, z uszu, jakby w środek świeczkę wsadzić. Ubrana była w tą swoją kurtkę z targu zielonkawą, ale taką jakby w błocie, w pozasychanej ziemi, jakby tam w grobie jej się już wszystko z deszczem, z błotem pomieszało.”

⁶⁴ Adam Mickiewicz, “Upiór,” Wolne Lektury Project (*Dziady cz. I-IV*, Warsaw: Czytelnik 1974; Wolne Lektury Project, 2014). <http://wolnelektury.pl/media/book/pdf/dziady-dziady-poema-dziady-czesc-iii.pdf>. Original: “Duchu przeklęty, po co śród parowu/Nieczułej ziemi ogień życia wzniecasz?/Blasku przeklęty, zagasłeś i znowu/Po co mi znowu przyświecasz?”

“I came here for a *luj*, for that holy rod, across the chasms and brush, even after death! Today we celebrate Forefather’s Eve, give me a little sperm, give it to me and I will share with you this moral lesson, that he who has never been...”

“Blasphemy! You ridicule a national epic, you hussy, even after death!” She always was an exceptional slut. And she continued to make fun, saying: “I am Million! I am Million,” she said, “because a million *luje* have had me!”⁶⁵

Of course, as Patrycja points out, the promiscuity of the Countess in life and in death constitutes national blasphemy, as the echoing (and sullyng) of Mickiewicz’s original text with explicit (homo)sexuality undercuts its gravity as an expression of national sentiment, or, more provocatively, perhaps exposes latent homosociality inherent in nationalism. The stanza that Witkowski references begins:

Is my soul incarnate in my fatherland now?
With my body I swallowed its soul
My fatherland and I are one.

Teraz duszą jam w moję ojczyznę wcielony?
Ciałem połknąłem jej duszę,
Ja i ojczyzna to jedno.⁶⁶

Witkowski’s “version” of this passage opens up the original text to queer interpretation through a process Joanna Niżyńska terms the “Lubiewo Effect.” The intertextual insertions, re-workings, and parodies of famous works of Polish literature in *Lubiewo* means that we can no longer read these texts “naively,” as they dialectically produce new meanings in the context of the novel and its reception after the “epistemological shift.”⁶⁷ Even a text as sacrosanct as Mickiewicz’s

⁶⁵ Witkowski, *Lubiewo*, 18. Original: “--Za lujem tu poszłam, za świętą lufą tu szłam przez te wykroty, jeszcze po śmierci! Dzisiaj obchodzimy dziady, daj trochę spermy, daj, a udzielę ci moralnej nauki, że kto nie był ni razu... — Błuzni! Z narodowego dzieła, szmata, jeszcze po śmierci się wyśmiewa! —Szmatą to ona zawsze była nieprzeciętną. I jeszcze dalej się wyśmiewa, mówi: --Nazywam się Milijon! Nazywam się Milijon—mówi—bo mnie Milijon lujów miało!”

⁶⁶ Adam Mickiewicz, “Wielka Improwizacja,” *Dziady część III*, Scene II Project (*Dziady cz. I-IV*, Warsaw: Czytelnik 1974; Wolne Lektury Project, 2014), <http://wolnelektury.pl/media/book/pdf/dziady-dziady-poema-dziady-czesc-iii.pdf>.

⁶⁷ Joanna Niżyńska, *The Kingdom of Insignificance: Miron Białoszewski and the Quotidian, the Queer, and the Traumatic*. (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2013), 135.

Forefather's Eve becomes suffused with sexual innuendo. For instance, the melding of body and soul, of incorporating nation into man, is expressed in highly corporeal, even sexual terms. The word *wcielony*, like its possible translations of incarnate and embodied, takes its root from the word for flesh or body (*ciasto*). The speaker devours, or swallows (*połknąć*), the nation's soul with his body, sparking associations with both vampiric appetites and sexual activities (specifically those that are more to the Countess's tastes). Significantly, the word *ojczyzna*, like fatherland, codes the nation as male. Indeed, "Ciałem połknąłem jej duszę," taken euphemistically, could easily describe the Countess's desires to drink the sperm of the *luje*, who themselves represent a kind of Slavic essentialism (and thus their sperm is the essence of Slavic essence, so to speak). Following this line of reasoning, "my *fatherland* and I are one" can be read as a perversion of the biblical trope of sex as "two becoming one flesh," and thus can be read as a metaphoric coital union of two male bodies.⁶⁸

The Countess commits her blasphemy most explicitly in her misquotation of *Forefather's Eve*. The original passage signifies such an identification with the nation ("my fatherland and I are one") that the pain of millions is the pain of the individual. The stanza (indeed, the whole play) is steeped in the martyrological pathos that Mickiewicz helped to propagate in nineteenth century Romantic literature. Not only does it represent the Messianism that is part of the bedrock of Polish national identity, but it also implies (through the context of the plot) great suffering at the hands of Russia.

Nazywam się Milijon - bo za milijony
 Kocham i cierpię katusze.
 Patrzę na ojczyznę biedną,
 Jak syn na ojca wplecionego w koło;

⁶⁸ Genesis 2:24, "Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh." While the passage in Genesis describes "two becoming one flesh" as a marital sex act, Paul in 1 Corinthians 6:16 claims this statement describes all sex, "Do you not know that whoever is united to a prostitute becomes one body with her?"

Czuję całego cierpienia narodu...

I am Million—because for millions
I loved and suffered agonies
I look upon my wretched fatherland
Like a son upon his father tied to the rack
I feel the whole of the nation's suffering.⁶⁹

Such noble love and suffering, (ostensibly) chaste in the context of the familial relation between father and son, is turned into ravenous promiscuity and an unquenchable thirst for sperm. The Countess moans, “I am Million! I am Million...because a million *luje* have had me!” The Countess subverts the ubiquitous, messianic perspective Mickiewicz claims (I represent the masses and therefore experience their pain) by positioning herself as having been willingly and gleefully possessed by others, and more specifically, by Russian soldiers. The millions no longer are represented by the Million, rather, the Million's experiences are limited to a single perspective—that of the penetrated.

Parallels between vampires as subject-formations of repressed sexual desire and of the trauma of violent Christianization (colonization) blur or bleed, if you will, together in *Lubiewo* through the search and consumption of *luj* sperm. Blood (the preferred beverage of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* and of Western vampires everywhere) is often linked in vampire scholarship to the degeneration or dilution of racial or ethnic purity, therefore the blood-sucking vampire embodies xenophobic fears of miscegenation.⁷⁰ In *Lubiewo*, however, blood is obviously not the fluid of choice. Patrycja reports that “she wanted neither food nor drink, something like that, just

⁶⁹ Mickiewicz, “Wielka Improwizacja,” *Dziady część III*, Scene II.

⁷⁰ In her study of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, Judith Halberstam reads blood-sucking, in addition to xenophobic fears, as a figure for Jewish usury. Judith Halberstam, “Technologies of Monstrosity: Bram Stoker's "Dracula,"” *Victorian Studies* 36, no. 3 (Spring 1993): 333-352.

a drop of sperm from a *luj*. Nothing else, only sperm and more sperm.”⁷¹ Sperm, as an agent of reproduction and carrier of genetic material, is consumed in a two-fold anti-reproductive act: it passes between two genetically male bodies, and through oral sex. As *luje* are represented as quintessentially Slavic (or, at the very least, ethnically tied to the Russian Empire), the consumption of sperm results in a kind of solidification of ethnic or racial ties, rather than a dilution. Disavowed homosexuality or homosociality in Polish nationalism arises in the form of the cum-sucking vampire, but the Countess is also a subject-formation stemming from the trauma of being violently cut off from an original “Slavdom,” the big brother of which is Russia.

