

Female Body and Sexuality Reflected in Ego-documents of Acculturating Jewish Women in the Partitioned Territory of Poland at the Beginning of the 20th Century¹

by Zuzanna Kołodziejska-Smagala

Introductory remarks

Klara Mirska, a Polish-Jewish journalist, socialist and wife of a prominent communist activist, recalling her years in Zofia Kalecka's private school for Jewish girls,² described an impression and the impact that a piece of literature could make on sexually uneducated girls at the beginning of the 20th century:

“I was fifteen at the time. Our fantastic teacher Lucjan Komarnicki [...] once brought a book from which he read aloud the beautiful *Tale of the Falcon*. We asked Komarnicki to tell us who was the author and what the title of the book was, so that we could borrow it from the library. But he seriously answered: ‘It’s not a book for you, young ladies, so the name of the author should not be of interest to you.’ [...] When he moved away from his desk, I (sitting in the first row) glimpsed the first page of the book. It was *The Decameron*. *The Tale of the Falcon* is, probably, the only tale in this book that does not contain any drastic scenes. All others depict the erotic adventures of priests. After a few days my classmates finally got a copy of *The Decameron* and were whispering about it. I read only a few tales. They did not arouse any unhealthy feelings or thoughts in me.”³

The use of the word “unhealthy” clearly shows that the author of the memoir disapproved her classmates’ excitement. The passage refers to the common topic of girls’ overexcitement about any hint of eroticism, which was discussed in newspapers of the time, noted in diaries and recalled later in memoirs. It also points out the sources for sexual education used by girls, which is one of the key issues that this article focuses on: that is, a reflection of the discourses on the female body and sexuality at the beginning of the 20th century in Polish-Jewish ego-documents.

The research question is whether fierce debates in the daily press on such vital social questions as female sexuality, sexual education, prostitution,⁴ the female body and the

1 This article was supported by NCN (National Science Center, Poland) under grant no 2019/33/B/HS3/00993. All translations of primary sources are done by the author.

2 Mirska attended the school between 1910 and 1918. Zofia Kalecka's school operated until 1939. See further: <https://sztetl.org.pl/en/towns/w/18-warsaw/102-education-and-culture/138845-kalecki-senior-and-junior-high-schools-warsaw> (access: 15.11.2021).

3 Klara Mirska: *Kronika mojego życia* [The Chronicle of My Life], (typed manuscript; TM), archives of the National Library in Poland (BN), rps. akc. 9024, p. 78.

4 I use the term “prostitution” because it was widely used in the period covered in my research. I find the modern, neutral term “sex work” anachronistic because the intellectuals who discussed

spread of venereal diseases, that at first were discussed only among a few professionals,⁵ had any reflection in the private sphere of young, acculturating Jewish women and girls. How did they perceive their own bodies? Were the abovementioned issues important to them, that is, worth describing in their diaries, memoirs, or correspondence? The article tries to examine whether the Jewish background of the authors had any impact on their perception or presentation of their bodies and sexualities. It leads to another question – what the relation between personal experience and institutions, like schools or collective norms presented in the press and guides to sexual education, was. The reason for limiting the scope of sources only to private documents of Polish-Jewish women is that Polish-Jewish female literature between 1880 and 1918 was characterized by a number of texts⁶ referring to female sexuality and the body⁷; hence the question arises whether it was merely a literary theme or whether the same tendency can be seen in other Polish-Jewish sources. Due to the fact that Judaism has a number of rites related to the female body, such as head covering for married women or immersing in ritual baths after menstruation, just to mention the two most well-known, it seems interesting to see if the experience of being, particularly, a Jewish woman had any impact on the attitude towards one's body and was in any way expressed in the private documents of Polish-Jewish women. As some of the Polish-Jewish female writers, such as Aniela Korngutówna, had close relations with some prominent members of the Polish *intelligentsia* (she was a friend of the renowned playwright, novelist and feuilletonist, Gabriela Zapolska), it seemed natural to examine surviving correspondence between acculturating Jewish writers and members of the Polish *intelligentsia*. Yet, so far, the analyzed correspondence has not revealed any references to the female body or sexuality.⁸ Therefore, the ego-documents I focus on here are limited to memoirs and diaries.

the issue did not perceive the phenomenon as an ordinary job, nor did they consider it neutral. Quite the opposite: that kind of work was considered immoral.

- 5 Various researchers emphasize the unprecedented scale on which the discussion of sexuality took place between 1880 and 1914, see for example Keely Stauter-Halsted: *The Devil's Chain: Prostitution and Social Control in Partitioned Poland*, New York 2015, p. 2; Jolanta Sikorska-Kulesza: 'Skąd się wziął twój braciszek?' Początki dyskusji o wychowaniu seksualnym dzieci i młodzieży na ziemiach polskich [Where Did Your Little Brother Come from? The Origin of the Discussion on Sexual Education for Youth and Children in the Polish Lands], in: Anna Żarnowska, Andrzej Szwarc (eds.): *Kobieta i małżeństwo. Społeczno-kulturowe aspekty seksualności. Wiek XIX i XX* [A Woman and a Marriage. Social and Cultural Aspects of Sexuality. 19th and 20th Centuries], Warsaw 2004, p. 25.
- 6 Among texts which serve as good examples are the following: Ewelina Lindowska: *Męty. Obrazek sceniczny w 1 akcie* [Scum. A One-Act Play], Warsaw 1909; Aniela Kallas: *Ofiara* [A Victim], in: *Rocznik Samborski* 21 (1897/1898), pp. 113-155; Aniela Kalla: *Żona czy kochanka. Komedie w 3 aktach* [A Wife or a Lover. A Three-Act Comedy], Krakow 1909.
- 7 See Zuzanna Kołodziejska-Smagąła: 'Natura stworzyła kobietę na to, żeby była żoną i matką' – rola kobiety w oczach polsko-żydowskich pisarzy [The Nature Created a Woman to Be a Wife and a Mother – A Role of a Woman Through the Eyes of Polish-Jewish Writers], in: Zuzanna Kołodziejska-Smagąła, Maria Antosik-Piela (eds.): *Literatura polsko-żydowska 1861–1918. Studia i szkice* [Polish-Jewish Literature 1861–1918. Studies and Sketches], Krakow 2018, pp. 147-187.
- 8 I examined letters between Zapolska and Korngutówna, Korngutówna and Orzeszkowa, Orzeszkowa and Blumberg. The research on correspondence has not yet been finished hence the outcome may change.

Since the term Polish-Jewish denotes an ambiguous phenomenon, it is crucial to determine the criteria that I considered while conducting the research. Because the Jewish women the article focuses on chose Polish as their language of expression, the first criterion is that the literature as well as ego-documents written by them must be in Polish. The other key criterion is a reference to their Jewish background. Because they underwent the process of acculturation, which can often be only vaguely differentiated from assimilation; and since personal identity is negotiated throughout one's life, the choice of sources is limited and complicated. Summing up, the social actors that the article focuses on are Jewish women who chose Polish as their language of public and literary expression; Polish culture as their point of reference and the Jewish religion and tradition as their, more or less, private spheres. Because ego-documents are a specific source for literary and historical research, their nature falling somewhere between the fictional and the documentary genres,⁹ I find it extremely important to analyze them within broad social, cultural, historical and political contexts, because, in my view, only in that way may we be able to expand our knowledge of the epoch we research. Hence, the article describes in detail the contemporary discourses on female sexuality, as well as offering some insight into the milieu of acculturating Jewish women. I will start with an analysis of the memoirs.

It seems that the first decade of the 20th century was a melting pot of different ideas in the Polish lands. With growing industrialization and modernization social changes were occurring rapidly, while revolutionary movements in Russia and the Kingdom of Poland attracted many young women and men. Higher mobility of women caused by the migration from villages and little towns to big cities brought up questions on their morality, while the fight for higher education for women started to change gender roles slowly. The elites and media had to react fast. At that time female sexuality, sexual education, the female body, the spread of venereal diseases, and prostitution became everyday problems discussed in the professional and daily press.¹⁰ Hence, the article widely uses press reports as a source of different discourses on the most vital issues. Although those processes were occurring in other parts of Europe and the US, they possessed their own specific features in the Polish lands. First of all, in a rather obvious way, the question of the female body and sexuality was related to a much bigger and more complicated issue – women's emancipation, which itself had a minimally different regional character in Central and Eastern Europe. Foremost, it was related to the national question.¹¹ Therefore, in the Polish lands, the emancipationists would perceive the issue of women's rights or education from a local, Polish perspective and would link the battle for women's emancipation with the fight for Poland's independence.

The ethnic reference is also visible not only in the names of women's movements (Association for Polish Women's Suffrage, Polish Union of Equal Rights for Women, the

9 See Jochen Hellbeck: *The Diary between Literature and History: A Historian's Critical Response*, in: *The Russian Review* 63 (2004), issue 4, pp. 621-629, here 621.

10 It is worth remembering that at the time press and literature were the only media available hence literature was often treated as a reliable source of knowledge on reality, like a documentary rather than a piece of fiction.

11 Scholars researching other parts of the region point out to the relation between women's emancipation movements and the question of a nation. See, for example, Ana Kolarić: *Gender, Nation, and Education in the Women's Magazine Žena (The Woman) (1911–1914)*, in: *Espacio, Tiempo, y Educación* 4 (2017), no. 1, pp. 1-23; <http://dx.doi.org/10.14516/ete.142>

Union of Equal Rights for Polish Women) or women's summits held in different towns of the former state of Poland, but also in the content of women's journals, like "Ster" (The Helm) or "Nowe Słowo" (The New Word), where references to other women's organizations in different parts of the world had the function of differentiating the Polish one from others, as well as displaying similarities. By "Polish" they generally meant Roman-Catholic, Polish-speaking women living in the lands of the former Poland. Interestingly, even though there were Jewish women's organizations at the time, emancipationists collaborating with "Ster" or "Nowe Słowo" never mentioned them, though they would refer to such (for a Polish reader) exotic ethnicities as Chinese. The fact that the women's emancipation movement was nation-related also had an impact in the acculturation process of Jewish women. They would rather choose to participate in the Polish women's emancipation movements than in Jewish ones, as they identified themselves with the Polish culture and for their milieu the question of Poland's independence was of crucial importance.¹² For acculturating Jews, the question of Poland's independence was in fact the question of their loyalty; hence they were engaged in the fight for a new Poland, they took part in the January Uprising, and with the increase of antisemitism in the last decades of the 19th century, they tried to prove their loyalty and patriotism even more strongly. Therefore, membership in an organization of Polish women could also be a sign of patriotic behavior on their part. The issue, though, is complex and should not be generalized, as the scale of one's acculturation was different then, as well as one's attachment to the Jewish culture. Jewish women's emancipation movements, on the other hand, like a Warsaw-based Bnos Tijon (Daughters of Zion), established in 1903, were often related to Zionist organizations and supported the idea of emigration, learning Hebrew and establishing a Jewish state – ideas absolutely incompatible with the aims pursued by the supporters of acculturation.¹³ Therefore, if acculturating Jewish women supported women's emancipatory movements, it was because they did not, in fact, have a choice but to become involved in the Polish movement, especially inasmuch as they did not have their own press body, nor did they form any organization.

