

Beyond the Old Polish “hic mulier”: Regina Salomea née Rusiecka, secundo voto Pilsztynowa, and her memoir

Staropolska “hic mulier”: Regina Salomea de domo Rusiecka, secundo voto Pilsztynowa, i jej pamiętniki

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Abstract

The 1760 memoirs of the first Polish woman doctor, Regina Salomea Rusiecka, were not published until 1957 (in Polish). The author, however, clearly meant the manuscript for publication, having edited it and bestowed on it the title of *My Life's Travels and Adventures* (Polish: *Proceder podróży i życia mego awantur*). So far, Pilsztynowa has been the object of attention to researchers in women's history and historians of medicine. As for her writing style, it has been remarked that it differs from contemporary Polish travel writing in its lack of Baroque ornamentation or fondness for Latinism, attributed to Pilsztynowa's evident lack of formal education. Basing on Pilsztynowa's memoirs, my objective is to focus on her emotions, expressed in a non-explicit manner in her text. Her memoir carries a heavy emotional load, which locates her self-portrait far beyond the typical “hic mulier” image.

Abstrakt

Pamiętniki pierwszej polskiej lekarki, Reginy Salomei Rusieckiej, z roku 1760 doczekały się publikacji dopiero w XX wieku (1957). Jest sprawą oczywistą, że autorka planowała ich wydanie, odpowiednio redagując manuskrypt i nadając

mu tytuł *Proceder podróży i życia mego awantur*. Dotychczas Pilsztynową interesowali się badacze historii kobiet oraz rozwoju medycyny. Stwierdzono, że styl pisarski Pilsztynowej odbiega od ówczesnego stylu polskiego podróżopisarstwa brakiem językowej ornamentacji typowej dla baroku, w szczególności brakiem latynizmów, co przypisywano brakom w wykształceniu autorki. Bazując na pamiętniku Pilsztynowej pragnę wykazać, że prezentacja jej autoportretu wykracza poza wizerunek tzw. "hic mulier", obejmując szeroką gamę emocji, w większości przypadków wyrażanych przez pamiętnikarkę w sposób nieoczywisty.

Beyond the Old Polish “*hic mulier*”: Regina Salomea née Rusiecka, *secundo voto* Pilsztynowa, and her memoir

The beginnings of Polish women’s life writing date back to the sixteenth century, with several widowed female life writers attempting to put their life’s experiences into words and eulogize their late spouses¹, witness the memoir by Elżbieta Orzelska (begun 1589; unpublished), continued by her daughter Katarzyna Niegolewska (from 1623 onwards; unpublished). The seventeenth century follows with the mystical autobiography of a Discalced Carmelite sister (published 1939), Anna Maria Marchocka (1603–1652), and the secular rhyming autobiography entitled *A Transaction; or a Description of the Entire Life of One Orphan Girl through Doleful Laments Written by the Same 1685*² (published 1935) by a noblewoman, Anna née Stanisławska (1652–1700), *primo voto*: Warszycza, *secundo voto*: Oleśnicka, *tertio voto*: Zbąska. Clearly, as is often the case with any autobiographical texts³, early modern Polish women’s life writing tended to be triggered by their need for emotional expression at moments of significant upheaval in their lives. It seems that Poland’s first female eye doctor, Regina Salomea Pilsztynowa (or Makowska⁴, as she signs her name in the introductory letter to her benefactress, Ludwika Potocka) was not much different on that score.

In 1760, with little native autobiographical tradition that she could relate to⁵, Pilsztynowa penned *My Life’s Travels and Adventures* (Polish: *Pro-*

¹ K. Targosz, *Sawantki w Polsce XVII w. Aspiracje intelektualne kobiet ze środowisk dworskich [Seventeenth-Century Polish Femmes Savantes: Intellectual Aspirations of Noblewomen]*, Warszawa 1997, pp. 276–278.

² The original Polish title is *Transakcyjja albo Opisanie całego życia jednej sieroty przez żalosne treny od tejże samej pisane roku 1685*.

³ Ph. Lejeune, *On Diary*, eds. J. D. Popkin and J. Rak, transl. Katherine Durnin, Honolulu 2009, p. 33.

⁴ Hereinafter referred to as Pilsztynowa.

⁵ Other than the so-called “*silvae rerum*”, i.e. household books of important dates and family events, recipes, letters, poems, prayers, and the like, popular at seventeenth-century and later Polish manor houses. Their status as autobiographical texts is, however, disputable due to their collective authorship: the records were entered by several members of a household. On that score, these could not be called truly personal writings. Considering how little writing concerning Old Polish individual emotion has survived until today, it has been surmised that not much was originally produced, the famous collection of love letters between John III Sobieski, King of Poland in the years 1674–1696, and his wife, Queen Marie Casimire, being an exception. The eighteenth century produced the correspondence of Countess Franciszka

ceder podróży i życia mego awantur), a memoir in seven chapters⁶. Basing on Pilsztynowa's memoir, my objective is to trace this woman's life story as it embraces a set of sensibilities in many ways typical of the Old Polish epoch⁷. So far, Pilsztynowa has been the object of attention to researchers in women's history⁸ and historians of medicine⁹. Students of her prose style have remarked that it differs from contemporary Polish travel writing in its lack of Baroque ornamentation and fondness for Latinism, as well as in its primitive and sometimes faulty sentence patterns, attributable to Pilsztynowa's evident lack of formal education¹⁰. Rocznik justifies the writer's imperfect use of the language with the fact that, while living abroad for prolonged periods of time, she had little chance to be exposed to correct Polish¹¹.