The Countess is one of the many ways that Witkowski attempts to undermine a pro-sovereign or pro-Western postcolonial paradigm that positions Russia as Poland’s traditional enemy. The effectiveness of *Lubiewo*’s attention to the ties between Slavic cultures lies in the fact that “assignment to Slavdom can awake the suspicion of ‘slavophilia’ or ‘panslavism,’ understood as yielding to Russian imperialism, which has always masked itself with the slogan “Slavic unity” and has worked under the aegis of “We, Brother-Slavs.” Problem Poland—Russia appears here in all its exasperating glory.”⁷² Perhaps we can instead say that, instead of advocating for “panslavism,” Witkowski instead, tying together the figure of the homosexual and that of an essentialized Slavdom, advocates “homoslavism,” an ideology even more threatening to those who believe Sarmatism represents Poland’s true cultural heritage.

⁷¹ Witkowski, *Lubiewo*, 18-19. Original: “że nie chce jadła ni napoju, jakoś tak się wyraziła, że tylko kropkę lujowskiej spermy. I nic, tylko spermy i spermy.”

⁷² Janion, *Niesamowita Słowiańszczyzna*, 22. Original: “Przypisanie do Słowiańszczyzny budzić może posądzenia o ‘słowianofilstwo’ czy ‘panslawizm,’ pojmowane jako podporządkowanie się rosyjskiemu imperializmowi, który maskował się zawsze hasłem ‘jedności słowiańskiej’” i działał pod szyldem ‘My, bracie-Słowianie.’ Problem Polska—Rosja objawia się tutaj w całej swej jątzącej okazałości.”

Even though *Lubiewo* propagates a sense of ethnic similarity, at least amongst the *luje* of the East, the novel's setting in the 1970s and 1980s of the PRL, when the country was at least nominally independent of the USSR, indicates a geo-political and cultural power dynamic that can be read as colonial.

Performing the Colonial

Beyond the intertextual play Witkowski engages in, there are many ways in which *Lubiewo* marks the period of communism as a form of Russian colonialism. It is important to note that not all of the details of the novel correspond with or prove the existence of a historical colonial relation, but rather that they play upon stereotypes of the PRL and conservative postcolonial discourse which argues Russian colonialism existed during the communist period. The various settings of the novel, when examined together with attributes of certain characters, play a key role in producing the campy colonial context in which the sexual encounters of the queens take place. Perhaps the most obvious is the presence of the Russian military, a symbol (and means) of oppression by and subjugation to a foreign power. The barracks and their occupants are implied to be the result of an invasion or occupation. Patrycja, after sadly putting away her Russian military memorabilia, hopefully asks, "But maybe we'll be invaded again, Lukrecja, what do you think? Maybe the Germans could similarly occupy us?"⁷³ "Similarly" excludes a reference to German invasion in the first sentence, while the word "again" references the long, fraught history of Polish-Russian relations, including the Partitions of the eighteenth century, the suppression of Polish revolts in the nineteenth century, the Polish-Soviet War, World War II, and the institution of Soviet-backed Communism in the twentieth, all of which are

⁷³ Witkowski, *Lubiewo*, 56. Original: "A może jeszcze na nas ktoś napadnie, Lukrecja, jak myślisz? Może Niemcy by tak pookupowali?"

marked, in Polish postcolonial discourse, as instances of colonial expansion on the part of Russia/USSR.

In the novel, the barracks function as a symbol of Russian military dominance and surveillance. The queens fondly recall the barracks in Wrocław (which was near the East German border), which they visited frequently. The barracks themselves are fairly imposing, complete with visible threats of potential violence, as “there was only a tall wall, covered with neat lettering in four different languages, warning against coming within shooting range. At the top was rusty barbed wire. And every dozen or so meters was a guard in a watchtower.”⁷⁴ Patrycja and Lukrecja, along with other queens in their posse, “day in and day out” would “clamber up to the top of wall, maybe around one in the morning, one of us supporting the other, and in a moment a head with a military cap would appear in one of the guard towers in the wall.”⁷⁵ The queens not only mention other barracks in Wrocław, but Russian military bases across Poland, all targets for the legions of queers who regularly visited the Russian soldiers for sex.

Russian soldiers are so popular amongst the queens that their barracks are constantly mobbed. Strikingly, the queens’ sexual negotiations with soldiers and with each other often are described in economic terms. The sexual relations in *Lubiewo* and their apparent directionality (queens are always bottoms, soldiers always tops) mirror a kind of economic colonial relation in which the raw materials of the colonized and/or periphery are exported to meet the needs of the

⁷⁴ Ibid., 44. Original: “Tylko wysoki mur, cały popisany take w porządne napisy w czterech językach, że zabronione zbliżanie się na odległość strzału. Na jego szczycie zardzewiałe druty kolczaste. I co kilkanaście metrów stróżówka z wartą.”

⁷⁵ Ibid., 44. Original: “Dzień w dzień wyglądało. Wdrapywałyśmy się na mur, tak jakoś około pierwszej w nocy, jedna drugą podtrzymywała i za chwilę ukazywała się głowa w czapce wojskowej, w takiej wieży strażniczej w murze.”

colonizer/center. While I argue *Lubiewo* ultimately undermines this simplified relation, the novel sets up the colonial context through its attention to different economic details. When explaining why she didn't choose to frequent the Legnica barracks instead, Patrycja says, "I already knew from other queens at the main Bydgoszcz train station that fags went there, they specifically traveled there from all over Poland. But it turned out there was too much of a crowd, and the soldiers couldn't stave them off." Lukrecja adds, "Oh! Supply! There was too much supply." The narrator wryly remarks, "The soldiers in Legnica couldn't process so many queens."⁷⁶ The queens here are represented in the dehumanizing terms of supply (the colonized) and demand (colonizers).

Poland's economic relationship with Russia also manifests itself in the queens' present-day apartment, in which "nothing had changed since communism, there were gold Taiwanese watches from the market everywhere, barometers from the market, shining figurines from the market, everything from Russians."⁷⁷ The constant repetition of "the market" emphasizes that these goods were not sold by the state, but rather in the open-air markets where people bought, sold, and traded for goods that the planned economy failed to deliver. These markets, which still can be found today and sometimes bear the name "ruski targ" or "Russian market," have everything from cars to toys, clothes to vodka. In reality, many of these markets during the PRL dealt in goods from the West in addition to Soviet-produced goods, but in *Lubiewo*, the queens surround themselves only with knickknacks that were either manufactured in the Soviet Union or passed through the hands of Russian merchants. The dominance of Soviet artifacts in the

⁷⁶ Ibid., *Lubiewo*, 45. Originals: "Wiedziałam już od innych ciot z dworca Bydgoszcz Główna, że tam przychodzą cwelówki, zjeżdżają specjalnie z całej Polski. Ale tam się okazał już zbyt duży tłok, oni się już odgonić nie mogli."; "Jak to było? Jak jest czegoś za dużo? O! Podaż! Tam już była za duża podaż."; "A w Legnicy to żołnierze nie mogli przerobić tylu ciot."

⁷⁷ Ibid., 14. Original: "Nic się tu zmieniło od czasów komuny, wszędzie złote tajwańskie zegary z targu, barometry z targu, połyskujące figurki z targu, wszystko od Rosjan..."

apartment, and relative lack of anything from “the West,” evokes both Russian economic and cultural dominance.