Another obvious consequence of the national character of the Polish women's rights movement was the separation of Jewish and non-Jewish feminists, as was the case with other minorities,¹⁴ so the women's emancipation movement did not, in practice, fight for

12 See Zuzanna Kołodziejska: *Izraelita (1866–1915). Znaczenie kulturowe i literackie czasopisma [Israelite (1866–1915). Cultural and Literary Importance of the Weekly]*, Krakow 2014; Agnieszka Jagodzińska: *Pomiędzy. Akulturacja Żydów Warszawy w drugiej połowie XIX wieku [Between. Acculturation of Warsaw Jews in the Second Half of the 19th Century]*, Wrocław 2008; Alicja Maślak-Maciejewska: *Modlili się w Templu. Krakowscy Żydzi postępowi w XIX wieku. Studium społeczno-religijne [They Prayed in the Temple. Cracow Progressive Jews in the 19th Century. A Social and Religious Study]*, Krakow 2018.

13 On Jewish women's emancipation in the Polish lands see, for example, Joanna Lisek: *Kol isze – głos kobiet w poezji jidysz (od XVI w. do 1939r.) [Kol-Isha – Women's Voice in the Yiddish Poetry (from the 1500s to 1939)]*, Sejny 2018, pp.170-173. On Bnos Tsijon see also: Puah Rakovsky: *My Life as a Radical Jewish Woman: Memoirs of a Zionist Feminist in Poland*, Bloomington et.al. 2002, pp. 72 f.

14 The issue is a bit more complex as it occurred from time to time that Jewish or Ukrainian women's associations collaborated with Polish ones in such big events as the International Women's Day. Some of the members of the Polish women's rights organizations were assimilated Jews. Yet as Iwona Dadej and Angélique Leszczawski-Schwerk show in their article, some organizations

women's rights in general, but for the rights of Polish-speaking Roman-catholic women in particular. Therefore, a small milieu of acculturating Jewish women could have played a role of a bridge between two cultures and two emancipation movements. However, it seems that this never happened, maybe because the milieu was never organized but was rather a group of individuals who pursued their goals separately. Maybe the members of the Polish movement were not really interested in the problems of minorities, or maybe the reason was that Jewish women who spoke Polish were perceived as assimilated, as Poles. At the same time they would assume that the Jewish component of their identity belonged to the private sphere and was not, for example, important in the fight for women's education. Because it is impossible to generalize on such a complex and individual matter as one's identity, especially at a time when different social movements "fought" for their supporters, the article analyzes particular cases instead of making generalizations. Its aim is to present complexity and lack of homogeneity in the history of Polish culture.

The time frame of the article is established by the heated debate over sexuality that took place in the early 1900s, hence the discourses on sexuality between 1900 and 1914, when the debate faded away, are analyzed here; and 1918, which represents a symbolic moment when Poland regained its independence and the political and social situation changed. Yet, because memoirs are a specific source in regard to time, their analysis is not limited only to such a short period of time but extends into the early 1920s. The selection of research sources was based on the lifespan of an author, not on the date a memoir was written. Even though I am aware of the fact that a memoir is influenced by the epoch it is written in, I assume that it may serve as a reliable source inasmuch as it presents personal experience and its relation to social changes that occurred between 1900 and 1918. The article is not meant to describe facts, but the relation between a private experience and discourses; hence a lack of objectivity is an inevitable feature of the article.

Since between 1795 and 1918 Poland did not exist as a state and its territory was divided among three different countries, the term "Polish lands" denotes the area that belonged to the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. However, the geographical background of the article is narrowed to the Kingdom of Poland and Galicia, because Warsaw, Cracow and Lviv were the centers of Jewish acculturation. The Jews coming from the former parts of Poland which belonged to the Russian Empire were called the Litvaks and were perceived by Polish Jews as different to them in terms of tradition and habits.¹⁵ The third partition that belonged to Prussia, on the other hand, differed much from the other two in its social structure.

that included Jewish and non-Jewish members eventually split, because some members did not like the growing number of Jews in their association. See Iwona Dadej, Angelique Leszczawski-Schwerk: Together and Apart. Polish Women's Rights Activists and the Beginnings of International Women's Day Around 1911, in: *Aspasia* 6 (2012), pp. 25-42. In 1912 Stefania Sempołowska and Teresa Lubińska, members of a Warsaw-based *Związek Równouprawnienia Kobiet Polskich* [Association for Polish Women's Suffrage], left the association in an act of protest over a campaign for boycotting Jewish businesses, that was supported by the association's press body – "Ster". See J. [Józefa, Z. K.] Bojanowska: *W przełomowej chwili* [The Turning Point], in: *Ster* (1912), no. 20-21, pp. 2 f.

15 See, for example, Heiko Haumann: *A History of East European Jews*, Budapest et.al. 2002, pp. 124 f.; François Guesnet: *From Community to Metropolis: The Jews of Warsaw 1850–1880*, in: Glenn Dynner, François Guesnet (eds.): *Warsaw. The Jewish Metropolis. Essays in Honour of the 75th Birthday of Professor Antony Polonsky*, Boston 2015, pp. 128-153.

Jews living there had equal rights with Christians under the condition of acculturation (they had to speak German and use German surnames), while Poles underwent a process of Germanization, and Polish institutions and the use of the Polish language were forbidden. Besides, I did not find any Polish-Jewish (that is written in Polish) female ego-documents from that region.

Unlike the case in the Kingdom of Poland, the Polish minority in Galicia enjoyed more political freedom with a local government, Polish as one of the official languages, and higher education available also for women since the late 1890s. The fact that women could study, and that the language of education was Polish had significant consequences for women's emancipation as well. Thanks to the efforts of some social activists, such as Kazimiera Bujwidowa,¹⁶ it was possible in Krakow to open a gymnasium for girls with a curriculum similar to that in schools for boys. A wide choice of different schools for girls influenced and enhanced the acculturation of Jewish women.¹⁷ Many girls from the Kingdom of Poland who could not afford to study abroad in Zurich, Brussels, or other Western cities, chose Krakow or Lviv.¹⁸ Education was a key element of the process of Jewish acculturation. Therefore, the article also focuses on the question of the education of Jewish women because all the authors of the ego-documents were educated in schools that taught in Polish (in the Kingdom of Poland not officially).

Acculturating Jewish women – main characteristics of the group

Beginning in the late 1700s, Jewish communities in Europe began to undergo various social changes. One that was well visible to non-Jews and which shaped the relations between the two groups, was a complex process of acculturation.¹⁹ In the Polish lands, depending on the partition, the situation of Jews was different; hence the “progressive” Jewish circles, as

16 Kazimiera Bujwidowa (1867–1932) was a women's rights activist involved in the fight for women's education. She was critical towards the Catholic Church, which she left in the 1890s, and engaged in anticlerical activities. After moving from Warsaw to Krakow, she collaborated with other women's emancipationists, Maria Turzyna and Maria Siedlecka, co-founding with the latter a women's reading room, a cultural institution that spread the idea of women's emancipation. She published various pamphlets on education and women's emancipation. In 1908 she was engaged in the election campaign of Maria Dulębianka. See Maja Haber: Kazimiera Bujwidowa, in: *Archiwum Historii Kobiet*, <http://www.herstorie.pl/kobiety/> (access: 30.11.2021).

17 See Rachel Manekin: *The Rebellion of the Daughters. Jewish Women Runaways in Habsburg Galicia*, Princeton et.al. 2020, pp. 11-54.

18 See Jan Hulewicz: *Sprawa wyższego wykształcenia kobiet w Polsce w wieku XIX [The Question of Women's Higher Education in the 19th Century Poland]*, Krakow 1939, p. 265.

19 I use the term acculturation because it indicates the process of changing one's cultural, religious, ethnic and national identity, and in my view for a considerable number of Jews, especially at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, the process was not finished and sometimes could never end because it was undergoing a constant change related to external circumstances. On the other hand, assimilation indicates a final stage of the process. For more information on Jewish assimilation see among others: Todd M. Endelman: *Assimilation and Assimilationism*, in: Mitchell B. Hart, Tony Michels (eds.): *The Cambridge History of Judaism, Volume 8, The Modern World, 1815–2000*, Cambridge 2017, pp. 291-311; Shmuel Feiner et.al.: *Haskalah and History: The Emergence of a Modern Jewish Historical Consciousness*, Liverpool 2002.

they liked to call themselves, wanted to be acculturated within German culture (the Prussian partition, Galicia until the 1860s, when the appearance of a Polish-speaking preacher began the process of acculturation into Polish culture²⁰) and Polish culture, respectively, as in the case of the Kingdom of Poland. Not surprisingly, it was in Warsaw that the first Polish-Jewish press bodies appeared in the 1820s and then in the 1860s. Polish-Jewish weeklies, which functioned as an institution for progressive Jews, also welcomed female authors. At first, they were primarily translators,²¹ but with the passage of time more Jewish women became active as authors of different genres of Polish-Jewish texts. It is worth noting that throughout the 19th century, literary texts were perceived as descriptions of reality, not as fiction. Due to the woman's position in a traditional Jewish family and the system of Jewish education, which was more focused on boys than girls, press and literature in European languages in the second half of the 19th century offered more favorable conditions for female voices than Yiddish or Hebrew ones, which assumed that women should not be active in the public sphere, including literary work.²² It seems, however, that literature, unlike the press, was the medium in which they could express themselves most freely.