In line with recent trends, Polish scholarship has dwelt on Pilsztynowa's alleged incompatibility with her epoch, stressing her refusal to live up to con-

Urszula Radziwiłłowa (1705–1753), whose style has been compared to that of Ovid's *Heroides*. On the whole, the majority of less literary eighteenth-century Polish love letters centre around issues of practical interest to both spouses rather than their emotions, with premarital correspondence standing in marked contrast on account of its infantilisation of emotional expression manifested through an abundance of diminutives and other love-lorn phraseology (B. Popiołek, *Kobiety świata w czasach Augusta II. Studia i mentalność kobiet z kręgów szlacheckich* [The Women's World in the Times of August II: Studies in the Mentality of Noblewomen], Kraków 2003, p. 190).

⁶ At this point it must be noted that memoirs, and not diaries, were the form of life writing practiced commonly by Polish women of the past epochs, which researchers have justified with their lack of time to devote to methodical daily entries (Ibidem, p. 23).

⁷ "Old Poland" is a capacious term used to cover the periods from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment.

⁸ J. Partyka, *Kobieta oswaja męską przestrzeń. Polska lekarka w osiemnastowiecznym Stambule* [A Woman Enters the Male Space: A Polish Doctor in Eighteenth-Century Istanbul] [in:] *Pisarki polskie epok dawnych*, ed. K. Stasiewicz, Olsztyn 1998, pp. 153–62; M. Hawrysz, *Portret kobiety nowoczesnej w świetle pamiętnika "Proceder podróży i życia mego awantur" Reginy Pilsztynowej* [A Portrait of a Modern Woman in the Light of Regina Pilsztynowa's "My Life's Travels and Adventures"] [in:] *Tradycja a nowoczesność* [Tradition and Modernity], ed. E. Woźniak, Łódź 2008, pp. 583–594; L. Lubamersky, *Unique and Incomparable: The Exceptional Life of the First Female Doctor in Poland, Regina Salomea Pilsztynowa*, "The Polish Review" 2014, Vol. 59, No. 1, pp. 87–100).

⁹ J. M. Konczacki, K. Aterman, *Regina Salomea Pilsztynowa, Ophthalmologist in Eighteenth-Century Poland*, "Survey of Ophthalmology" 2002, No. 47, pp. 189–95)

¹⁰ R. Pollak, *Wstęp* [Introduction] [in:] *Regina Salomea z Rusieckich Pilsztynowa, Proceder podróży i życia mego awantur*, ed. R. Pollak, Kraków 1957, p. 19.

¹¹ W. Rocznik, *Power in Powerlessness: The Strange Journey and Career of Regina Salomea Pilsztynowa* [in:] "The Polish Review" 2008, Vol. 53, No. 1, pp. 26–27.

temporary patriarchal ideals of femininity, wifehood and motherhood¹². Yet, to a certain extent, this view may be a distortion of the Old Polish spirit and Sarmatian culture. While the popular understanding of “Sarmatianism” (or “Sarmatism”) usually denotes the overall cultural achievement of the Polish nobility during the late sixteenth to mid-eighteenth centuries, founded on patriarchal values and a glorification of rural gentry life¹³, it was in fact a more complex set of phenomena. Originating from the geographical situation of Poland at the contact zone between the West and the East, as well as between Catholicism, Protestantism and Christian Orthodox denominations, the culture thus produced was a combination of influences from several sources, soon becoming a self-contained public mind-set. By the mid-eighteenth century, it had become subject to Enlightenment criticism due to its tendency toward isolation from Western Europe and zealous devotion to Roman Catholic principles. At the same time, the Polish Sarmatians were renowned for the love of their homeland, dedication to liberty, and spend-thrift lifestyles. Most interestingly, Sarmatianism produced a distinct attitude towards women, Polish females enjoying their menfolk’s esteem and recognition as lifelong friends and companions, which is reflected in numerous epitaphs¹⁴. Far from being oppressed by gender-based discrimination veiled in socially acceptable forms, Sarmatian women held a special status in society, frequently attributed to the Marian cult of Roman Catholicism. Meriting the attention of foreigners, this phenomenon did not escape the notice of Jeanne Julie Éléonore de Lespinasse, the French salonière, who is known to have remarked that Poland might be the only country where women stood above men¹⁵. Historical research has revealed that eighteenth-century Polish womenfolk had the benefit of considerable liberty. It has been found that

¹² Z. Kuchowicz, *Żywoty niepospolitych kobiet polskiego Baroku* [*Lives of Remarkable Women of the Polish Baroque*], Łódź 1989; J. Partyka, op. cit.; J. Partyka, *Obraz kobiety leczącej w tekstach staropolskich* [*Images of Female Medical Practitioners in Old Polish Texts*] [in:] *Pod patronatem Hygiei. Udział kobiet w rozwoju nauk przyrodniczych*, ed. I. Arabas, Warszawa 2000, pp. 71–84; G. Borkowska, M. Czermińska, U. Phillips, *Pisarki polskie od średniowiecza do współczesności. Przewodnik* [*Polish Women Writers from the Middle Ages to Modern Times: A Survey*], Gdańsk 2000; M. Hawrysz, op. cit.; et al.)