In addition to the physical trappings of their apartment, the queens’ musical taste also implies Soviet political and cultural hegemony, which manifested itself in a rhetoric of brotherhood and unity with the Poles. The dingy apartment’s ambiance is completed by the queens’ “favorite Anna German record,” which plays in the background while the narrator conducts his interview. The narrator notes the lyrics of “Tańczące Eurydyki,” or “Dancing Euridices,” “*May your drunken Orpheus/Hold you in their arms.*”⁷⁸ The queens borrow this epithet, referring to their sexual prey (the drunk, heterosexual, working class men whom they await in the parks) as “Orpheuses” (and the drunker the better!). German herself was born in the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic to a Russian-German family. She eventually moved to Poland where she learned Polish, and released records in both Polish and Russian (she was able to sing in seven different languages). She became a Polish and a Russian pop cultural icon, and, according to Mariusz Maszkiewicz, a “political project.” In a somewhat paranoid blog post for the Foundation for Freedom and Peace, he describes how Anna German was used by the authorities as political propaganda. Here the queens’ favorite songstress is evidence of the propagandistic fiction of brotherly Polish-Russian relations. He writes, “The talent and voice of Anna German was a valuable diamond which adorned the blossoming ‘Polish-Soviet’ friendship. The government of the PRL could consider the presence of Anna German and her Russian songs in Soviet pop culture a success.”⁷⁹ While Maszkiewicz’s argument is comprised mostly of

⁷⁸ Ibid. Original: “Niech was tulą w ramionach/Orfeusze pijani...”

⁷⁹ Mariusz Maszkiewicz, “Anna German jako projekt polityczny,” *Fundacja Wolność i Pokój* (Blog), accessed March 7, 2016, <https://fundacjawip.wordpress.com/2013/04/19/anna-german-jako-projekt-polityczny/>. Original: “Talent i głos Anny German był cennym diamentem, który zdobył kwitnąca przyjaźń ‘polsko-radziecką.’ Władze PRL mogły uznać za sukces obecność Anny German i jej rosyjskich pieśni w całej sowieckiej przestrzeni popkultury.”

personal anecdotes and speculation, it highlights the fact that, as both a Polish and Soviet pop cultural icon who released records in both languages and who also had admirers amongst Communist functionaries, Anna German is symbolic of a contested past which is now characterized by both nostalgia and anxieties of lustration.⁸⁰ In *Lubiewo*, she is not only the queens' campy diva of choice, but is representative of their obsession with a Polish-Russian queer "brotherhood."

The queens' language and linguistic practices also play an important role in establishing the Poland of the novel as a colonized space. As mentioned previously, the Russian Empire in the nineteenth century enacted a series of policies that could be termed "Russification," such as banning the use or teaching of Polish in schools and in other public spheres.⁸¹ While no law of this kind existed under socialism, Russian was nevertheless a mandatory subject in schools. The specter of Russification, however, haunts Polish nationalist and postcolonial discourse as a manifestation of the Russian drive to consume and assimilate its neighbors, and as a tool in the eradication of Polish identity through a denial of Polish linguistic and artistic expression. A refusal to learn or speak Russian, especially at certain points in the nineteenth century, then, became a political act, and even in the twentieth century, when the Polish language wasn't

⁸⁰ Maszkiewicz also identifies a link with the military, which he first intuited in the 1980s. Maszkiewicz was assigned to a unit responsible for building roads as punishment for refusing to take an oath swearing fidelity to the "Red Army." There, the major in charge of political matters constantly and obsessively played Anna German records, and had a collection of her photos. This struck Maszkiewicz as strange but not suspicious, until later when he heard that General Jaruzelski, now commonly considered a traitor, once said that Anna German was his favorite singer. Further digging revealed that her songs were performed at certain Communist functions and festivals. Maszkiewicz conjectures that perhaps her music was „part of the aesthetic exercises in the preparations and courses organized by the Political Bureau of the People's Army of Poland (LWP) for the upper managerial corps."

⁸¹ For a more thorough discussion of the history of the language policies of the Russian Empire as they pertained to the regions Poles inhabited during the Partitions, see Tomasz Kamusella, "Germanization, Polonization, and Russification in the partitioned lands of Poland-Lithuania," *Nationalities Papers* 41, no. 5 (2013): 815-838; and Aneta Pavlenko, "Linguistic russification in the Russian Empire: peasants into Russians?" *Russian Linguistics* 35, no. 3 (2011): 331-350. For a discussion of the different historiographical approaches taken to "Russification," see Andreas Kappeler, "The Ambiguities of Russification," *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 5, no. 2 (Spring 2004): 291-297.

threatened by Soviet language policies to the same degree, Russian retained symbolic vestiges of its former hegemony. *Lubiewo* invokes this specter both through the queens' language and the privileged position of Russian in the sexual encounter between Russian and Pole.

The queens, while their native language is Polish, tend to code-switch from standard Polish into a "russified" Polish. One example of this is during the interview, when the narrator notices that the queens intersperse their speech with Russian phrases, or, perhaps even more indicative of colonial language, use grammatical structures that more closely resemble Russian. The narrator observes, "even their language was full of Russianisms: *U niego mało w spodniach*."⁸² The phrase itself means "there's not much in his pants," but the prepositional phrase of "*u niego*" more closely approximates a Russian grammatical construction ("by him"), whereas in standard Polish one would use the subject-verb construction "he has" ("*on ma/nie ma*," or just "*ma/nie ma*") to indicate the man's lesser-endowment. This phrase and others result in a kind of linguistic mixture that is both threatening to an ethnonationalist Polish identity (as it is evidence of Polishness polluted by Russianness) and marks the queens as belonging to the much-maligned class of Communist sympathizers, or, in other words, colonized subjects too weak or opportunistic to resist Russian or Soviet influence.

Russian is also the *lingua franca* of the barracks, the language spoken by both the queens and the recruits who hail from all regions of the Soviet empire. Thus it is also the language of authority---the soldiers themselves not necessarily ethnic Russians but conscripted into service nevertheless, using the language of the "center"; the queens' knowledge stems from mandatory education and its usage is driven by their sexual desire. Russian, fraught as it is with historical

⁸² Witkowski, *Lubiewo*, 14. Original: "Nawet ich język pełen jest rusycyzmów: -U niego mało w spodniach"

and ideological baggage, is the language of political and perhaps even moral authority under Communism, and functions as a kind of linguistic capital, to borrow Bourdieu's phrase, which enables the queens to participate in a sexual economy. While the queens refer to themselves as the aforementioned "supply," in reality their sexual exchanges are more complicated—they involve negotiations of power which manifest in national and sexual positionings that are, in part, subtended by language. The queens often recount conversations with their Russian lovers, which the author communicates in a Russian written with Polish orthography, the persistence of Polish in the pronunciation highlighting the queens' heavy Polish accent and thus the foreignness of Russian, the submission of the Polish language to the necessity of Russian for the purposes of exchange. Yet there is a give-and-take that parallels the sex itself. Lukrecja describes her first sexual experience with a man, with a Russian soldier. The soldier himself begins the exchange with "Pan," a Polish honorific (and sometimes pronoun):

So I went up to the soldier (an 18 year old boy) and the soldier says:

--Pan, 'chto ty hot'yel? (Sir, what do you want?) – and I said:

--Nu... pogovorit' s toboi... (Um... to talk with you...)