Since the late 1880s a group of Jewish women publishing in Polish-Jewish periodicals like "Izraelita" (The Israelite) or "Ojczyzna" (Homeland), though not strong in numbers, was undoubtedly significant, as literary texts written by women outnumbered those published by men. Many of them, such as Aniela Korngutówna, Róża Centnerszwerowa, Julia Dicksteinówna and Amelia Reichmanówna, were also engaged in the women's emancipation movement. Their ethnic identity was complex and it is impossible to determine it unequivocally even for one person, as it was changing over time. Yet, the description of their identity expressed by Malwina Blumberg, one of the Polish-Jewish translators, seems to be a good clue: "I am a Jewish woman who passionately and warmly loves her nation, but as much as I love my religion and my poor, downtrodden nation, I also love my home country, where my ancestors found shelter during the most violent persecutions in Western Europe. I felt I'm a citizen of the country, a sister of its people."²³ As the passage shows, a milieu of acculturating Jewish women wanted to be citizens of the country; hence their engagement in the Polish women's rights movement, which also fought for Poland's independence, was natural

20 See Alicja Maślak-Maciejewska: Progressive Preacher Szymon Dankowicz (1834–1910). A Study in the History of Progressive Judaism in Partitioned Polish Lands, in: *Scripta Judaica Cracoviensia*, vol. 14 (2016), pp. 69-84.

21 Known for her first Polish travel guide to the Sudetes, published in 1850, Rozalia Saulsonowa collaborated with the first Polish-Jewish weekly "Jutrzenka" [The Dawn], (there were two journals published in the 1820s – one did not survive, and the second, "Dostrzegacz Nadwiślański" – *Der Beobachter an der Weichsel* [The Discerner upon the Vistula River], was published in Polish and German written with the Hebrew alphabet, but "Jutrzenka" became the first important and influential press body for the milieu of acculturating Jews in the Kingdom of Poland); and she published there her translations of Lessing's "Nathan der Weise" and a poem from the Talmud.

22 See Rachel Manekin: The Lost Generation. Education and Female Conversation in Fin-de-Siècle Kraków, in: *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry*, vol. 18 (2005), pp. 189-219, here p. 197; on women in Hebrew literature see Tova Cohen: The Maskilot: Feminine or Feminist Writing?, in: *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry*, vol. 18 (2005), pp. 57-86, here pp. 58 f.; for Yiddish, see Lisek, *Kol isze* (see note 13), pp. 30, 49, 52, 58.

23 Malwina Blumberg to Eliza Orzeszkowa, 28 December 1886, *Archiwum Elizy Orzeszkowej* (AEO), rps. 287. All translations, if not stated otherwise, are by the author of the article.

to them. Later, as the 20th century developed, they would have to reconsider their identity in the light of external circumstances, such as increasing anti-Jewish attitudes in Polish society.

Press, medical and cultural discourses on women's body and sexuality between 1900 and 1918 in the Polish lands

The heated debate over sexuality was ignited by a few main factors: the women's emancipation movement, industrialization and a change in the structure of employment, emigration from small towns and cities to bigger centers, social changes as well as new political and ideological movements. The main focus of the debate was prostitution, which was related to the aforementioned changes. Since the late 1880s the intellectual elites in all three partitions and in other European countries began to direct public attention to the "problem" of prostitution. Although there were different approaches towards the phenomenon, which will be discussed later, they all had one thing in common: they viewed prostitution as a moral decline, as an exclusively female profession, and women who worked in the sex industry were perceived as the innocent victims of abusive men. Their agency was taken from them entirely.²⁴ It was a theme through which different aspects of social reality could be explained. It pointed out the problem of women's labor – it was used as an argument to make women's and men's salaries more equal – the assumption being that if women were better compensated, they would not have to work in the sex industry. Prostitution was not only a good means to introduce the question of women's sexuality and the need to control their bodies, but it also served as an argument for sexual education and for vocational education for women. The spread of venereal diseases, which was a considerable problem in the 1900s, was also easily explained through prostitution. Even though it was condemned and seen as immoral, it was also presented as a last resort for women who tried to be independent. One of the heroines of Aniela Korngutówna's novel when unable to find a "decent", well-paid job, turns to sex work, but her choice, even though a sign of self-determination and independence, is not seen as such by other characters or by the narrator, who might be an alter-ego of the author.²⁵ Prostitution also served as an introduction to another difficult issue, namely abortion and unwanted children.

Press discourse

As an immediate aftermath of the 1905 Revolution and the Alfonse pogrom,²⁶ together with an abundance of social institutions, two journals appeared in the Polish lands: a Lviv-based

24 See Stauter-Halsted, *Devil's Chain* (see note 5), p. 6. In her research, Keely Stauter-Halsted shows how false that belief was.

25 See Aniela Kallas: *Kobiety uczciwe* [Decent Women], Lviv 2 1919, p. 97.

26 The term denotes the riots in May 1905 in Warsaw when a Jewish mob attacked Warsaw brothels and their Jewish owners. It was believed that frustration related to ineffective activities by the societies for the protection of women, press reports on many cases of human trafficking together with a feeling of growing debauchery in Warsaw, caused the riots. See Aleksandra Jakubczak: *Polacy, Żydzi i mit handlu kobietami* [Poles, Jews and the Myth of Women's Trafficking], Warsaw 2020, pp. 184-194.

“Świat Płciowy” (Sexual World) and a Krakow-based “Czystość” (Purity). Although they were both published in Galicia, the former resembled the approach to sexuality represented by a Warsaw-based circle of Ster’s collaborators, while the latter was, in the beginning, published as a supplement to “Nowe Słowo”, a journal edited by women’s rights activist Maria Turzyna²⁷ in Krakow.²⁸ They were both edited by physicians and their goals were to fight against debauchery, prostitution, and most of all, the spread of venereal diseases. They serve as good examples of two main approaches towards those issues taken by Polish intellectual elites. “Świat Płciowy” advocated for sexual education as a solution to all issues, whereas “Czystość” promoted sexual abstinence. “Świat Płciowy” not only promoted sexual education but also fiercely opposed the idea of abstinence. Similarly, the Warsaw circle of feminist Paulina Kuczalska-Reinschmit²⁹ advocated for sexual education in schools as one of the elements of the women’s rights issue.³⁰ Nevertheless, “Świat Płciowy” did not support sexual promiscuity, because, according to its editor-in-chief, it led, in the case of women, either to “vaginal suffering” or “uterine catarrh”.³¹ It is noteworthy that he did not elaborate on the consequences of promiscuity for men, which indicates the limit of self-determination of women set by progressive or liberal circles. Sexual education was supposed to be provided by schools and parents. The latter would be supported by guides for parents, but as women were responsible for upbringing, they were intended mostly for female readers.³² “Czystość”, on the other hand, supported abolition and was involved in funding a Polish abstinence movement among male students.³³

27 Maria Turzyna (1860–1922), an editor and publisher of “Nowe Słowo”, a bi-weekly on women’s issues, and “Robotnica” [The Woman Worker], a supplement to “Nowe Słowo” for working-class women. She was involved in the women’s emancipation movement in Galicia. With Kazimiera Bujwidowa she fought for access to higher education for women. In 1904 she funded Związek Kobiet [Women’s Union], a society fighting for women’s rights in Galicia. She also actively fought for Poland’s independence as a messenger of the Polish Legions and a member of Polska Organizacja Wojskowa [Polish Military Organization]. See Ewa Furgał: Maria Turzyna, in: *Archiwum Historii Kobiet*, <http://www.herstorie.pl/kobiety/> (access: 30.11.2021).

28 Keely Stauter-Halsted also notices the relation between “Ster” and “Świat Płciowy” in juxtaposition to “Czystość” and “Nowe Słowo”: See Stauter-Halsted, *Devil’s Chain* (see note 5), p. 221.

29 Paulina Kuczalska-Reinschmit (1859–1921), a scientist graduated from the University in Geneva, a feminist, a co-founder and co-editor of the women’s weekly “Ster” [The Helm] published in Lviv and then from 1907 in Warsaw. She was a founder of Związek Równouprawnienia Kobiet Polskich [Association for Polish Women’s Suffrage]. She was called a leader (hetmanka) of Polish women. She held a salon in Warsaw and was a founder of a scientific library for women. Her circle included women’s rights activists from the Kingdom of Poland. See Ewa Furgał: Paulina Kuczalska-Reinschmit, in: *Archiwum Historii Kobiet*, <http://www.herstorie.pl/kobiety/> (access: 30.11.2021).

30 See Stauter-Halsted, *Devil’s Chain* (see note 5), p. 230.

31 Dr A. Roicki: *Hygiena miodowych miesięcy* [Hygiene during the Honey Moon], in: *Świat Płciowy* (1905), no. 1, pp. 14 f.

32 In 1903 one of the Polish-Jewish journalists and translators, Róża Centnerszwerowa, published a Polish version of a guide for parents by Ellis Ethelmer titled “Baby Buds”. The book was republished with some editorial amendments two years later, so it may be assumed that it gained popularity.