¹³ B. Popiołek, op. cit., p. 185.

¹⁴ W. Łoziński, *Życie polskie w dawnych wiekach* [*Polish Life in Old Days*], Kraków 1974, p. 173.

¹⁵ Z. Kuchowicz, *Postawa wobec kobiety w kulturze szlacheckiej polskiego Baroku* [*Attitudes towards Women in the Culture of Nobility of the Polish Baroque*]. *Kobieta w kulturze i społeczeństwie*, ed. B. Jedynak, Lublin 1990, p. 40.

they would, as a rule, inherit and manage property¹⁶, a necessity in the tumultuous times which drew men away from homes on military expeditions. Old Polish women were no waif-like creatures themselves¹⁷: numerous were the so-called “hic mulier” or “mulier fortis”, i.e. Amazon-type women, who donned men’s clothes, rode on horseback, hunted (killing a couple of bears in one go) or fought in local forays, frequently documented by contemporary court proceedings files¹⁸.

Regina Salomea née Rusiecka was born in 1718 in the province of Navahrudak near Hrodna (today’s Belarus). At the age of fourteen, her townsfolk parents married her off to Jacob Halpir¹⁹, a Lutheran ophthalmologist, with whom she soon went to live in Istanbul where he treated his patients and she learnt some of his doctoring methods which she was to use for the rest of her life. That she thus acquired a profession which would successfully carry her through her various tribulations is indeed extraordinary, considering that opportunities for formal education were closed to her on account of her gender²⁰. When Dr. Halpir left her and their infant daughter after three years of marriage, she was capable of successfully providing for herself and her child. Later she married a military man, Joseph Fortunatus de Pilsztyn who treated her badly and by whom she had two more sons. Finally, she had a long-lasting affair with an unidentified man, seven years younger than herself – an “Amoratus” whom she never named but with the initials I.M.C.Z. It has been suggested that the initial “M” may stand for the surname of “Makowski”²¹ (whose feminine Polish variant would be “Makowska”), which would imply that Pilsztynowa was either finally married to Makowski, or wished to pass for his wife. These three relationships organise her autobiographical text to a large extent.

Whether venturing into wild regions to pursue business or in search of a place in which to live a comfortable life, repeated journeys took Pilsz-

¹⁶ M. Bogucka, *Staropolskie obyczaje w XVI-XVII wieku [Old Polish Customs in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries]*, Warszawa 1994; M. Bogucka, *Białogłowa w dawnej Polsce [Women in Old Poland]*, Warszawa 1998, p. 46.

¹⁷ Z. Kuchowicz, *Miłość staropolska. Wzory – uczuciowość – obyczaje erotyczne XVI-XVIII wieku [Old Polish Love: Patterns – Sensibility – Love Manners in the Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries]*, Łódź 1982, p. 193; J. Maciejewski, *Sarmatyzm [Sarmatism]* [in:] *Słownik literatury polskiego Oświecenia [Dictionary of Polish Enlightenment Literature]*, ed. T. Kostkiewiczowa, Wrocław–Warsaw–Kraków–Gdańsk 1977, pp. 638–645.

¹⁸ W. Łoziński, *Życie polskie w dawnych wiekach [Polish Life in Old Days]*, Kraków 1974, p. 174; Z. Kuchowicz, *Postawa*, p. 20.

¹⁹ Arranged marriages were common among Old Polish townspeople and gentry.

²⁰ W. Roczniak, op. cit., p. 41.

²¹ R. Pollak, op. cit., p. 313.

tynowa across eighteenth-century Europe, from Petersburg to Vienna, from Wrocław (Breslau) to Istanbul. Such frantic travelling was not unusual for eighteenth-century Polish women, and it did not have much in common with the English Grand Tour tradition²². Their travelling was often driven by the need to transact business, visit relatives or acquaintances, engage in devotional practices, or – from the seventeenth century onwards – take the waters²³. In 1760, back in Istanbul (where a large Polish colony was centred around the court of the Polish Ambassador)²⁴ where she settled down as a recognized eye doctor, working for the court harem, Pilsztynowa composed her memoir (now kept at the National Museum in Kraków), which was not published until 1957 (in Polish). The memoir leaves the writer in her early forties, planning a trip to Jerusalem and Egypt. She clearly meant her manuscript for publication, having edited it, compiled a contents page, and bestowed on it the title of *My Life's Travels and Adventures*.