--Nu, ya vizhu, chto ty po ruski govorish, no zahodi... (Yeah, I see you speak Russian, come on in)...⁸³

This initial dialogue underscores what Bourdieu describes as the actualization of power relations inherent in linguistic interaction: "the linguistic relation of power is not completely determined by the prevailing linguistic forces alone: by virtue of the languages spoken, the speakers who use them and the groups defined by possession of the corresponding competence, the whole social structure is present in each interaction (and thereby in the discourse uttered)."⁸⁴ Bourdieu

⁸³ Ibid., 19. Original "No więc wchodzę do żołnierza (osiemnaście lat chłopak) i żołnierz mówi:"

⁸⁴ Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, ed. John B. Thompson, trans. Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1991), 67.

particularly stresses the importance of these relations in colonial and postcolonial contexts, where socio-political hierarchies often manifest in linguistic relations. In this scene,

Let us begin with the previously mentioned use of “pan.” Here, the soldier utilizes a *strategy of condescension*, a socio-linguistic strategy common to colonial and postcolonial contexts. As described by Bourdieu:

The strategy of condescension consists in deriving *profit* from the objective relation of power between the languages that confront one another in practice...in the very act of symbolically negating that relation, namely, the hierarchy of the languages and of those who speak them. Such a strategy is possible whenever the objective disparity between the persons present (that is, between their social properties) is sufficiently known and recognized by everyone (particularly those involved in the interaction, as agents or spectators) so that the symbolic negation of the hierarchy (by using the ‘common touch,’ for instance) enables the speaker to combine the profits linked to the undiminished hierarchy with those derived from the distinctly symbolic negation of the hierarchy—not the least of which is the strengthening of the hierarchy implied by the recognition accorded to the way of using the hierarchical relation.”⁸⁵

In utilizing the word “pan” (a respectful way of addressing someone in addition to being a Polish word), the soldier, who himself functions as a symbol of Soviet power and a reminder of Poland’s submissiveness to the USSR, and whose language thus carries an authoritative weight, makes a gesture of goodwill that ostensibly negates the power imbalance between them, while in truth it reinforces it. In addition, the soldier, immediately afterwards, refers to Lukrecja with the informal “ty” or “ты” in Russian (“ty” is also the informal 2nd person singular pronoun in Polish), which again simultaneously negates (we are on informal terms with one another) and strengthens (I am in a position of power thus I can speak to you informally) the hierarchical relation between them, which in the context of the novel is a colonial one. Thus the Russian

⁸⁵ Ibid., 68.

soldier's speech serves to reinforce his position as the representative of the political, and, according to the queens, cultural hegemon.

In addition, Lukrecja's use of Russian is sufficient "capital" to initiate a more intimate conversation and ultimately provides access to the object of desire, the Russian soldier's cock. "I see that you speak Russian," the soldier begins, "so come on then." The ensuing seduction is a complex negotiation of social and linguistic capital, involving an allusion to ethnic and/or regional solidarity, and thus functions not only on a physical level but is also highly symbolic. Lukrecja recounts that she then "schemed a little,"⁸⁶ indicating that the desired sexual exchange, during which Lukrecja would suck off the Russian soldier with no reciprocation (a sexual act easily and often employed metaphorically, especially in politics), necessitated the establishment of extra-sexual relations. Lukrecja encourages the Russian soldier to talk about himself, and as it turns out, he is from Rostov-on-Don, and that "there are some Cossack traditions." A southern port city in Russia, the city represents "Cossackness," which in *Lubiewo* functions as a symbol of Russian imperialism or, as the case may be, colonialism. *Lubiewo* thus draws upon the stereotype of Cossacks as guardians of the Russian borders, further legitimizing the figure of the Russian soldier as a representative of the colonial "center," and one that is looking after the border of the empire (Western Poland), even though he himself is from the periphery.

Lubiewo thus conjures the specter of colonialism in its sexual encounters between the queens and the soldiers; through militaristic, economic, and linguistic representation, it harnesses a conservative postcolonial discourse and draws its transgressive power from it. Part of this power stems from the parallel and oft overlapping relations of colonizer/colonized, top/bottom,

⁸⁶ Witkowski, *Lubiewo*, 22. Original: "Ja tam trochę politykowałam." "Politykować" also means to "talk politics," and while in this context "scheme" is more appropriate, the verb gestures toward a negotiation of political positioning in addition to Lukrecja's sexually-focused "scheming."

but perhaps the true transgression is the naturalization of this national-sexual order through a certain Pan-Slavic or even Slavophilic notion of ethnic solidarity, one that manifests in a queer brotherhood comprised of a masculine Slavic (often Russian) top and the submissive Slavic (almost always Polish) bottom, united by a common resistance against the “West.” This solidarity is a kind of historio-fantastical corrective to Lukrecja’s first sexual encounter suggests that this ethnic solidarity between Slavic people subtends the sexual relation, obliquely enforced by racial objectification and a reinforcement of cultural and moral divisions between the “East” and “West.” The soldier asks, after perusing Lukrecja’s porn magazine, “A ciornuju ty użę jebał?” (You’ve already fucked a black chick?) which Lukrecja clarifies the Russian term “чёрная” for the narrator, “which means black woman, you know.”⁸⁷ The fascination with the “pornographic” black female body belies a regional history of racism that both the soldier and Lukrecja share, an unfamiliarity with and orientalizing of black bodies that simultaneously is rooted in a broader history of European colonialism and Eastern Europe’s relatively limited presence in colonial Africa.⁸⁸ The soldier’s curiosity leads to his discovery that Lukrecja has never fucked a woman, much less a black woman, and he becomes attuned to Lukrecja’s true intentions. The soldier, nervously responding, “Uh, I don’t do that...,” although the ellipses suggest an openness to experimentation (out of convenience, most likely) that is soon confirmed.⁸⁹ While the sexual relation between the Russian and the Pole, the colonizer and the colonized, the top and the bottom, is eventually negotiated and consummated, naming it remains taboo---sexual deviation as an identity (“piedzik”/“педик”) is sanctioned only when it is

⁸⁷ Ibid., 23. Original: “--A ciornuju ty użę jebał?—znaczy: Murzynkę, nie.”

⁸⁸ Eastern European racism, while certainly present, tends to function differently as most countries of Eastern Europe never had colonies in Africa, and populations of black Poles, Russians, etc have historically been small. Therefore many stereotypes of people of color are imported from other cultural contexts and media, resulting in a kind of “translated” racism. There is also the legacy of Soviet solidarity with former colonies of Western European nations (at least nominally), which produced its own complex race relations.

⁸⁹ Witkowski, Lubiewo, 23. Original: “—No, ja tym nie zanimajus...”

displaced onto a Western sexual paradigm, safely divorced from a heterosexual Slavic/geopolitically Eastern identity— Lukrecja explains that “they call it ‘Piedzik Gamburskij’, or Hamburg Fag... somehow, when something is perverse, Slavs usually associate it with Germans.”⁹⁰ The relation between *luje* and *cioty* eschews the Western ontology of sexual desire = a politicized sexual identity. Instead, *Lubiewo* explores the gender, sexual, and historical power dynamics at play in the encounters between *luje* and *cioty*.

The Colonial Bottom

Lubiewo makes no secret of the centrality of sex in the lives of its protagonists. From the religious devotion with which the *cioty* attend to the memory of Russian soldiers to their potentially dangerous liaisons with strangers on the picket, the queens of *Lubiewo* organize their lives around the sexual encounter. Of course, for the *cioty* in *The Book of the Street*, sex is more than any old path to physical release—in fact, *cioty* are rarely depicted climaxing—rather, sex in *Lubiewo* most often adheres to specific structures: expressions of gender, sexual positioning, and national or colonial fantasies. In other words, sex is organized not only by physical need, but by psychic and social structures that play out on an individual and collective scale.