33 See Dr Augustyn Wróblewski: *O moralności płciowej* [On Gendered Morality], in: *Czystość* (1905), no. 2, pp. 12-15.

As much as those approaches differed from one another, they were the same in their manner of perception of human sexuality. Both journals considered a marriage between a man and a woman as the only possible, accepted form of intimate relations between people.³⁴ Therefore, homosexuality was seen as unnatural, dangerous, abnormal and pathological.³⁵ Both condemned masturbation as unhealthy or even dangerous for one's mental condition. Not surprisingly, it had apparently worse consequences on women than on men because it was regarded as a sign of self-determination by women, who in the act of masturbation were not only active but performed an action that led to their self-satisfaction. As a result, they became the subject of sexual activity, whereas they were presented in contemporary discourses as mere objects of male sexual desire. It was understood by the majority of contemporary intellectuals that "a healthy, decent" woman could not feel pleasure from sex unless it led to reproduction, but then it was not a physical pleasure, but rather a satisfying feeling of fulfilling her duty as a woman. Because of higher moral standards for women than men, masturbation by women was seen as a symptom of debauchery and immorality. As "Świat Płciowy" argued, due to onanism young men become weaker with lower life energy, which may lead to suicide, whereas young women suffer from constant "uterine pain, nymphomania, spinal pain, jaundice and they become animal-like creatures".³⁶ The passage clearly implies that such behavior was unnatural for the majority of women and led to health deterioration. Parents of daughters who were caught masturbating were advised to give them metal gloves to wear at night. Obviously, the aforementioned discourses echoed various theories about human nature and sexuality, that were popular in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It should be emphasized that the beginning of the 20th century was also the beginning of two new disciplines, criminology and sexology, both of which played an important role in the discussion of sexuality. At the time, "the set of new social and behavioral sciences" or so-called scientization of the social emerged, which undertook to examine human actors from an empirical point of view.³⁷ The abovementioned periodicals clearly indicate that shift: human sexuality became a subject of scientific research, while academics and physicians became experts on the topic. Women's bodies started to be categorized and examined, while their sexuality was explained by psychology. It was at that

34 That was a widespread belief among the majority of intellectuals and medical professionals; see Anna Żarnowska, Andrzej Szwarc: Przedmowa [Foreword], in: Żarnowska, Szwarc (eds.), *Kobieta* (see note 5), p. XVIII.

35 See [sn]: *Z dziedziny zwyrodnień etycznych. Homoseksualizm* [From a Discipline of Ethical Deviation. Homosexuality], in: *Świat Płciowy* (1905), no. 2, pp. 30-33. Again, homosexual relations between men were seen differently from those between women. Clearly, the former was treated as a more significant social danger. Interestingly, as Laura Engelstein shows, some medical professionals considered same-sex love as abnormal, but not pathological or criminal. Hippolit Tarnowski argued that lesbians "should be kept out of schools" so as not to influence others, but should not be imprisoned: see Laura Engelstein: *The Keys to Happiness. Sex and the Search for Modernity in Fin-de-Siècle Russia*, Ithaca et.al. 1996, p. 159.

36 Dr A. Roicki: *Samogwałt u mężczyzn i kobiet* [Masturbation among Men and Women], in: *Świat Płciowy* (1905), no. 3, p. 27

37 Raphael Lutz: *Embedding the Human and Social Sciences in Western Societies, 1880–1980: Reflections on Trends and Methods of Current Research*, in: Kerstin Brückweh, Dirk Schumann et.al. (eds.): *Engineering Society. The Role of the Human and Social Sciences in Modern Societies, 1880–1990*, London 2012, pp. 41-56, here pp. 41-43, https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137284501_2.

time, too, that physicians began the practice of dividing the human body into different parts, rather than perceiving it holistically.

The two-pole discussion in the Polish lands had its roots in a the more general question of whether unfavorable social conditions forced people to sell sex or whether a predilection to sex work was an inborn trait. Those, like Maria Turzyna, who supported the idea of abolition and expressed doubts as to whether former prostitutes could live “ordinary” lives and have “decent” jobs, followed Cesare Lombroso’s idea of female sexuality – that those who are sexually active have pathological traits because “normal” women accept sex only as a means of having children, which, *nota bene*, is their inborn need.³⁸ Because prostitution was perceived as archetypical female sexual deviance, it provoked a more general discussion on female sexuality.³⁹ Lombroso’s “L’uomo delinquente” from 1876 was translated into Polish by Jan Popławski in 1891, and his “La donna delinquente: la prostituta e la donna normale” from 1893 was translated into Polish in 1895 by Izydor Szenhak, while a pamphlet-form summary of his studies published in 1897 was also translated by Szenhak. Hence Cesare Lombroso’s theories were known to Polish intellectuals (obviously, translation widened the scope of readership to include the less educated because many Polish-speaking intellectuals could read Lombroso’s theories in the Italian original or French translation) and impacted a debate on female sexuality.⁴⁰ In consequence, they influenced Polish criminology as well as the eugenics movement, which attracted many Polish-speaking physicians and scientists with leftist political beliefs.⁴¹ Traces of them will be present in Klara Mirska’s memoir.

Medical discourse

Overall, the discussion about prostitution was in fact a Freudian discussion about nature versus nurture, the one that occupied psychologists’ and scientists’ minds throughout the

38 See Engelstein, *The Keys* (see note 35), p. 149; Stauter-Halsted, *Devil’s Chain* (see note 5), pp. 232 f.

39 See Engelstein, *The Keys* (see note 35), p. 128.

40 See Hans Kurella: *Lombroso i jego teorie* [Lombroso and His Theories], Warsaw 1897, <https://polona.pl/item/lombroso-i-jego-teorie,NzkyOTI5MzY/24/#info:metadata>; Cesare Lombroso: *Człowiek-zbrodniarz* [Criminal Man], Warsaw 1891, <https://polona.pl/item/czlowiek-zbrodniarz-w-stosunku-do-antropologii-jurysprudencji-i-dyscypliny-wieziennej,MTgyMzQ1NjY/6/#info:metadata>; idem: *Kobieta jako zbrodniarka i prostytutka* [Criminal Woman, the Prostitute, and the Normal Woman], Warsaw 1895, <https://polona.pl/item/kobieta-jako-zbrodniarka-i-prostytutka-studja-antropologiczne-poprzedzone-biologja-i,MTg2NDM0MDQ/4/#info:metadata>. Danuta Janicka claims that Lombroso’s theory of crime came to the Polish lands in the late 1880s: first to Galicia and then to the Kingdom of Poland. See Danuta Janicka: *O pionierach nauk kryminologicznych w Polsce* [On Pioneers of the Criminological Sciences], in: *Czasopismo Prawno-Historyczne* LXVIII (2016), no. 1, pp. 29-50, here p. 31.

41 See Magdalena Gawin, Kamila Uzarczyk (eds.): *Eugenika, biopolityka, państwo. Z historii europejskich ruchów eugenicznych w pierwszej połowie XX wieku* [Eugenics, Bio-politics, State. The History of European Eugenics Movements in the First Half of the 20th Century], Warsaw 2010; Magdalena Gawin: *Seksualność i prokreacja w polskiej publicystyce eugenicznej 1905–1939* [Sexuality and Procreation in Polish Eugenical Press], in: Żarnowska, Szwarc (eds.), *Kobieta* (see note 5), pp. 73-85.

20th century.⁴² Obviously, Sigmund Freud's theories on female sexuality had a great impact on the discourse in the professional and non-professional press.⁴³ His concept of the sexual background of hysteria had a practical consequence – the development of massage treatments in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Masseurs were often educated in midwifery, and many gynecologists or venereologists treated their female patients with special massages. Advertisements in the non-professional press show how popular the treatments must have been.⁴⁴ With the appearance of “Świat Płciowy”, “Czystość”, “Krytyka lekarska” (Medical Critique), “Kosmetyka” (Cosmetology) and other more or less professional journals, one can see clearly the moment when physicians in the Polish lands began to gain a position of power over female sexuality. With the help of new medical tools, they could decide about norms, pathologies, regulations etc. After the 1905 Revolution, medical and legal professionals became interested in the question of birth control, which only expanded their power over women.⁴⁵ It coincided with the discovery of *Treponema pallidum*, a bacterium responsible for syphilis. The discourse on prostitution linked it to the spread of venereal diseases and the most common and dangerous at the time was syphilis hence the discovery of the cause of the illness enhanced the development of hygienic and medical discourses, which was well visible in the blossoming of different hygienic associations aimed at improving living conditions of the lower classes. The development of hygienic standards in the Polish lands also had a political aspect, as some of the experts would claim that Jews were less adapted to live in more hygienic conditions. In that belief, apart from its antisemitic character, Lombroso's theories can again be traced, suggesting that there were inborn traits characteristic not only of different classes and sexes but also ethnicities.⁴⁶ In order to prove the moral decline that a big city provokes, many publicists diminished the sex economy among peasants and stated that prostitution was an entirely urban phenomenon. It was also believed that the lower classes were characterized by lower moral standards, and that was a reason why women who migrated from rural parts of the country so easily decided to sell sex.⁴⁷ The lower classes, according to the discourse, had an inborn predilection for immoral behavior, similarly to other than Polish ethnicities, which, like Jews, possessed, in a public view, a majority of brothels in the Polish lands. As Laura Engelstein indicates, Russian physicians linked lower levels of civilization with non-venereal syphilis. They also “denied sexual desire and illicit

42 Freud's theories were also known to Polish readers. Apart from German versions, his texts have been available in Polish since 1911. See Edyta Dembińska, Krzysztof Rutkowski: The Reception of Dr Ludwik Jekels 'Apostolic Activity' to Promote Psychoanalysis in Poland before the Outbreak of the World War I. Part 2, in: *Psychiatria Polska* 54 (2020), no. 6, pp. 1231-1254, <https://doi.org/10.12740/PP/81669>

43 I am not going to elaborate on Freud's theories as their impact on discourse on sexuality has been widely discussed, just to mention Michel Foucault's renowned work. See Michel Foucault: *The History of Sexuality. Volume I: The Will to Knowledge*, pp. 53-56, 119.

44 See, for example, *Izraelita* (1900), no. 20, p. 241; no. 23, p. 277.

45 See Engelstein, *The Keys* (see note 35), p. 335.

46 See, for example, Alfred Nossig: *Higiena społeczna Żydów* [Social Hygiene of Jews], in: *Izraelita* (1894), no. 33-38, pp. 41, 43; Ign. Maur. Judt: *Higiena i żydzi* [Hygiene and Jews], in: *Izraelita* (1898), no. 1, pp. 4 f.; N. Sokołów: *Błogostan nędzy* [A State of Poverty Bliss], in: *Izraelita* (1900), no. 29, pp. 339 f.

47 See Stauter-Halsted, *Devil's Chain* (see note 5), p. 63.

sexual activity among peasants”.⁴⁸ Therefore, venereal diseases, prostitution and sexual desire were urban problems, yet lower-classes migrants were vulnerable to the dangers of a big city. On the other hand, they were upper and middle-class women who became victims of syphilis as their upper and middle-class husbands were clients of prostitutes. Hence, sexual education and abstinence were promoted for middle- and upper-classes girls and boys.