Despite its considerable concern with the author's sensibilities, Pilsztynowa's *My Life's Travels* does not appear to be an emotional text at first glance. Yet the sentiments lurking in the text itself are not as untypical as some critics would have us believe. To begin with, let us look at Pilsztynowa's affairs of the heart. While it can hardly be said that she married her first husband, Jacob Halpir, out of anything vaguely resembling affection – as she never mentions any, even in passing – she represents herself as a devoted wife, who spares no time and effort to rescue Halpir out of the trouble in which he finds himself when a patient of his dies in Istanbul. She has to go and see the *Vasir*, and pay damages to the deceased man's family so that her husband is not executed. Unfortunately, Halpir fails to appreciate her efforts, and soon leaves her without any explanation, or at least this is the memoirist's version of the events. She is to meet him again somewhat later: "P. Jezus był go nawiedził, że mu ręce i nogi pokurczyło, i wszystek w ranach został" ["visited by Lord Jesus to the effect that his arms and legs had shrunk, and he was covered in wounds all over"] (Pilsztynowa 62)²⁵, at which point she is ready to forgive him. Having welcomed Halpir with the affectionate address: "Kochany mężu" ["My beloved husband"] (Pilsztynowa 63), she declares her readiness to treat him as best she can. She claims to have succeeded, but the husband

²² B. Popiołek, op. cit., p. 161.

²³ M. Bogucka, *Białogłowa*, p. 177.

²⁴ J. Reychnan, *Życie polskie w Stambule w XVIII wieku [Polish Life in Eighteenth-Century Istanbul]*, Warszawa 1959; W. Łoziński, op. cit.; et al.

²⁵ All quotations from Pilsztynowa's memoir come from the following edition: Pilsztynowa, R. S. *Proceder podróży i życia mego awantur [My Life's Travels and Adventures]*, ed. R. Pollak, Kraków 1957, and will hereafter be denoted by page numbers. Translation into English is mine throughout.

does not live much longer, as he falls victim to some unspecified epidemic disease which she is apparently unable to cure (Pilsztynowa 64). Upon his death, she admits to feelings of “żał, tęskność” [“sadness and longing”] (Pilsztynowa 64). Yet, significantly, Pilsztynowa’s first husband is not the one to whom she would devote the majority of emotional space in her memoirs. What she stresses more than her own mourning is her anxiety over the fate of their orphaned daughter, Konstancja.

Joseph Fortunatus de Pilsztyn, whose surname the author will retain for the rest of her days, is first mentioned in *My Life’s Travels* soon after the death of Dr. Halpir, the exact date being unknown as dates are hardly a significant part of the text. Regina Salomea first meets him during her business dealings: she trades in slaves, i.e. Turkish captives of Polish and other origin, whom she buys out from their Turkish owners and transports to Poland where the captives’ relatives lavishly pay her back. Before she leaves Istanbul, she has paid eight hundred red zlotys for five persons (Pilsztynowa 69). One of these is Józef Fortunatus, whose parents live “daleko od Wiednia..., to tam tak prędko listy jego nie doszły” [“far away from Vienna... so his letters took a long time to reach them”] (Pilsztynowa 70). Upon settling her business with all the others, able to repay her as agreed, she decides to take Pilsztyn with her “as a companion” until the required three hundred red zlotys arrive (Pilsztynowa 70). “Był człekiem rozumnym, dobrej edukacji, był w szkołach rzymskich, w legorskich, wiedeńskich i na to miał dyploma z pieczęciami. Trzeźwy, posłuszny, cichy i pobożny mnie się pokazał” [“He was a clever man, had a good education, having gone to schools in Rome, Leghorn and Vienna, to prove which he had certificates with official seals. Sober, obedient, quiet and devout he seemed to me”], the memoirist says (Pilsztynowa 70). Not that there is much emotion in the statement itself, but this is a clear picture of a positive male figure, enough to attract a young widow who had never given half as much praise to her late first husband. Arguably, Pilsztyn is a perfectly eligible candidate for eighteenth-century Polish matrimony: the contemporary male ideal was frequently described as kind-hearted, well-mannered, noble and steady-going. He is all that with a vengeance, having the added benefit of a good schooling, which goes beyond standard female expectation of the age²⁶.

Then follows one of the memoir’s puzzling lacunae: nothing is said about the growing attraction between the two, and the plot featuring Pilsztyn is abandoned in favour of a narrative of Hungarian Prince Joseph Ragotzky (Rákóczi) and his importunate wooing of the memoirist. The Prince goes as far as having her arrested at the Bulgarian town of Rustchuk, with the order

²⁶ B. Popiołek, op. cit., pp. 189-190.

that she be executed immediately if she keeps denying her favours to the Prince. At that time she barely mentions being separated from her slave Pilsztyn, daughter Konstancja and all her belongings. Yet her good Fortune smiles on her, that is to say she experiences assistance from Divine Providence when a local dignitary happens to need her medical services and has her released immediately. At that point she duly records being reunited with Pilsztyn, her daughter, and – last but not least – her material possessions (Pilsztynowa 74-76). Because there is very little that comes close to emotional in the above account, one should take the very mention of certain characters or activities, and exclusion of others, as evidence of emotional turmoil. At the end of what constitutes Chapter 1 of *My Life's Travels*, once again the intrepid traveller enumerates her dependants, her young daughter and Mr. Pilsztyn, as she dispassionately sets out on the final leg of her journey back to Poland.