Sex in *Lubiewo* is most commonly depicted as a kind of rigidly gendered top/bottom relationship, one that involves a highly masculine (but not consciously so!) man who orally or anally penetrates a highly (very consciously!) effeminate man. The words “top” and “bottom” in Western gay culture, while not explicitly prescriptive of gender, are indicative of both physical positioning and a hierarchy that is closely connected to patriarchal organizations of power, and

⁹⁰ Ibid., 23. Original: “to się u nich nazywało ‘Piedzik Gamburskij’, czyli Hamburgski... Jakoś tak, jak coś zбочzonego jest, to Słowianom zwykle z Niemcami się kojarzy”

thus are sometimes thought of in gendered terms. Indeed, at least in the hegemonic understanding of topping and bottoming, power relations are inscribed in the sex act itself. “Top,” the penetrator and possessor of the phallus, therefore, usually embodies dominance, power, and masculine privilege, whereas “bottoms” are considered passive, feminine (or feminized through the act of penetration), and powerless. David Halperin, while arguing that ancient Greek sexual subjectivities were radically different from modern sexual paradigms and deducing continuities between the two is irresponsible, describes Greek sexual relations between men as organized by civic and social relations of power which manifested in specific inserter/insertee roles. Historically, the balance of power was heavily tipped in favor of the top, while bottoming indicated or conferred a loss of agency, sexual objectification, and lack of masculine privilege (all common attributes of women’s experiences of patriarchy).⁹¹

While the vocabulary for top and bottom in *Lubiewo* doesn’t exist per se, within the above framework *luje* almost exclusively function as tops. Their cocks are the only ones that matter—their cum the elixir vitae for the *cioty*. Michaśka, the narrator, seeking clarification as to what makes a man a *luj*, asks Lukrecja and Patrycja about the term, much to their delight:

“What is a *luj*?” My question is drowned out by wild squeals. “What is a *luj*, what is a *luj*!. Christ, Christina! *Luj*, what is it?? Well, ok, let’s say that you don’t know. The *luj* gives meaning to our lives. A *luj* is a buck, a drunken young buck of a man, a macho scoundrel, a lout, a little darling, a guy who sometimes returns home through the park or lies in a ditch drunk, on a park bench at the station, or in a completely unexpected spot. Our drunken Orpheuses! Because after all, queens don’t go lezzing it up with other queens! We need hetero meat! Queers can also be *luje*, providing they’re straight and tall as an oak, uneducated, because once you have a high school degree you’re no longer a real man, only some kind of

⁹¹ Of course, there are many ways of negotiating masculine/feminine power relations that work to undo oppression--topping/bottoming, butch/fem, and or S/M relationships may superficially seem like an imitation of patriarchal structures, but have been theorized extensively as liberating from those very structures, or subversive of them.

intellectual. He can't put on any airs, he has to have a mug like a thigh, a face like leather, he can't show any feelings, none at all!"⁹²

Luje are the only sexual partners appropriate for *cioty*, a masculine/feminine pairing that seemingly belies an investment in heterosexual, homophobic regimes and resists much of the gender-troubling work done by feminist and queer theorists. In many ways, the rigid essentialist dimensions of the *luj* and *ciota* are meant as a response to the adaptation of queer theory in Poland in the late 1990s/early 2000s, and instead reach back to earlier formations of the effeminate man as "invert," or a man trapped in a woman's body. However, the experience of "being trapped" is negated by the *cioty* themselves, as they make sure we know that their gender inversion is a game; the narrator notes of the queens, "being a real woman is no longer a game—the game excites, but to actually accomplish it, whatcha mean, accomplish it..."⁹³ It is the fantasy, the assumption of a transgressive role, that excites the *cioty*. Two *cioty* having sex wouldn't be sex between men, rather it would more closely resemble lesbianism. The structure of the sexual encounter, and the pleasure that results from it, necessitates a masculine top and a feminine bottom. The *luje* are the epitome of an artless masculinity; they are non-emotive, and must not care about or conform to any Western standards of beauty. They are the "salt of the earth," an extension of nature (described as a *byczek*, literally a young bull, and "straight and tall as an oak"), and utterly uncultured and unintellectual.

The attributes of the *luj* and his position as penetrator is key to decoding the colonial relationship between Russia and Poland as represented in *Lubiewo*. The *luj*, as Patricia and

⁹² Witkowski, *Lubiewo*, 16-17. Original: "Kto to są 'luje'? Moje pytanie zagłuszają dzikie piski. 'Kto to są luje, kto to są luje. Boże, Bożenka, luje, kto to są?! No, dobra, powiedzmy, że nie wiesz. Luj to sens naszego życia, luj to byczek, pijany byczek, męska hołotka, żulik, bączek, chłopiec, który czasem wraca przez park albo pijany leży w rowie, na ławce na dworcu, albo w zupełnie nieoczekiwanym miejscu. Nasi Orfeusze pijani! Bo przecież ciota nie będzie się lesbijczyła z inną ciotą! Potrzebujemy heteryckiego mięsa! Luj może też być pedałem, byle prosty jak dąb, nieuczony, bo z maturą to już nie chłop, tylko jakiś inteligencik. Żadnych min nie może robić, musi mieć głębę jak udo, po prostu obciągnięty skóra futerał, nic tam się nie może ukazywać, żadne uczucie!"

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 12. Original: "Bycie prawdziwą kobietą to już nie to—zabawa ekscytuje, a spełnienie, jak to spełnienie..."

Lucretia explain, is the meaning of life, and he is also in many ways central to the meaning of the novel. A substantial part of the novel's action takes place either in the company of a *luj*, or in the never-ending hunt for one. However, while *luj* in the context of the novel signifies working class, potentially violent or criminal men, in the novel it is also imbued with a gendered and distinctly Slavic essentialism, one that is concentrated most strongly in "Russianness," or in a kind of Russian imperialist brotherhood.⁹⁴ Michał, our narrator, reclines on the beach and watches as a few German tourists stroll by. He politely greets them, appreciating them for their cultured manners and their intellect. He watches them use a recycling bin. There's only one thing you can't do with Germans, he explains. They aren't *luj* enough to fuck. Michał muses, "A *luj* has to have a soul that's, how should I say it, more Russian, wider, he has to have a completely unpredictable nature, and has to throw his empty vodka bottles in the bushes, not segregate them into recycling bins. And of course, he's not allowed to have a shaved or pierced dick. The Western *luj* doesn't exist—that species appears east of the Oder [river] and stretches all the way

⁹⁴ In Witkowski's most recent edition of *Lubiewo*, entitled *Lubiewo Uncensored (Lubiewo bez cenzury)*, he includes a short compendium of definitions, presenting a slightly more universal understanding of the *luj*, one that is more focused on an East/West division than it is based on Slavic cultures. While he includes Cuba and India in the following definition, earlier editions of the novel make no mention of *luje* outside the Slavic context. The entry for *luj* reads, in full, as follows: "A very straightforward heterosexual man with a stocky build, unaware of his sexuality, with a non-pornographic body unmarked by culture, devoid of mannerisms, natural. A non-pornographic body lacks traces of intentional self-fashioning, working out in the gym, tattoos, piercings—in short, signs (signifiers?). If a *luj* is muscular it's because he works as a laborer—for example, in construction; if he is tan it's because he works bare-chested, not because he visited a tanning bed. His face lacks expression; expressions are the domain of *cioty*. He has a face like a thigh—it's simply a piece of meat covered with skin. Rough features, a burly, heavy frame, any old baggy clothes. He doesn't take care of himself, he quickly grows a belly which he doesn't fight, just like he doesn't fight with baldness or any other sign of time passing. The *luj* is therefore the ideal of eastern masculinity of an ancient type, a masculinity which isn't aware of itself. The opposite of the *luj* is the western man who has a pornographic, ready-for-the-market body, who highlights his sexual attractiveness through various processes and identifies himself as an object of another's desire. *Luje* appear in modernist cultures (not postmodernist) where they work in factories or the army—in India, Cuba, Russia, Belarus, and oddly now in Ukraine. They don't appear in the West or in North American culture. The *luj* is not able to identify himself as such, because he doesn't possess the talent for meta-reflection; he wouldn't understand what that is. Most often he acts mistrustfully towards *cioty*, he doesn't understand them, he doesn't know what they want from him, and he isn't aware of how sexual attractive he is to them. The effect the *luj* and the *ciota* have on one another is described in Witold Gombrowicz's short story 'The Rat' (in the collection *Bakakaj*)." Michał Witkowski, *Lubiewo bez cenzury* (Warsaw: Świat Książki, 2012), 399-400.

to the far side of Russia.”⁹⁵ *Luje*, according to the narrator, don’t fit Western models of masculinity, especially masculinity in Western gay cultures, which he associates with a masculinity that is conscious of itself (a definitely reductive perspective, but one he perpetuates throughout the novel). The thought and effort which goes into shaving or piercing one’s penis, ostensibly to produce a pleasing aesthetic effect (or in some cases to enhance sexual pleasure), in *Lubiewo* constitutes a kind of artifice. This automatically disqualifies one from being a *luj*—*luj*-ness is effortless, natural, and perhaps most importantly, authentic, lending itself further to essentialist interpretations.