Apart from Freudian theories, discourse on female sexuality in the medical and non-medical Polish press was also influenced by other contemporary thinkers. It is clearly visible, for example, that “Świat Płciowy” followed Richard von Krafft-Ebing’s belief that sex is a powerful instinct resistant to any cultural constraints.⁴⁹ Similarly important for the discussion was Otto Weininger’s argument that a woman is inferior to a man because she is an entirely sexual creature incapable of rational thinking.⁵⁰ His ideas, on the one hand, strengthened arguments for uncontrollable sexual desire among women, which should be constrained by medical treatment, and on the other served as yet another means to limit the access to higher education for women.⁵¹ Weininger also claimed that there were only two main types of women: the mother and the harlot.⁵² Such typology, slightly mitigated, was widely accepted by many intellectuals, even the “more progressive” ones, as can clearly be seen in the debate on women’s education in the Polish lands.⁵³ Interestingly, Weininger, following the ideas of Mary Woolstoncraft, John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor, advocated for better quality, broader and equal education for boys and girls.⁵⁴ Katarzyna Wojnicka argues that the Austrian philosopher was the first to admit that a woman may get satisfaction from sex. Certainly, like contemporary feminists, he opposed double standards for men and

48 Engelstein, *The Keys* (see note 35), pp. 179, 183.

49 See Jeffrey Weeks: *Sexuality*, London ³2009, p. 17.

50 See Otto Weininger: *Geschlecht und Charakter*, Wien et.al. 1903, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/51221/51221-h/51221-h.htm>; his arguments were analysed and criticised by Felicja Nossig-Próchnik, a philosopher of Jewish background. See Felicja Nossig-Próchnik: *Mężczyzna i kobieta. Streszczenie odczytów dr Felicji Nossig z dnia 3 i 4 kwietnia br* [A Man and a Woman. A Summary of Felicja Nossig’s Lectures from April 3 and 4 of the Current Year], in: *Świat Płciowy* (1905), no. 1, pp. 17-22.

51 Interestingly, Henryk Nussbaum, the renowned Polish-Jewish physician who treated, among others, Eliza Orzeszkowa, shared with Weininger the idea that reasonable thinking is not a female skill and he opposed access to higher education for women, especially in science. See Henryk Nussbaum: *Kobieta w społeczeństwie ze stanowiska przyrodniczego* [A Woman in Society from the Scientific Stand], in: *Tygodnik Ilustrowany I* (1896), no. 22, p. 434. This may have been a reason why he decided to ask Eliza Orzeszkowa to teach his daughter, Jadwiga, in order to discourage her from entering university. See Iwona Wiśniewska (ed.): *Kalendarium życia i twórczości Elizy Orzeszkowej* [A Calendar of Eliza Orzeszkowa’s Life and Work], vol. 2, Warsaw 2014, p. 87. It is noteworthy that the discussion on women’s education in the Polish lands was mostly focused on higher education.

52 See Katarzyna Wojnicka: *Otto Weininger: Mizogin i profeminista? [Otto Weininger: a Misogynist and a Proto-Feminist?]*, in: *Autobiografia* 6 (2016), no. 1, pp. 39-58, here p. 45, DOI: 10.18276/au.2016.1.6-04.

53 See, for example, Maria Turzyna: *Potrójne więzy kobiety* [A Woman’s Triple Shackles], in: Aneta Górnicka-Boratyńska (ed.): *Chcemy całego życia. Antologia polskich tekstów feministycznych z lat 1870–1939* [We Want Full Life. An Anthology of Polish Feminist Texts between 1870 and 1939], Warsaw 2018, p. 209.

54 See Wojnicka, *Otto Weininger* (see note 52), pp. 49-51.

women. Nevertheless, until 1914 Weininger's misogyny shaped the debate over female sexuality and women's emancipation in general; while his antisemitism had an impact on the debate over Jewish emancipation in the Polish lands.⁵⁵

Sexual education

"Świat Płciowy" attempted to examine the problem of the low level of knowledge about human sexuality by carrying out a survey. It was not, certainly, conducted according to any sociological methods of measurement. It is also difficult to assess how authentic the responses were and whether the outcome of the survey, in favor of the journal's hypothesis about the matter, was real, or whether the editors published only those answers that suited them. Nevertheless, it can be analyzed as a part of contemporary discourse. The survey was announced in the first issue of the monthly. Aimed at young people, parents and pedagogues, it consisted of five questions: 1) What did you know about sex in your childhood?, 2) When and how did you get to know about sex?, 3) What did you feel as soon as you became aware of sex?, 4) Do you think you became aware of sex at the right moment of your life, too early or too late and why do you think so?, 5) How are you going to deal with the issue with your own children?⁵⁶ In the following issue the editorial board announced the outcome: there were thirty-three letters, five of them by female authors. Only three correspondents admitted that they had become sexually aware at the right moment of their lives. Another two male correspondents bitterly regretted that they had not known about venereal diseases before they contracted syphilis. The majority of respondents pointed to dramatic, unpleasant and improper circumstances in which they became aware of human sexuality: they often caught their relatives having sexual intercourse with servants,⁵⁷ which echoed contemporary discourse on the sexual abuse of female servants.⁵⁸ The journal published only five letters; hence it is impossible to state whether the editors exaggerated while presenting the results of their survey.

Two of the published letters are particularly interesting: one, written by a young woman, and the other by a young Jewish man. In the former an upper-middle-class woman described her first encounter of sexual pleasure caused by a kiss, claiming that after that experience she found joy in her own body: "I promised to be frank, so I have to admit that at the time I gradually began to become fond of myself, of my physicality; I enjoyed looking at my

55 See, for example, Leo Belmont: *Otto Weininger. Genialny wróg kobiety* [Otto Weininger. A Genius Enemy of a Woman], Warsaw 1911. A well-known Polish playwright, novelist and poet was influenced by Weininger's ideas: see Wojciech Gutowski: *Stanisław Przybyszewski i Otto Weininger – dwie metafizyki płci* [Stanisław Przybyszewski and Otto Weininger – Two Metaphysics of a Gender], in: *Rocznik Kasprowiczowski* (1990), no. 7, pp. 135-147. Weininger's anti-Semitism was discussed by Leo Belmont and Ostap Ortwin, for example. See Justyna Górny: *Weininger's Polish-Jewish Readers and the Jewish 'Selbsthass'*, in: *Jewish History Quarterly* (2016), no. 2, pp. 431-447.

56 See [sn]: *Ankieta* [A Questionnaire], in: *Świat Płciowy* (1905), no. 1, pp. 12 f.

57 See [sn]: *Nasza ankieta* [Our Questionnaire], in: *Świat Płciowy* (1905), no. 2, pp. 8, 15.

58 See Stauter-Halsted, *Devil's Chain* (see note 5), p. 80; Alicja Urbanik-Kopec: *Instrukcja nadużycia. Służące w XIX-wiecznych polskich domach* [A Manual to an Abuse. Women Servants in Polish 19th Century Households], Katowice 2019; Joanna Kuciel-Frydryszak: *Służące do wszystkiego* [All-Purpose Servants], Warsaw 2018.

body in the mirror and it happened, sometimes, that its view made me feel similar pleasure to the abovementioned sensual experience”⁵⁹ [she means the kiss, Z. K.-S.]. For her, the best solution to educate women of her class properly about sex was not to educate them at all – to leave it to their instincts and marry them off early. She openly claimed that a woman could feel joy from sex in marriage. In 1897, “Ster” reported how shocking for a reading public in Germany and other countries was a book by Laura Marholm “Zur Psychologie der Frau“, in which the author claimed that women have sexual needs.⁶⁰ Yet, a few years later, it was still a matter of debate, so the letter may function as a firsthand argument in the discussion. In contrast to the mainstream discourse, it emphasized female agency in the choice of a husband and in acknowledging sexual pleasure. Press and literature would rather describe a shock that young newlywed women experienced during their wedding nights. In consequence, according to the authors, women start to associate men and sex with “something gross and terrifying”.⁶¹

The other letter, written by a Jew, pointed to the link between experiencing sex and the economic conditions in which a person lived. He came from a poor Jewish family and was sent to cheder when he was four. There, he became aware of masturbation. When he was five years old one of the girls from cheder, who was six, tried to “do with me what, as she claimed, her father did with her mother! I hesitated, my instinct mounted resistance. Finally, she persuaded me, but just after she did, I ran away feeling great disgust”.⁶² Then, when he was a few years older, he met a village girl who offered him sex in exchange for some small amount of money. “This time I did not run away, but this first encounter with a woman left me with a feeling of disgust that I could not overcome for a long time.”⁶³ He emphasized the commonality of this experience among children from low-income families. His letter echoed three discourses: the one about the economic background of the turn to commercial sex, argued by Warsaw feminists; the other about the poor quality of education in cheders, which mainly was discussed among Jewish intellectuals, and of the harmful psychological consequences of too-early sexual experience. Some participants of the debate on prostitution argued that it was caused by the low salaries offered to working women, which prevented them from making ends meet. In fact, all jobs available to women, even to those from middle- and upper-class backgrounds, did not allow them to live independently: they either had to get married or hold more than one position.⁶⁴ The letter adds a new element, namely

59 Spowiedź świeżo upieczonej mężatki [A Confession of a Newly-wed Wife], in: *Świat Płciowy* (1905), no. 2, p. 10.

60 See C.W. [Cecylia Walewska?]: *Ze świata* [Of the World], in: *Ster* (1897), no. 21, pp. 296 f. The book was published in the Polish version in *Prawda* [The Truth].

61 Magdelna Cwetsch-Wyszomirska: *W drodze ku „małżeństwu doskonałemu“*. *Małżeństwo na początku XX wieku w świetle ‘Czystości’ i ‘Kosmetyki’* [On the Way to a ‘Perfect Marriage’. A Marriage at the Beginning of the 20th Century in Purity and in Cosmetology], in: Żarnowska, Szwarc (eds.), *Kobieta* (see note 5), pp. 43-53. See also Aniela Korngutówna: *Córki marnotrawne* [The Prodigal Daughters], Lviv 1913, p. 54, where she calls a wedding night a legalised rape. The same problem appears in memoirs of upper-middle class or upper-class women: see Sikorska-Kulesza, Skąd (see note 5), pp. 29 f.