The first part of Chapter 2 is titled “I Re-Marry Mr. Pilsztyn”, which – if compared to the indifferent subtitle of Chapter 1, “The First Trip to Istanbul”, without even a mention of her first husband, speaks volumes. Appropriately, the beginning of the chapter is devoted to how the marriage is transacted: the story is well worth telling. When Regina Salomea arrives at the city of Bar (today’s Ukraine), she means to drop Mr. Pilsztyn at a Jesuit monastery until he can be redeemed when his money arrives. On hearing that, Pilsztyn “począł bardzo rzewno płakać” [“start[s] crying his eyes out”] (Pilsztynowa 80), approximating a proper Man of Feeling in the Sternean and Mackenziean fashion of the later decades, but refuses to tell her the reason. That is definitely far removed from standard male behaviour in contemporary Central Europe, and Pilsztyn’s tears are recorded as a curiosity in its own right. Needless to say, the memoirist herself is never shown weeping.

Visibly impressed by this display of sentiment, acting as an outright heroine of sensibility for once, the memoirist insists on knowing why Pilsztyn cries, and suggests that he entrust his worry with the Jesuit fathers. When he does so, she is told that Pilsztyn has marriage plans with respect to herself: “pani moja... jest z woli Boga wdowa, a ja jestem człek wolny, rad bym był jej przyjacielem dożywotnim zostać” [“as my lady... is, God willing, a widow, and I am unmarried, I wish to become her lifelong friend”] (Pilsztynowa 80). The Jesuit fathers make the situation clear to Regina Salomea. The candidate is a worthy, educated man, and she – but a widow with a wanderer’s past: no Starost or other wealthy dignitary will take her in marriage. So, rather typically, she says to herself, “stań się Boża wola ze mną” [“God’s will be done”] (Pilsztynowa 82), and – so it is before she knows it: “krótko mówiąc w niedziel kilka biorę ja ślub z imć Józefem de Pilsztynem w Dubnie” [“briefly speaking, within a few weeks, I marry Mr. Joseph de Pilsztyn at

Dubno”] (Pilsztynowa 82). Both are then employed in the service of Prince Michael Casimir Radziwiłł: Pilsztyn as an ensign, and she – as a court medical practitioner. But the initial idyll is soon to be dispelled. She recalls: “Już, jak to mówią, jak się ożenił, tak się odmienił” [“As they say, marry too soon, repent too late”] (Pilsztynowa 82). His respect for her and gratitude are lost in no time at all, and it becomes quite clear that he has meant mainly to be released from his position of dependence on her. Yet Pilsztynowa dutifully fulfils her wifely obligations: she equips him adequately to his new rank, which costs her (and she is usually very accurate about her finances) 5,000 zloty, including expenditure on watches, snuff boxes and gold signet rings. Her growing disappointment in this relationship provides a turning point: from then onwards, her actions will be decreasingly founded upon romantic or familial affections.

Soon enough, she plans another expedition to recover four Turkish slaves of hers from Moscow, and this comes to dominate her narrative, replacing sensibility-related remarks. Her daughter receives but a short mention when she is to be discarded at a Nesvizh (today’s Belarus) Benedictine convent to receive an education and, particularly, to learn the Polish language, which she cannot speak properly, having been reared among Turks. To twenty-first-century readers²⁷, Pilsztynowa has appeared to be an uncaring mother, not very sympathetic to the fates of her three children whom she is ever eager to abandon and leave with individuals hardly fit for guardians.

Inconsiderate as this might seem, in those days it was not uncommon to deposit one’s children, especially of previous marriages, at monastic institutions for an education²⁸. When Pilsztynowa returns, her husband is discovered to have squandered her little fortune which she had entrusted with him before leaving (Pilsztynowa 115). Soon she complains, somewhat detachedly yet indecorously, at her husband’s marital infidelity, adding in the same breath: “tum chora z woli Pana Boga, w ciąży zostając” [“God willing, I am poorly and pregnant”] (Pilsztynowa 152). This does not, however, pre-

²⁷ I. Maciejewska, *Kobięcym piórem o miłości, małżeństwie i erotyce (Regina Salomea z Rusieckich Pilsztynowa, Elżbieta Drużbacka, Franciszka Urszula Radziwiłłowa)* [*Female Writings on Love, Marriage and Eroticism (Regina Salomea née Rusiecka Pilsztynowa, Elżbieta Drużbacka, Franciszka Urszula Radziwiłłowa)*] [in:] *Kobieta epok dawnych w literaturze, kulturze i społeczeństwie*, eds. I. Maciejewska, K. Stasiewicz, Olsztyn 2008, pp. 213–23; I. Maciejewska, *Specyfika relacji pamiętnikarskiej Proceduru podróży i życia mego awantur Reginy Salomei z Rusieckich Pilsztynowej* [*Memoir Features of My Life’s Travels and Adventures by Regina Salomea née Rusiecka Pilsztynowa*] [in:] *Kobieta epok dawnych w literaturze, kulturze i społeczeństwie*, eds. I. Maciejewska, K. Stasiewicz, Olsztyn 2008, pp. 141–152; Hawrysz, op. cit.; et al.)