In addition to possessing an authentic masculinity, the *luj* should also have a “wide, Russian soul.”⁹⁶ We can read this in a few ways: first, as an oblique reference to serfs, who were counted as “souls” (души) on Russian estates and who represented (in literature) many of the same romanticized qualities of the *luj* – close to nature and the land, simple and uncultured, almost animalistic in their motivation and desire. Secondly, relatedly, and perhaps most relevantly, Witkowski invokes here the “Russian soul” as it was developed in Russian culture in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, vis-a-vis the Enlightenment and the West, linking the essentialism of the *luj*’s masculinity to the spiritual condition of “messianic homelessness” which was considered as inherent to Russian national identity and which was particularly conducive to the expansion of the Russian empire. In her summary of the Slavophilic interpretation of the Russian soul, Svetlana Boym mentions not only the Slavophiles’ idealization and dehistoricization of the peasantry, who were regarded as the bearers of a “communal spirituality” (a concept alien

⁹⁵ Witkowski, *Lubiewo*, 204-205. Original: “Luj to musi być dusza bardziej, że tak powiem, rosyjska, szeroka, zgoła nieoczekiwana natura, butelkę po wódce rzuci w krzaki, nic segregował nie będzie. No i, rzecz jasna, nie ma prawa mieć wygolonego ani przebitego, chuja. Nie istnieje coś takiego jak zachodni luje,—ten gatunek pojawia się dopiero na wschód od Odry i ciągnie aż po krańce Rosji.”

⁹⁶ Witkowski, *Lubiewo*, 204-205. Original: “Luj to musi być dusza bardziej, że tak powiem, rosyjska, szeroka

to Western individualism), but she discusses the Slavophiles' imperial fantasies. Russian "metaphysical nomadism" ("holy wanderers") was easily translated into the geopolitical expansion of the Russian empire, as the Russian soul wasn't constricted by national or ethnic borders.⁹⁷ She quotes Feodor Tiutchev's poem "Russkaia geografiia" to illustrate their imperial dreams:

Seven inner seas and seven great rivers
From the Nile to the Neva, from the Elbe to China
From the Volga to the Euphrates, from the Ganges to the Danube
That's the Russian kingdom.⁹⁸

Thus, according to many Russian thinkers in the nineteenth century, "being Russian [was] not defined by ethnicity but by allegiance to the empire and by religion."⁹⁹ National identity was also inspired by a kind of cultural conflict with the West. Boym explains, "The idea of the Russian soul developed directly in response to the German Geist and has something of an Oedipal relation to it (it was *ressentiment*, rather than murder). [...] This soul is opposed to Enlightenment reason as well as to the cultivation of the body."¹⁰⁰ In *Lubiewo*, the *luje*, be they Russian soldiers or Polish workers, uneducated, simple, and aligned with an imperial, or, as implicated in the novel, colonial imperative of Russia, are, as subjects imbued with the political or masculinity authority of the empire, linked through a metaphysical, spiritual brotherhood as represented by the Russian soul.

Witkowski also invokes nineteenth century metaphors of the Russian soul as the endless, exotic Russian steppe. Lukrecja and Patrycja, recounting their romances with Soviet soldiers, exclaim, "He was a Cossack. White face, moustache, a Cossack legionnaire (they smell so different, like the steppes, like Asia!)."¹⁰¹ Here they elide the (admittedly contested) ethnic and

⁹⁷Svetlana Boym, "From the Russian Soul to Post-Communist Nostalgia," *Representations* 49 (Winter 1995): 137-138.

⁹⁸ Quoted in *ibid.*, 138.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 140-141.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 140.

¹⁰¹ Witkowski, *Lubiewo*, 48. Original: "Był taki Kozak. Biała twarz, z wąsem, no, kozaczyzna (ach, oni inaczej zupełnie pachną, stepem, Azją...)"

cultural differences between Cossacks and Russians, as well as the differences between the Soviet Union and the Russian empire. They imagine Cossacks as representatives of an Asian, Eastern Russia, and as possessors of the nomadic Russian soul. In other words, a fetishized Other. As much as the concept of *luj* also encompasses “true” Poles, even Polish nationalists, it is also inextricably connected to the (Eurasian) East, one which (in an inversion of Said’s Orientalism) embodies masculinity, power, and domination. Here Witkowski enacts a feature of the highly specific Eastern European experience of colonialism- the “exportation of ideas to the east” from the West, as previously mentioned, includes the impulse to “Other” the East. While Europe exoticizes Poland, Poland exoticizes Russianess. In *Lubiewo*, the exoticization also is an eroticization which figures Russia as not only politically and culturally desirable, but sexually dominant as well.

The position of *luje* as sexual tops and their textual association with Russian colonialism in *Lubiewo* evokes a comparison with metaphors (and actual histories) of sexualized violence that often describe the attack and conquest of one nation by another. Indeed, there is even a book by Stanisław Mikołajczyk, the Prime Minister of the Polish Government in Exile during WWII, entitled *The Rape of Poland: The Pattern of Soviet Aggression*. While this title certainly can be taken literally, as during the Red Army’s invasion of Poland in 1939 and its march across Poland in 1944-1945 many women of Polish and German descent were raped by Soviet soldiers, it also functions, in a heterosexist society, as a metaphor for the penetration of borders and the stripping of a nation’s sovereignty and national identity. The “motherland,” represented as the female body, is vulnerable to sexual violence and resulting defilement of its (ethnic) “purity,” and therefore the (male) citizens of the nation must mobilize to stave off invaders who might usurp their power over her. A common enough trope, unfortunately, and one that has played out in

horrific ways in a number of violent conflicts. In *Lubiewo*, however, this metaphorical paradigm is certainly used, but it is also shifted and thus produces new meanings concerning the Polish/Russian relation. Penetration happens to male bodies (a literalization of the penetration of the *ojczyzna*, or fatherland, as discussed above), and while this is in line with the patriarchal and heterosexist conception of nation-as-woman, due to the feminization and symbolic castration of the “bottom,” the sexualized power relation between Russians and Poles in *Lubiewo* is eroticized and sought after; the bottom’s consent and enthusiasm is what transforms the metaphor of national rape into something that, according to those who propagate the idea of Russian colonialism and Polish martyrdom, constitutes treason.¹⁰² I propose that we read *Lubiewo* as a particular re-envisioning of Polish history, as an image that replaces or undercuts current dominant historical narratives which employ postcolonial rhetoric with an alternative story, one told in the idiom of masochistic pleasure and which grants agency to the bottom.