62 *Zatruty posiew nędzy* [A Poisoned Seed of Poverty], in: *Świat Płciowy* (1905), no. 2, p. 17.

63 *Ibidem*, p. 18.

64 The struggle to be financially independent was a theme in Aniela Korngutówna’s novels and private correspondence. See, for example, her answer to Kazimiera Bujwidowa’s review: Aniela

improper sexual education, to a view widely held by Jewish and non-Jewish intellectuals, that cheders with their poor hygienic standards, low level of education and overuse of corporal punishment, were reasons for the backwardness of orthodox Jews. A reform of cheders was much discussed in the Polish-Jewish press.⁶⁵ Those who supported the idea of sexual education were not certain as to what age it should start at, as it was thought that too early sexual education might lead to promiscuity or some improper behavior. The survey did then prove a need for sexual education, expressed by “Świat Płciowy”. Both letters might have been prepared by the editorial board as they perfectly suit the editors’ view on sexual education.

The debate over sexual education had multiple angles: who should be responsible for it, when should it be started, what kind of knowledge should be transmitted, was it necessary to educate children sexually, why was sexual education so important? Although it was a vital issue, it seems that often the discussion lacked detail and was rather general. “Ster”, for example, encouraged readers to express their opinions on female sexuality and sexual education,⁶⁶ but it seems that discussion was somewhat chaotic, repeating arguments about the lack of sexual desire among women,⁶⁷ a critique of debauchery and pornography in literature⁶⁸ and the need for sexual education in a very general sense.⁶⁹ Before the beginning of the 20th century, discourse on sexual education was in the hands of clergymen. At a time of growing secularization and scientification as a key to all social problems, there was a need for a non-religious explanation of human sexuality. Therefore, a translation of “Baby Buds” by Ellis Ethelmer,⁷⁰ a guide to sexual education for parents, became very popular among Polish-speaking elites. The reviewers emphasized its pioneering role in fighting to discredit the common yet harmful tale about a stork that brings children.⁷¹ The book was structured as a tale that a mum (the first-person narrator) tells her child. She presents examples from the way animals and predominantly plants (hence the original title) propagate, and using reproductive plants’ system terminology, she makes references to the human body. However, the message is conveyed clearly enough. The author emphasized the power of love and

- Korngutówna: Córki marnotrawne [The Prodigal Daughters], in: Tygodnik. Pismo poświęcone sprawom społecznym, politycznym, ekonomicznym i literackim (1913), no. 44 f.
- 65 See, for example, Mieczysław Themerson: Z higieny szkolnej [On School Hygiene], in: Izraelita (1903), no. 3, pp. 24 f.; Kołodziejska-Smagala, Antosik-Piela, Literatura polsko-żydowska (see note 7), pp. 77-106; Agnieszka Friedrich: The Attitudes of the Polish Positivists towards the Assimilation of Jews, in: *Iggud: Selected Essays in Jewish Studies* (2005), vol. 2, pp. 67-76, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23538316>.
- 66 See Pożądana dyskusja [A Necessary Discussion], in: *Ster* (1907), no. 6, pp. 231 f.
- 67 See Kazimiera Ostachiewicz: Z zagadnień etyki obyczajowej [On the Question of Morality], in: *Ster* (1908), no. 12, pp. 433-443.
- 68 See Józefa Kodisowa: Ideał człowieka z punktu widzenia społecznego [An Ideal of a Man from the Sociological Perspective], in: *Ster* (1914), no. 3, pp. 18-23.
- 69 See J. Budzińska-Tylicka: O wychowaniu dziewcząt [On Girls’ Education], in: *Ster* (1910), no. 11-12, pp. 370-378.
- 70 Such a name of the author is on the cover of two Polish editions (1903, 1905), but the author was Elisabeth Wolstenholme-Elmy (1833–1918), a British suffragette, teacher and a reformer. She was a first woman who spoke publicly on conjugal rape: see Maureen Wright: *Elisabeth Wolstenholme Elmy and the Victorian Feminist Movement: The Biography of an Insurgent Woman*, Manchester 2011.
- 71 See Sikorska-Kulesza, Skąd (see note 5), pp. 25 f.

the need to love all creatures.⁷² Interestingly, the translator, an acculturated Polish-Jewish women's rights activist, added her explanation how a fetus leaves the body of a woman. Róża Centnerszwerowa did not, however, name the vagina, but wrote:

“In a very probable case that a child would ask how they got out of their mother's body, you should also answer truly, that when a child is strong enough to tolerate air and light, a wound opens in their mommy's body, big enough so the child can get out through it, but the wound quickly closes up if only mommy lies down quietly and peacefully. That is why mothers always get ill for some time after giving birth to their children.”⁷³

I think this is a good example of the discourse on sexuality at the beginning of the 20th century – the revolutionary change that the book was supposed to bring seems not so revolutionary after all, since a reader of the book might have assumed that “the wound” opens up in any part of a woman's body, and the process of insemination was not explained. However, the fact that biology took over from religion the position of a leading tool to explain the human reproductive system was a sign of a crucial social change. The position of clergymen who explain everything to an ordinary man was taken over by physicians and other intellectuals, who, like their predecessors, adopted a rather patronizing tone. Another key issue in the book was the criterion of truth, although, as the quoted passage shows, the criterion could be loosely interpreted. The fact that a child should not be told lies by their parents was not obvious to many pedagogues. One of the renowned Polish feminists – Iza Moszczeńska – fought fiercely against lying to children.⁷⁴ She was also the author of other guides to sexual education. She advocated for explaining the human reproductive system to children using the example of animals, and not to give all the details because, as she claimed, some details a mother may leave for a child to guess.⁷⁵ Children should also keep the newly acquired knowledge to themselves, in order not to disturb common views. Like Wolstenholme or Centnerszwerowa,⁷⁶ Moszczeńska focused the attention of the reader on the question of love. In the book, morality is entangled with sexuality. It

72 See Ellis Elthermer: *Skąd się wziął twój braciszek?* [Where Did Your Little Brother Come from?], trans. Róża Centnerszwerowa, Warsaw 1905, p. 34.

73 *Ibidem*, p. 30. There are considerable differences between the two editions (the first in 1903 and the second in 1905), and the first edition does not include the quoted fragment. It is also shorter but contains a botanical illustration of reproductive flower parts.

74 See Iza Moszczeńska: *Jak rozmawiać z dziećmi o kwestiach drażliwych* [How to Talk with Children about Sensitive Issues], Warsaw 1904, pp. 11-15. It was not her only guide book for mothers on sexual education. She also published: *idem*: *Czego nie wiemy o naszych synach: fakta i cyfry dla użytku rodziców* [What Don't We Know about Our Sons: Facts and Data for Parents], Warsaw 1904; *idem*: *Co każda matka swojej dorastającej córce powiedzieć powinna* [What Every Mother Should Say to Her Growing-up Daughter], Warsaw 1912; *idem*: *Zasady wychowania* [The Rules of Upbringing], Warsaw 1907. On Moszczeńska see Marek Babik: *Edukacja seksualna małych dzieci w koncepcji Izabeli Moszczeńskiej* [Sexual Education of Small Children in Izabela Moszczeńska's Concept], in: *EETP* 11 (2016), no. 1, pp. 101-112, Doi:10.14632/eetp_39.6

75 See Moszczeńska, *Jak rozmawiać* (see note 74), p. 36.

76 We know from Centnerszwerowa's introduction that she interpreted the book and adapted it for a Polish cultural background rather than translated it. The differences between the first and second editions are possibly caused by that; hence it is likely that she was the author of the Polish version

also echoes the debate on the influence of nurture on a child's character and future life. Modesty was a vital feature of a well-educated child, especially of a well-educated girl. That notion is visible in the analyzed memoirs. Obviously, the guides limited sexual education to a process of reproduction; they did not, for example, explain menstruation or even mention it. Moszczeńska also repeated a belief that servants, including nannies, "are viewed all as fallen or soon to be fallen women".⁷⁷ Finally, she paid attention to child sexual abuse, but as with other delicate matters she did not describe it straightforwardly but warned mothers and suggested they should explain to their children that they should only express their love and sensuality to the closest family members.⁷⁸

Apart from guides to sexual education the turn of the centuries was also marked by a visible increase in publications of medical guides primarily for midwives, although other women, usually of the middle or upper-middle class, read them as well. Unlike guides for parents, these did not use analogies to the world of plants but focused on the physiology and anatomy of women. Similarly to women's journals (for example, "Kobieta"), they often described the dramatic effects of fashion on women's health.⁷⁹ As Bożena Urbanek argues, the reasons for their focus on women were the following: "a belief that reproduction is the main biological function of a woman and a lack of proper pre- and post-natal care".⁸⁰ Hence, Urbanek claims, medical guides and journals did not mention older, post-menopausal women. One popular medical guide explained why the female orgasm is useful in insemination, which was not, as analysis of contemporary non-medical discourse shows, commonly accepted knowledge.⁸¹

Female body and sexuality in ego-documents

The vast majority of the memoirs and diaries that I have examined so far, does not refer to, nor does it mention any issues related to sexuality or even to the bodies of their authors. Yet, they describe such important events as weddings and childbirths, as well as everyday life routines. Surprisingly, even the fragmentary diary of fifteen-year-old Helena Szpidbaum refers only once to her body – when she prefers not to be seen by her male and female colleagues because she has a sty.⁸² The lack of the issue may serve as evidence that middle-class Jewish girls from acculturating families were brought up according to contemporary

rather than Elisabeth Wolstenholme. I have not yet had the opportunity to compare the original with the Polish version.

77 Moszczeńska, *Jak rozmawiać* (see note 74), p. 65.

78 Ibidem, p. 68. One literary work that interestingly presents child abuse is: Czesława Endelmanowa-Rosenblattowa: *Opowieść pomarańczy* [A Tale of an Orange], in: Zuzanna Kołodziejska-Smagąła, Maria Antosik-Piela (eds.): *Literatura polsko-żydowska 1861–1918. Antologia* [Polish-Jewish Literature 1861–1918. An Anthology], Krakow 2017, pp. 142-144.