²⁸ B. Popiołek, op. cit., pp. 87, 236.

vent her from undertaking another trip, this time to meet her in-laws and ask for the money which she is still owed on account of Pilsztyn's release from Turkish captivity. So off she goes to his Austrian home town, having deposited her little fortune – and daughter – with Mrs. Szczytowa, wife to the Smolensk Castellana²⁹, hoping for at least a thousand red zloty, and – possibly – for five thousand. Her husband's parents offer her but a hundred red zloty, but gratify her vanity by having three portraits of her painted before she leaves, which she records not without a certain amount of satisfaction. She heads to Vienna for her confinement, motivated by a very trivial reason: in Pilsztyn's home town, lying-in women are only allowed to eat soup, she being partial to chicken (Pilsztynowa 153). Embittered about her poverty, Pilsztynowa wastes no time and soon finds wealthy patients who provide for her living expenses. “Mnie Pan Jezus rozwiązał i urodziłam syna, Franciszka Ksawerego” [“Lord Jesus willing, I was delivered of a son, Francis Xavery”] (Pilsztynowa 158), she notes tersely, without bothering to insert the date and passing straight into the abundance and variety of foods which she enjoyed at the time. Soon, having traversed the whole of Poland, from Wrocław to Lublin again, and further on to Lvov, she finds that Pilsztyn has removed her little fortune and her daughter from the custody of Mrs. Szczytowa, squandered the money, and now lives with two women: “wielcem się z tego martwiła” [“which worried me much”] (Pilsztynowa 171). Few statements of Pilsztynowa's emotional states are as explicit as that.

Next she calmly records her husband's attempt to poison her, her vomiting four hundred times and almost dying (Pilsztynowa 172), evidently an exaggeration which serves the purpose of hyperbolically conveying her fear at possibly being at death's door. What matters, upon being delivered by Lord Jesus from that predicament, is her loss of beauty: “mnie zęby powypadały, włosy oblażyły, paznokcie schropowaciały, nawet wszystka skóra się ze mnie złupiła” [“I lost my teeth and my hair, my nails got patchy, and so did my skin”] (Pilsztynowa 172). But this is not the end of trouble: Pilsztyn arrives, insists on her moving back with him, and before long she finds herself with child again. When she complains to him of his failure to provide her with basic comforts, he tells her to buy three-pence worth of arsenic. “Otruj się, to ani połogu, ani mamki nie trzeba” [“Go poison yourself, so no lying-in or wet nurse are needed”] (Pilsztynowa 174) is his cynical response. Pilsztynowa heads for a nunnery, and deposits her two children: the two-year old Franciszek, and Konstancja “the poor girl”, with Mrs. Potocka, wife to the Braclaw

²⁹ As has been observed, Pilsztynowa is in the habit of referring to her female acquaintances as wives of their high-ranking husbands, and not independent individuals in their own right (W. Roczniak, op. cit., p. 48).

Castellan. A deceitfully caring letter arrives from her husband, who evidently hopes for sponsorship again. One night, after supper, God safely delivers the memoirist of her younger son, Stanisław Kostka (Pilsztynowa 178). One of the very few dates of the memoir pertains to his baptism: 31 July, 1742 (Pilsztynowa 179). The baby suffers from epilepsy, St. Valentine's disease – as she diagnoses it, and anxiously she takes him to a renowned shrine, where he is placed in a saint's coffin to be promptly and miraculously recovered (Pilsztynowa 182). In the meantime, Konstancja is repeatedly dropped at a Benedictine nunnery and at Mrs. Potocka's. It is now clear that Pilsztynowa deliberately estranges herself from her husband, but wishes for no divorce³⁰ as she intends to continue a good Roman Catholic while strongly determined never to marry again. When she is once more deprived of her belongings – a chest containing 18,000 zloty, she laments: “Ach mój Boże, jak mnie ten świat ucisnął był i złota wolność polska!” [“Oh, my God, how the world has mistreated me, what with Polish golden liberty!”] (Pilsztynowa 193). The latter is a new motif in the memoir, one which involves a heavy load of negative emotion. Once again, it shows Pilsztynowa – as is repeatedly the case – more concerned with the material comforts rather than the non-material values in life.

What happens to her second husband, Mr. Pilsztyn, is not clear, some researchers claiming that their marriage was dissolved through divorce, others – that Pilsztyn conveniently died and released his widow from the marital bond. When her unhappy marriage is luckily over, the memoirist comments: “trzeba było Bogu dziękować i w pokoju żyć, aleć czy wola Boska czy niedola, znów mi się trafił kawaler pewny, urodzenia godnego i edukacji szlachtetnej, dość że godnej familii i życzył sobie mieć mię za dożywotniego przyjaciela” [“I should have thanked God and lived in peace, but God willing, I befriended a certain Cavalier, of noble birth and proper education, son of a good house, who wanted me to become his lifelong friend”] (Pilsztynowa 197). In the opening lines of a section entitled “About my Cavalier”, Pilsztynowa confesses:

Ja zapomniawszy, co było z imć p. Pilsztynem, odważyłam się w duchu: “Jeszcze raz spróbuję i pójdę za mąż, ale nie teraz, obaczę, zrozumiem, co to za człek, czy będę ja mogła z nim swoje życie dalej kontyn[u]ować”. I tak ja temu kawalerowi respons dałam: “Obaczę, jak wola P. Boga będzie”. Aleć tak mnie mówił, że “jak żyję, tak żadnej damy ani wdowy nie kochałem”. Ja jemu jestem pierwszą, że mnie zaczął szczerze kochać. Ja tej powieści uwierzyłam.