Reading the novel as an instance of textual colonial roleplay, especially in the fantasies of the queens, allows us a more nuanced approach into Witkowski’s seemingly simplistic, broad-strokes attack on national sentiment and progressive narratives of nationhood and sovereignty. In describing S/M historical roleplay, Elizabeth Freeman claims that historical play is, “a means of invoking history—personal pasts, collective sufferings, and quotidian forms of injustice—in an idiom of pleasure.”¹⁰³ Significantly, Freeman doesn’t quite subscribe to the idea of S/M as redemptive or healing, nor as a blatant reproduction or manifestation of existing power structures, but rather is interested in the ways sadomasochism can reconfigure, re-code, or re-

¹⁰² This is not to say that there aren’t instances of rape in *Lubiewo*; however, these instances more often figure the *cioty* as the rapists, either through “tricking” the *luje* into sex or through force (in one case, resulting in a possible murder). Given the social position of the *cioty* in their environs and the discrimination and violence they face (even as they seek it out---see following section for a discussion on the transformative power of S/M), these instances can be interpreted as revenge fantasies in which the *cioty* take back the power that was taken from them as victims of homophobic violence.

¹⁰³ Freeman, *Time Binds*, 137.

distribute the corporeal and psychic effects of trauma and history. While the *cioty/luje* relationship doesn't quite fit the bill of sadomasochism in the traditional sense, there are elements, including the "dominant" and "submissive" positions during some sexual acts and a desire for humiliation and degradation, which echo that of an S/M dynamic.

While sexual shame need not be attached to the bottom or submissive position, in *Lubiewo* it is represented as an important part of the encounter. The *cioty* seek out degradation—they loiter outside prisons, inviting the prisoners to verbally humiliate and threaten them while they masturbate around the corner. In another particularly memorable episode of sexual humiliation, Madame Oleśnicka joins the narrator for a drink on the beach. He begs her to tell him a story, and so she recounts the time she stole her friend Kangaroo's *luj* out from under her. He was the "the quintessential *luj*, legs for miles, unzipped fly, a face with a straight nose, Roman, slight curves, biceps... he had sideburns like some Russian Ivan from the nineteenth century, huge, they covered half his face. Oh Christ."¹⁰⁴ This Russian Ivan is not actually Russian, as we find out:

I took 100 zloties and threw them on the ground, and started to stamp on them, but he started to yell at me how dare you throw it on the ground, because the Polish eagle's on it... he was... what was he? Some kind of nationalist or something. Something about respect for the nation, the land, the emblem. And me, I was so drunk I ripped that banknote, I lit it with a lighter, like Nastasya Filipovna. And when I saw him then, his towering legs... I imagined the following fantasy: me in the tub and he stands over me, I see those legs like columns from below, and he pisses on me. Over my breasts and face. And then he spits. So then I whispered to Kanga, 'here, take the key and lock the bathroom, let him drink all the beer he wants, but don't let him in the bathroom! Don't let him in! If you ever loved me even a little, if you are truly my friend, lock the door! Lock the fucking door, and don't let him in, don't let him get one foot through that door!'¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴Witkowski, *Lubiewo*, 255-256. Original: "Esencja lujostwa, nogi do samego nieba, rozpór wypchany, twarz z nosem prostym, rzyskim, lekkie zakola, bicepsy...bokobrody to miał jak jakiś Iwan z Rosji, z XIX wieku, takie wielkie, na pół twarzy. Matko."

¹⁰⁵Ibid., 256-257. Original: "To ja wyciągam sto złotych i na ziemię, deptać zaczynam, ale tu on na mnie jak nie krzyknie, żebym się nie ważyła rzucać tym na ziemię, bo tam jest orzeł, a on jest... czym to on był? Jakimś narodowcem, czy jakoś tak. Coś z poszanowaniem kraju, ziemi, godła. To ja taka pijana podarłam ten banknot,

In Madame Oleśnicka's fantasy, references to Russian literature and ethnic markers cross or displace Polish nationalism. Madame Oleśnicka, in an extravagant display of national disrespect (which perhaps can stand in for the act of Witkowski's writing of *Lubiewo*), destroys the banknote emblazoned with national symbols, inviting the ire of the Polish nationalist. In that moment of symbolic destruction, imagining herself as a provocative Russian heroine (Nastasya Filipovna from Dostoevsky's *The Idiot*), she fantasizes the possible consequences of her unpatriotic act at the hands of the angry nationalist. However, the Polish nationalist is simultaneously imagined as historical, from the nineteenth century, and as a hairy Russian, an "Ivan." The nineteenth century Russian, especially as imagined today, is representative of authority and the Partitions, of the colonizer, although not necessarily culturally superior... his uncouthness (the unzipped fly) marks him as uncultured. However, this is also exactly what makes him a *luj*, and thus desirable on many levels.

Oleśnicka takes the key to the bathroom and hides it in her frenzied desire to realize her fantasy. She controls the parameters of the sexual encounter; she solicits it from her Ivan. As Nguyen Tan Hoang and other bottom theorists have remarked, the relationship between top and bottom is not one of absolute power and powerlessness. While the cultural "baggage" of bottoming is saturated with patriarchal and misogynist signification, queer activists and scholars have complicated and attempted to reclaim it, not only a primary site of queer pleasure, but also for the transformative power of powerlessness itself. Passivity, for instance, has been re-

podpaliłam zapalniczką, jak Nastazja Filipowna. I gdy tylko go zobaczyłam, te jego wielkie nogi, tam, pod Iglicą, od razu wyobraziłam sobie taki obraz: ja w wannie, a on stoi nade mną, tak że te nogi to jak kolumny widzę od dołu i szcza. Po moich piersiach i po twarzy. I pluje. Więc poszeptalam z Kangurzycą, weź, zamknij łazienkę na klucz, niech on te wszystkie piwa pije, ale niech tam nie chodzi. Niech tam nie chodzi! Na klucz zamknij, jeśli mnie jeszcze choć trochę kochasz, jeśliś przyjaciółką mą! A to zamknij w pizdu drzwi te, niech on tam nie wejdzie, niech nie postanie noga jego w tych progach."

conceptualized by some bottoms as “receptivity,” or “an active engagement that accounts for the senses of vulnerability, intimacy, and shame that one necessarily risks in assuming the bottom position.”¹⁰⁶ While the bottom does indeed submit to the top, the power relations between the two are in constant flux, with the bottom sometimes controlling sexual aspects of the encounter such as speed and force. The relation is open to mutual pleasure. Reveling in the possibility of being pissed and spat upon, Oleśnicka orchestrates the encounter through both her provocation of nationalist outrage and through trickery, using the *luj* as a prop for her sexual pleasure turned inwards, anticipating the moment of humiliation at the hands of the drunken man.

The bottom’s shame, however, also gestures toward what affect theorists describe as a paradoxical individuation of the self and uncontrollable relationality toward an Other. The encounter between a colonizing top and colonized bottom would posit the pleasure in the tension between the antisocial nature of the encounter, or the intense turn inward toward the self, and the heightening of the relation between the shamer and the shamed. A national shame of degradation or debasement at the hands of the Russian dominant produces a rush of sexual pleasure. This pleasure is entirely taboo in the Polish context, as the feminizing shame of being penetrated-- and enjoying it-- by the very nation against which modern Polishness is constructed seems like the ultimate betrayal. The colonial bottom’s excitement is, in large part, located in act of national betrayal and in the abjection that results from it, but it is also found in the national shame of subjugation to a foreign power. Witkowski presents a sexual subculture that thrives on a kind of national degradation, which in turn may possibly affect his Polish readers’ relation to mainstream national narratives.

¹⁰⁶ Tan Hoang Nguyen, *A View From the Bottom: Asian American Masculinity And Sexual Representation*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 17.

CHAPTER V.