79 The editors of "Kobieta" emphasized that corsets deform female bodies: see *Kobieta* 1 (1912), no. 1, p. 10.

80 Bożena Urbanek: *Poradniki medyczne o seksualności kobiet i mężczyzn w XIX wieku* [Medical Guides to Human Sexuality], in: Żarnowska, Szwarc (eds.), *Kobieta* (see note 5), p. 71.

81 See Henryk Jordan: *Nauka położnictwa dla użytku uczniów i lekarzy* [Learning Obstetrics for Students and Physicians], Krakow 1881, p. 51.

82 Her diary is mostly focused on her struggle to get a better education, but she also mentions her

standards, which tabooed the mention of sex and the female body. It may be a proof that hygienists who were fighting for sexual education were correct in their diagnosis that no one talked with girls about their sexuality and the changes in their bodies that occur during adolescence. Therefore, a memoir of Klara Mirska, which makes references to her sexuality and body, may be regarded as absolutely extraordinary.

An intimate memoir of Klara Mirska (1901–1990)

Klara Mirska's memoir is unique for a few reasons. First of all, there are three versions of the text: a handwritten manuscript, a typed manuscript and a book, published in 1980.⁸³ The typed manuscript and the book are almost identical. Moreover, as the author emphasizes in the introduction, the memoir served her as therapy after the death of her thirty-seven-year-old daughter. It was written in the late 1960s, a fact which, in my view, might be of crucial importance for an interpretation of her references to the body and sexuality. It seems that because she was brought up between 1901 and 1918, the contemporary discourses on sexuality had an impact on the way she perceived her body and sexuality at the time. Yet, the fact that she mentions the issue might be related to a much more liberal epoch and sexual revolution that occurred in the 1960s, the time when she wrote her memoirs. The memoir is written in chronological retrospective with passages about Klara's daughter's illness (she died of diabetes) and the feelings the condition of her daughter evoked in Klara. The last part of this one-thousand-two-hundred-sixty-page-long manuscript is almost entirely devoted to Majka's illness. In that part the author often uses a direct apostrophe to her daughter. All three versions of the text end with a speech Klara gave during the ceremony of unveiling a monument on her daughter's grave at the Jewish cemetery in Warsaw.⁸⁴ In the book, though, the speech is interrupted by a passage explaining the Mirskis' reasons for emigrating.⁸⁵ The memoir is narrated in a tone of sorrow and regret. Klara often repeats how unhappy her life was. In the first passages, she writes: "My parents were not young when I was born. They had two daughters, who passed away when they were mere infants. After their death they decided not to have more children. If only they had upheld that decision, I would not have had to experience all that I was a part of."⁸⁶ The first tragedy on her list was her mother's suicide when Klara was six. Mirska uses retrospection to find reasons for her unhappiness and interprets her mother's suicide as an unforgivable act of cruelty and harm towards a child. She knew she was loved by her mother and that made her suicide even less understandable.⁸⁷

sister's preparations for her wedding. See Helena Szpidbaum: *Dziennik*, archives of the National Library in Poland, akc 14897.

83 See Klara Mirska: *W cieniu wiecznego strachu* [In the Shadow of a Great Fear], Paris 1980.

84 Her grave is located in the cemetery on Okopowa Street, sector 8, row 14, no. 31.

85 They, as well as the family of their daughter, left Poland as a consequence of the antisemitic purge of 1968.

86 Klara Mirska: *Kronika mojego życia* [The Chronicle of My Life] (handwritten manuscript; I use the abbreviation HM for it and TM for the typed version), archives of the National Library in Poland, akc 9085/1, p. 11.

87 *Ibidem* (HM), p. 15.

Apart from the sorrow and her search for signs of her future unhappiness, Mirska rather often refers to her body and the fact that unlike her mother's, which she perceived as beautiful and very feminine, her own was not pretty. However, interestingly, she never refers to her Jewishness in that regard as it was not an essential factor for her body perception. Just at the beginning of her memoirs she expresses her surprise about the lack of physical resemblance between her and her parents: "What an irony! A child of beautiful parents. Even such weapon as beauty and femininity they did not give me."⁸⁸ Klara emphasizes her lack of femininity, which she interprets as a reason for her unhappy marriage. She gives some hints about her sexual education, as the quoted passage at the opening of the article shows, yet again she highlights the fact that she was different in that regard. She describes her passion for books and she states: "Pornography. Drastic descriptions of sex scenes did not awaken my curiosity".⁸⁹

Mirska's sexual education was typical: she was told stories and given cheap romantic novels by her stepmother's servant, who was never married but pregnant twice by two different Russian soldiers. Again, Klara emphasizes that her inborn taste for high literature prevented her from valuing that kind of book. The statement echoes the discourse on decency that suited young girls from the middle and upper-middle classes. When her stepmother persuaded her father to sell his shoe business and let rooms in their apartment, Klara's life changed, as she no longer had her own room. Her stepmother decided to lease all the rooms, so family life was not much separated from guests. She described a lack of intimacy which made her feel ashamed, but the women who stayed in her house would also be those who would make Klara aware of her femininity. From both printed versions she crossed out a fragment that describes changes in her body. She wrote that when she left school she looked like a girl. She was afraid that she would always remain an "undeveloped woman", but then she realized that she grew up, she "got taller, plumped up and finally became a woman".⁹⁰

Her description of the first sexual experience with her future husband helps to explain the fact that he had a lover and wanted to leave Klara, but the outbreak of WWII canceled that plan. She emphasizes the fact that she did not perceive herself as attractive or feminine. She wrote: "I could never be a woman like others. .. [I did not know how to be] seductive, as other women [are]."⁹¹ She met Michał, her future husband, in the CISZO (TSYSHO)⁹² seminar. He invited her to the Vistula embankment for a walk and then:

88 Ibidem, p. 11.

89 Ibidem (TM), p. 77.

90 Ibidem (HM), akc 9085/2, p. 196.

91 Ibidem (TM), p. 389.

92 CISZO was the Central Yiddish School Organisation established in Warsaw in 1921 by Jewish left-wing parties' members (Bund and Left Po'ale Tsiyon). Its aim was to create secular Yiddish schools in Poland. The organization maintained kindergartens, elementary schools, high schools and a pedagogical institute in Vilna. Its curriculum included Yiddish language and literature, Jewish history, sciences, music, maths, physical education, arts and crafts, Polish language and literature, and Polish history taught in Polish. See Joshua D. Zimmerman: "TSYSHO", in: YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe, <https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/tsysho> (access: 2.12.2021).

“suddenly he pulled me closer to him. Closer and closer. He started passionately kissing my breasts: ‘Oh, how beautiful they are, how beautiful’, he repeated as if in ecstasy. I succumbed passively. I did make not a single move. I did say not a single word. I didn’t mean to hurt him. But what a curse! Yet another trick that nature played on me. After all, I did so passionately desire love. I wanted so badly to feel on my body my loved one’s hand. After all, it seemed such great and desired happiness. However, as my loved one was getting closer, everything in me was getting colder, and his presence started to become a burden. I didn’t feel anything. And Michał suddenly got colder.”⁹³

The fact that she was passive and “did not make a move” was, for her, a reason why they did not have a happy marriage. She accuses herself of “not giving him what a woman should give to a man”.⁹⁴ This echoes a later discourse about sexually suited couples rather than the contemporary one, which (even at the beginning of the 1920s) put an emphasis on reproduction and took female agency away. It is interesting and significant that her sexual pleasure, her happiness, is not important to her. She does not mention it. She is humiliated and frustrated when Michał tells her about his lover and she is devastated when she reads their letters full of “sexual passion”, but even then, she does not change her narrative about the failure of their marriage being entirely her fault. The quoted fragment of decency may serve here as an explanation. For her, a young girl from a middle-class family, educated in a private Jewish school for girls, it would be improper and indecent to be active in sex. During WWII her feeling of intimacy and privacy was violated again because she had to live with her in-laws in a small hut deep inside the USSR. She describes the changes of her body due to starvation and physical work. Her last description of sexual life is non-directly referred to when she describes her pregnancy and the decision to have an abortion. Abortion was forbidden in the USSR, but she managed to persuade a female doctor to perform it. She probably mentioned that because it served as a point of reference as she wondered whether she would have been happier having another child.

Although Klara Mirska’s memoir differs much in comparison to other memoirs of the time (it is much more intimate, where others focus on work rather than on private life), it still recapitulates the discourse on sexuality and the body from her youth. She stays passive in relation to men. Similar to other Polish-Jewish ego-documents, her Jewishness does not seem to play a role in her perception of her sexuality and the body. It is probably caused by the fact that she came from a secularized family and later mingled with communists. Nevertheless, her Jewishness is important to her; she identifies herself with the Jews.