³⁰ In those days, “divorce” equalled “annulment of marriage”, and was a common procedure in the case of a husband's abuse of his wife (cf. M. Bogucka, op. cit., p. 48). Popiołek views the popularity of divorce as a marker of the changing mentality and growing empowerment of Polish women (op. cit., pp. 218-219).

[Having forgotten what I'd been through with Mr. Pilsztyn, I dared once again. "Let me try and marry once more, but not now. Let me see what kind of man he is, and whether I can go on living with him". So I told my Cavalier, "God's will be done". But he said, "As long as I live, I have never loved a lady or widow that much". I was the first he loved so sincerely. I believed that story] (Pilsztynowa 197).

That is how her relationship with the nameless I.M.C.Z., denoted by the partly affectionate, partly ironical appellation of "Amoratus", begins: verbally enchanted, she gives in to the Old Polish love language (Pilsztynowa 197). The story repeats. Whatever follows is a catalogue of her lover's offences against her: he will invariably squander all that she gives him; extort money, goods and chattels out of her; become involved in shadowy businesses; and finally come back to her, contrite. He is to blame for the death of her elder boy, at nine years old. Factually, without expected sentiment³¹, the memoirist recalls the circumstances:

Kawaler bał się, żeby dziecię to nie powiadało przede mną, co widział i dlatego to dziecię zamykał do ciemnego sklepu przez trzy miesiące i zapominał o nim, że mu czasem we trzy dni ledwie chleba dawał i tak to dziecię na gołej ziemi leżało, przestraszyło się, spuchło i z tego umarło.

[The Cavalier was afraid that the child would tell me what he had seen, so he locked the child up in a dark cellar over three months, forgetting him and hardly giving him any bread, and that once in three days, and so the child lay on bare ground, got a fright, swelled, took and died] (Pilsztynowa 200).

Yet, for the memoirist, that is not reason enough to dismiss her suitor: "ale pójść za niego nigdy nie życzyła widząc jego niestatek i że młodszy ode mnie lat siedem" ["I never wanted to marry him in view of his unreliability and because he was seven years younger than myself"] (Pilsztynowa 199). The latter sounds an unconvincing excuse: in her day, spousal age difference, as is known from historical records, was not considered a problem at all³². Even as she determines to disentangle herself from him once and for all, he comes after her, spoiling her plans and damaging her reputation (Pilsztynowa 203-204). Konstancja, in the meantime, toys with the idea of becoming a nun, which the mother pleads her to reconsider (Pilsztynowa 204). Gone is her maternal authority as she recalls these moments. Ultimately, Pilsztynowa succeeds in her persuasion, and although no details are given, the daughter is soon married off: in passing, the memoirist mentions her son-in-law (Pilsztynowa 216). In a summary of her motherhood, Pilsztynowa admits that "te

³¹ B. Popiołek, op. cit., p. 231.

³² Z. Kuchowicz, *Miłość*, p. 400.

mizerne matki większe przywiązanie mają do małych dzieci, a zwłaszcza do chłopców” [“those miserable mothers are more strongly attached to young children, boys in particular”] (Pilsztynowa 216), which suggests that – on the whole – she may not have been entirely satisfied with her parenting style.

The “Amoratus” plot is clearly of greater importance to the memoirist and it is invariably accompanied by discussions of her material possessions. When he insists that she marry him, she pretends to agree on condition that he return her belongings. He does as he is told, after which she rejects him. This takes place after she makes her confession and receives her Holy Communion, which gives yet another dimension to Pilsztynowa’s emotional life. It is her religious sentiment that the desperate “Amoratus” tries to appeal to as he writes two lists of his sins in ostensible preparation for his confession, one genuine, and the other – trivial and centred around his overwhelming love for one unnamed widow – meant for her to find and read (Pilsztynowa 211). Nevertheless, after he abuses her generosity several more times, she comes into her senses due to an alleged divine intervention: “Pan Jezus dał mnie oświecenie, i jużem mu więcej wspomozienia nie dała” [“Lord Jesus illuminated me and I never gave him any more support”] (Pilsztynowa 220). This puts an end to all the love affairs, as the memoirist undertakes to return to Istanbul, having parted with her only remaining son in Poland, who will soon become yet another source of dissatisfaction to her.

As has been demonstrated, even if Pilsztynowa’s prose is not explicitly emotional, it does carry a certain emotional load, inscribed between the lines and concealed behind the writer’s “hic mulier” image. At some points, Regina Salomea explicitly represents herself as one of those: when for instance she claims to have enjoyed shooting at wild pigeons or to have been in the habit of carrying a couple of pistols with her (Pilsztynowa 214) as well as cross-dressing at several occasions (Pilsztynowa 41, 53, 223).