Transhistoricity: Some Concluding Remarks

Gender transgression has cropped up as a major theme for most of the historical figures or characters I've analyzed in this project: Włast and his variously figured transformations, interwar Warsaw's fascination with Sadowska's attire, the feminine language and mannerisms of the *cioty*. They could, theoretically, all bear the label "transgender" in one way or another; the term encompasses a wide array of gender expressions and subjectivities, from binary to nonbinary, essentialist to constructionist, a sense of gender-fixedness and stability to ever-changing, fluid expression. Yet Filipiak remains skeptical of the idea that Włast could be transsexual or transgender, unless it functions metaphorically, Furja has staunchly claimed Sadowska for lesbian history, and Witkowski makes it a point to tell us that *cioty* would never, ever, want to actually *be* women. What gives?

Transgender, lesbian, and gay male histories often overlap. Early sexological theories of "inversion" naturalized the link between sex, sexuality, and gender—the invert was pathological precisely because their sexuality and gender didn't align. Hence the historical slippages between same-sex desire and transgender expression; "true" lesbians must manifest masculine qualities, and women who manifest masculine qualities must be lesbians. Nan Boyd explains that, "both lesbian and transgender communities look to the past to recuperate individuals who proudly or

cleverly lived outlaw sexualities or genders. However, because of the slippage between sexuality and gender, lesbian and transgender communities often spin usable histories around the same figures.”¹ These historiographical reclamations of certain gender transgressive bodies, however, are often depicted as violent erasures of either identity or desire. Wiktor Dynarski, writing from a trans studies perspective, criticizes the various occlusions of transgender identity in Polish history through labels like *butch*, which has strong associations with a particular expression of lesbian identity, and speculations or assumptions concerning an individual’s sexual preference. Dynarski specifically addresses Filipiak’s attempt to romantically link Włast to Zofia Villaume; while Filipiak never names Włast as a lesbian (in fact, she explicitly states she has no desire to do so), Dynarski suggests that she “designates a place for Włast in lesbian space” and fails to address concerns that this sort of speculation might result in an elision of the differences between transgender and lesbian identities (a distinction, I might add, that is also historical).² Dynarski also points out that nearly every party interested in Włast to-date has used feminine gender markers to refer to the poet (Filipiak does consistently), and that the most “progressive” stance taken has been to separate Komornicka and Włast via a slash, demarcating both the time periods each identity occupied and female/male identities as such. This, however, is not a solution for Dynarski, who asserts Włast’s masculinity for a few reasons. First, he believes in Włast’s right to self-definition, and if Włast affirmed himself a man, then we should refer to him as one. Second, he takes issue with literary critics’ and biographers’ obsession with Włast’s moment of transformation. He explains, “The majority of the literary and historical research focuses on, first

¹ Nan Alamilla Boyd, “The Materiality of Gender,” *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, 3:3, 1999. 74.

² Wiktor Dynarski, “Analiza wybranych badań nad płciowością Piotra Własta z perspektywy transgender studies” (master’s thesis, Uniwersytet Warszawski, 2011). www.academia.edu/3646878/Analiza_wybranych_bada%C5%84_nad_p%C5%82ciowo%C5%9Bci%C4%85_Piotra_W%C5%82asta_z_perspektywy_transgender_studies Original: “wyznaczyć Włastowi miejsce w przestrzeni lesbijskiej,” 74.

and foremost, discovering the *cause* of transgenderism (despite the fact that it is unclear even for medicine today), instead of accepting Piotr Włast's masculinity and attempting to examine his *oeuvre* from the perspective of a trans person who decided on (let's not hide it) a courageous and unusual action—coming out.”³

Błażej Warkocki takes up this line of reasoning in his review of *Komornicka: Biografia pozorna* (*Komornicka. An Ostensible Biography*), a play based on the poet's life which premiered in 2012. In the article, entitled “Piotr był mężczyzną!” (“Piotr was a man!”), he expresses his disappointment that the actor chosen to play Piotr was female. His indignation echoes the need to “make reparations,” as he writes, “After all, Piotr lost everything: a career, money, everything. He wandered around hospitals—as a man. And in this play about his life he became a woman.”⁴

Włast is slowly, but surely, being reclaimed as a transman. For instance, Tomasiak, who in his first edition of *Homobiografie* used feminine gender markers and the name Komornicka, corrected himself in the second edition. Abram Lewis observes the phenomenon of ensuring proper objects, “Possibly in an effort to resist popular notions of transgender people as at once insane, tragic, and absurd, this literature has seemed, if anything, to promote histories of agential and politicized communities—of subjects with sensible, self-interested aspirations.”⁵ Yet as much as Włast is now discussed in reparative terms—his rescue from obscurity, from pathologization, from misidentification—their archive, their textual traces, are still haunted by

³ Dynarski, “‘Analiza wybranych badań,’” 45. Original: “Większość badań historycznoliterackich skupia się przede wszystkim na odnalezieniu *przyczyny* transpłciowości (mimo że nie są one jednoznaczne nawet dla dzisiejszej medycyny), zamiast na akceptacji męskości Piotra Własta i próbie przyjrzenia się jego twórczości pod kątem osoby transpłciowej, która zdecydowała się na (nie ukrywajmy) odważny i niezwykle trudny krok—*coming out*.”

⁴ Błażej Warkocki, “Piotr był mężczyzną!” in *Różowy język*, 195. Original: “Piotr stracił przecież wszystko: karierę, pieniądze, wszystko. Tułał się po szpitalach—jako mężczyzna. A w spektaklu o swoim życiu został kobietą”

⁵ Abram J. Lewis, “‘I am 64 and Paul McCartney Doesn't Care’: The Haunting of the Transgender Archive and the Challenges of Queer History,” *Radical History Review*, 120, (2014): 22.

the specter of mental illness. As much as his rescuers have theorized, metaphorized, and historicized Włast's gender, mining his biography and creative output for indications of discursive, social, familial, and medical sanctions, the fact remains that we will never *know* whether or not Włast's transgender identity was connected with mental illness. And that makes Włast an unruly subject, a slippery persona who may or may not damage the hard-fought recognition for non-pathologized, autonomous personhood that transgender communities deserve.

So how do we do the history of Włast and other “bad subjects,” like Witkowski's *cioty*, who appropriate femininity but shun women? To what extent can we define and/or allegorize without doing epistemic violence to the historical subject? There is no one answer; if this dissertation makes one thing clear, I hope it is that historiography is always volatile and never “safe”; confrontations with the past never assure validation or revelation. However, Lewis suggests an ambivalent position might be the best we can hope for; he suggests that the very queerness of the transgender archive is constituted by unassimilable or strange objects, all possible forms of transgression and illegibility. He describes the paradox the historian faces, as locating these strange narratives,

in the violent forces of power in which they were caught betrays a deeply felt need to refigure their realities against their own accounts of them, to somehow recuperate those elements of their lives as meaningful to the scope of familiar political and intellectual agendas. In this, a hauntological reading seems, to me, both indispensable and critically flawed—it is a hermeneutic I cannot ignore, and yet I can countenance it only with great ambivalence, for this reading demands that we tacitly confirm the subjects of the archive as compromised speakers, that we admit them to our accounts only through a crucial refashioning of their own testimonies. Under a hauntological reading, these activists in fact evince a familiar paradox of witnessing: subjected to and subjectivized by an unknowable

power, they are eventually silenced by the foreclosure of their narrative authority.⁶

We are damned if we do, and damned if we don't, and so are our historical subjects. We cannot make sense of the damaging or simply unintelligible aspects of Włast's life unless we do so through metaphorizing or rationalizing their experiences, thus placing ourselves in an authoritative position; yet if we don't, Włast is relegated once again to solitary exile, a marginal figure who cannot be taken seriously. Somewhere in the middle lies the historian's anxiety about the unpredictable effects of recuperating such an ambivalent, contradictory, and secretive historical figure. Yet perhaps that is where queer historiography is most effective; it is disruptive of our temporalities, our politics, our sense of self, and full of unexpected pitfalls and pleasure.

⁶ Ibid., 27.

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