Mirska’s memoir, together with other memoirs, can be juxtaposed with an extremely special ego-document, namely a memoir by Jadwiga Strumff, a masseuse from the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries (she worked as a masseuse between 1893 and 1908), who was of Jewish background, though she does not mention this fact in her text.⁹⁵ The memoir

93 Ibidem (TM), akc 9024/II, p. 360.

94 Ibidem (TM), p. 389.

95 I came across this document thanks to the members of Archiwum Kobiet research team at the Polish Academy of Sciences, Institute of Literary Research, who are currently working on the manuscript (<https://ibl.waw.pl/pl/o-instytucie/pracownie-i-zespoly/zespol-badan-genderowych>).

is rather a study of her clients, a term that connects with the contemporary scientification of human experience. Unlike Mirska, Strumff describes a transition she underwent after becoming a masseuse. She has a sense of agency. When her husband left her with their three children, she had no choice but to start working to make a living. Apparently without the consent of her family, she chose a job that was not suitable for a middle-class woman, given that a masseuse has to touch other people's bodies, which was considered improper for a decent woman.⁹⁶ Jadwiga mentions that her first client took her for a prostitute.⁹⁷ In her practice she met people from different classes (among her clients were women from the upper, middle and lower classes, and the aristocracy), ethnicities (Jews, Russians, English, Germans) and social backgrounds (among her clients were actors, writers and prostitutes, just to mention a few). At first, she is ashamed of the fact that she has to enter different houses and sell her service to their occupants, but then she gets used to it and becomes an "artisan".⁹⁸

Like Mirska, Strumff highlights the lack of femininity in her body ("I did not have a single trait of femininity in me"⁹⁹). While describing her first days as a wife, she points to her lack of sexual education and a fear of being alone with her husband when she writes: "marital relations filled me with revulsion".¹⁰⁰ She later explains the reason for her disgust by the fact that she was never attracted to men, which saved her from becoming a prostitute, as she claims.¹⁰¹ However, in her description of sex life with her husband she indicates her passiveness, which is caused by her husband's reluctance to see in her a person who might feel pleasure from sex.¹⁰² This echoes the contemporary discourse that women were unable to feel sexual satisfaction. She describes her intimate relations with women; with one of her clients she was in a relation for five years.¹⁰³ Interestingly, though, she sums up that relation by using a contemporary discourse on homosexuality: "It lasted five years. Finally, I have realised that, morally spoiled, deprived in the highest degree, devoid of moral and religious standards, she taught me everything evil in life that I was not aware of. In our relationship there was something unnatural [...]"¹⁰⁴ This echoes the contemporary discourse that heterosexuality is the only accepted form of human sexuality. Among her clients are women from different classes who enjoy their bodies and who, like Jadwiga's lover, are sexually active and self-determined. Her memoir clearly shows a much broader sense of sexuality, one which was not discussed in the mainstream discourse: non-binary sexuality, sexually active women who are not afraid of their bodies. It reveals a much broader panorama of human desires than the intellectuals who discussed the question of sexuality were willing to accept.

literatura-i-gender). The memoir has been recently published in book form: see Jadwiga Maria Strumff: *Spostrzeżenia nad ludźmi. Szczerze wyznania massażystki* [Reflections on People. Frank Confessions of a Masseur], Warsaw 2021.

96 The same argument appeared in the discussion about female physicians.

97 Strumpf, *Spostrzeżenia nad ludźmi* (see note 95), p. 107.

98 *Ibidem*, p. 108.

99 *Ibidem*, p. 86.

100 *Ibidem*, p. 102.

101 *Ibidem*, p. 109.

102 *Ibidem*, p. 102.

103 *Ibidem*, p. 111.

104 *Ibidem*.

Conclusions

The fact that female sexuality and the body were not discussed in private documents of acculturating Jewish women might suggest that the discourses from the first decades of the 20th century had an impact on them because, despite the urgent need for sexual education in schools postulated by some circles of physicians and feminists, it was assumed that the self-determination of women in that sphere, or even just the revelation of their sexual needs, was a sign of their moral decline, and so was taboo. As the discussion on sexual education shows, young girls were almost totally unaware of their reproductive system or sexuality. The same conclusion can be drawn from the memoirs analyzed here. Klara Mirska and her classmates acquired some knowledge from books, like “The Decameron”, and from the tales of domestic help, but neither school nor parents were eager to give them a proper sexual education. Another reason for the lack of reference to sexuality in the majority of ego-documents might also be the fact that it belongs to the private sphere, while the memoirs are often focused on the professional life of the authors.

It is surprising that there is little mention of the female body in the majority of ego-documents. It might have been expected that, because of the complex set of rules concerning the female body in Judaism, memoirs of acculturated Jewish women would contain references to their physicality. Yet, even Klara Mirska’s memoir, extraordinary though it was in that regard, does not refer to a woman’s body in relation to any Jewish rites. It is interesting also that, in her descriptions of the female body, Mirska focuses on the figure: she divides women she knows into categories of being very womanish or, as in her case, not at all. Hair, which seems to have been important for a Jewish woman because she could not show her natural hair in public, and because the ritual of cutting the bride’s hair was criticized by Jewish “progressive” circles, is not for her an important part of a woman’s body. It seems that the Jewish background of this author does not influence the way she perceives or describes female sexuality or bodies. This might be so because the authors come from families that were undergoing the process of secularization and acculturation hence Jewish rituals were no longer as important to them as to religious Jews. However, Puah Rakovsky, for example, who came from a religious family, does not mention sexuality in her memoir either.¹⁰⁵ Therefore, it seems that the lack of references to body and sexuality is caused by the influence of such institutions as school or press rather than by ethnicity itself. Knowledge of the human reproductive system was not acquired in private or state schools, nor in Jewish or Polish ones. That question is also related to the fact that, as the analysis of contemporary discourses has shown, at the beginning of the 20th-century biology, medicine and various disciplines of the social sciences took over from religion a leading position in explaining human sexuality and body control, so the fact that the authors were Jewish did not matter much as they would use secular discourses present in schools and the contemporary press. Prostitution, which was a key element of the press and

105 Puah Rakovsky was a Zionist activist, a teacher in first Jewish schools for girls and a member of Bnos Tsiyon. See Paula E. Hyman: Puah Rakovsky (1865–1955), in: Jewish Women Archive, <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/rakovsky-puah> (access: 6.12.2021); Puah Rakovsky: My Life as a Radical Jewish Woman: Memoirs of a Zionist Feminist in Poland, Bloomington 2002.

medical discourses on sexuality, appears only in the memoirs of those acculturating Jewish women who, like Wanda Wawrzyńska,¹⁰⁶ worked in social care. Jadwiga Strumff, who had contacts with Warsaw prostitutes, perceived them according to contemporary standards: she saw in them the passive victims of male desire.¹⁰⁷ This shows the impact of the press discourse because Jadwiga was much more aware of human sexuality and its spectrum than other memoirists. It should also be noted that prostitution was only a pretext for discussing other questions like sexual education, equal financial rights, self-determination of women, abortion and birth control.

It seems that traces of the contemporary discourse on sexuality and the female body can be found in some of the ego-documents of acculturating Jewish women, yet their experience is similar to the experience of other middle-class women living in the Polish lands (as memoirs of Polish authors from the time prove¹⁰⁸). As a result, their Jewish ethnicity did not impact the way they perceived their bodies and sexuality. The female body and sexuality play an important role only in the memoir of Jadwiga Strumff, but although the author did not conceal her sexuality, like the majority of other authors, she did hide her Jewish background. She also baptized herself, so her text cannot be treated as the memoir of an acculturating Jewish woman. Interestingly, though, her memoir is also evidence for the scientification of the discourse, as it is a study of human attitudes towards one's body and sexuality. She was undoubtedly influenced by the notion that everything human can be empirically explained, then categorized and analyzed.

Although hygienists, physicians and women's rights activists emphasized a need for sexual reform, their arguments were often "conservative" in the sense that they did not overcome the limitation of perceiving human sexuality as relating only to man-woman relationships. They attempted to prevent syphilis and other venereal diseases from spreading rather than give real sexual freedom to women. Polish-Jewish ego-documents show well how deeply rooted the relation between sexuality and morality was, and how unequal the position of women was compared men. Nevertheless, their efforts also had good consequences: the debate launched then would later be developed and finally bring some changes in the perception of what was meant by sexual modesty and women's decency.

Finally, it seems that those acculturated Jewish women who were engaged in the women's rights movement chose literature as the medium in which to express their attitudes towards female sexuality because their private correspondence does not contain any traces of such a discourse. The perception of the body and sexuality was related rather to class than to ethnicity. Interestingly, the two memoirs which mention female sexuality were written by women who perceived their bodies as non-womanish, which was, in their view, almost a synonym for sexually unattractive. Therefore, the fact that Klara Mirska wrote about the issue might not be accounted for by the time of writing – the late 1960s – but by her negative attitude towards her own body, which might have led to an obsession. In the great

106 See Wanda Wawrzyńska: *Wspomnienia 1901–1987* [Memoirs 1901–1987], archives of the National Library in Poland, BN rps. 13974 III.

107 See Strumff, *Spostrzeżenia nad ludźmi* (see note 95), p. 125.

108 Joanna Sikorska-Kulesza indicates that the memoirs of Maria Czapska, Anna Potocka and Anna Tarczewska clearly show that a wedding night was a total shock for young brides, who were unaware of sexual matters. See Sikorska-Kulesza, *Skąd* (see note 5), pp. 29 f.

majority of memoirs written by acculturated Jewish women in the 1960s, 1970s or 1980s, there is no mention of the author's sexuality.

Summary

Der Artikel konzentriert sich auf die Betrachtung der Diskussion zur weiblichen Sexualität in den frühen 1900er Jahren, die medizinische, feministische und allgemeine Publikationen anregte. Die Grundlage sind die Memoiren, die von einer bestimmten Gruppe sozialer Akteurinnen geschrieben wurden – von jenen jüdischen Frauen, die Polnisch als ihre öffentliche und literarische Sprache wählten, die polnische Kultur als ihren Bezugspunkt und die jüdische Religion und Tradition mehr oder weniger als ihre Privatsphäre ansahen. Der geografische Hintergrund des Artikels beschränkt sich auf das Königreich Polen und Galizien. Der Artikel versucht zu prüfen, ob die jüdische Herkunft der Autorinnen einen Einfluss darauf hatte, wie sie ihre Sexualität und ihren Körper wahrnahmen. Er versucht die Frage zu beantworten, ob Einrichtungen wie beispielsweise Schulen eine Auswirkung auf die Wahrnehmung der eigenen Sexualität hatten. Er nimmt auch Bezug auf zeitgenössische Richtlinien zur Sexualerziehung, um ihren Diskurs in den persönlichen Dokumenten akkulturierter jüdischer Frauen nachzuverfolgen. Der Artikel hat nicht zum Ziel, Fakten zu beschreiben, sondern die Beziehung zwischen persönlichen Erfahrungen und Diskursen. Die detaillierte Analyse ist einer Lebenserinnerung von Klara Mirska gewidmet, einer polnisch-jüdischen Journalistin, Absolventin des Lehrerseminars der TSYSHO (Zentrale jüdische Schulorganisation) und Ehefrau eines prominenten kommunistischen Aktivisten. Ihr Text wird einer sehr besonderen Quelle gegenübergestellt – dem Memoire einer Masseuse jüdischer Abstammung, die in den späten 1890er und frühen 1900er Jahren in Warschau arbeitete. Wie die Gegenüberstellung verdeutlicht, haben die beiden Texte mehr gemeinsam, als es auf den ersten Blick der Fall zu sein scheint.