The text is preceded, in the eighteenth-century fashion, with a preface addressed “Do łaskawego czytelnika” [“To the Compassionate Reader”] (Pilsztynowa 35), wherein the writer thus states her authorial intention: “Chcę w tej książce mojej wyrazić proceder życia mego i cierpienie. Krzywdy, wzgardy od mężów, dzieci i bliźnich, i sług moich – te mnie wygnały z ojczyzny mojej” [“I wish, in this book of mine, to express the adventures of my life and suffering. Evil and contempt received from my husbands, children and neighbours, as well as servants – these drove me away from my homeland”]³³. With a claim that she earns no profit on her little book, and a plea for three “Hail

³³ The unexpected lyrical quality of this fragment has been commented on (R. Pollak, op. cit., p. 24).

Marys” for her good health and ultimate salvation, the memoirist gets to grips with the memories of her emotional and financial tribulations.

Considering that the readership of Pilsztynowa’s memoir is at the very beginning defined as follows: “ta cała książka jest tylko do uwagi Opatrzności Boskiej i dla rozrywki ludzkiej czytając” [“this whole book is only being written for the attention of God’s Providence and for human entertainment reading”] (Pilsztynowa 40; note the incorrect grammar of the final clause), one wonders if she means her text as a sort of an apologia. If so, it might be assumed that the memoirist is writing out of the need for some therapeutic re-enactment of her rich biography, as is the case with much life writing.

While emotion is hardly ever allowed to break from behind the veneer of the Sarmatian “hic mulier”, in some respects Pilsztynowa’s self-representation differs from some of her Polish predecessors and European contemporaries. The already-mentioned Anna Stanisławska, torn between her identity as a strong, self-aware woman, conscious of her variety of assets, yet willingly forfeiting some of her independence for the sake of familial and home-making values which she holds dear and builds her emotional life on, provides a clear contrast. Against a wider European background, Pilsztynowa is best juxtaposed with Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, who also travelled to the Ottoman Empire as wife to the British Ambassador, publishing her Turkish letters in 1763, three years after Pilsztynowa wrote her memoir. While Montagu’s perception of Turkey and Turks, particularly women, has been found to reflect her own heartfelt ambivalence on the status of women³⁴, nothing like this is to be observed in *My Life’s Travels and Adventures*. Pilsztynowa comes through as consistent, undivided, and in no need to redefine her position in society – whether Polish, Turkish or any other which she happens to be involved with. Generally complacent with herself and constantly propelled to move forward, geographically as well as emotionally – in search of new experiences, she is “a product of her day”³⁵ in that she even manages to achieve what has been termed “power in powerlessness”³⁶, i.e. a recognized position in the male-dominated Muslim society of Istanbul despite being a Christian and a woman. Still, when writing about her life, she feels the occasional need to portray herself as a member of the weaker sex, witness the numerous references to her being a lonely, unprotected woman (Pilsztynowa 63) and thus in need of God’s assistance. The memoirist’s religious sentiment is vigorous as if in compensation for her unhoused lifestyle and lacking family feeling. This

³⁴ E. A. Bohls, *Women Travel Writers and the Language of Aesthetics 1716-1818*, Cambridge 1997, pp. 23-45.

³⁵ W. Roczniak, op. cit., p. 35.

³⁶ W. Roczniak, op. cit., p. 25.

may be due to the author's belief that God's Providence is the only succour which can be relied on as she continues a dedicated (although not disinterested) eye doctor and general practitioner (often in need of divine intervention for the sake of her patients' survival). Numerous instances of that are painstakingly recorded³⁷, frequently accompanied by repeated religious ejaculations which serve to document the author's underlying emotion.

Religious feeling aside, towards the ending, the text features two more statements of Pilsztynowa's authorial intention. The shorter one which opens Chapter 5 merely echoes the initial assertion by stressing her purpose to write informatively to the glory of God and for the amusement of worthy readers (Pilsztynowa 243). The longer one, however, placed at the end of Chapter 4, reads:

Teraz podaję to zebranie moich awantur do uwagi ludzkiej. Kto je czytać będzie, niech uważa [w] wielu już byłam niebezpieczeństwach życia i wiele razy fortuna mnie bogaciła i nazbyt szybko zubożywała. Niech zrozumie, czy miałam ja co dobrego od mężów i od utrapionego kawalera, od dzieci i sług. I czy mam się po co do Polski wracać w moim terazniejszym wieku rachując w tym roku 1760 z łaski Bożej czterdzieści i dwa? Chyba na to, żeby mnie znowu z ostatniego, uchowaj Boże, obdarli.

[Now I offer this collection of my adventures to people's attention. Whoever reads this, let them consider in how many dangers I was in my life and how many times Fortune made me rich and, too soon, poor. Let them see if I have had any good from my husbands or the wretched Cavalier, from my children and servants. And do I have anything to go back to Poland for at my present age which is this year, thank God, two and forty? Perhaps only to be robbed to the last, God save me] (Pilsztynowa 239).

What is striking in this passage is its emotional quality – the load of embitterment which is never as explicitly communicated at earlier points. The memoir ends with a "Song of My Own Composition" (Pilsztynowa 294) dedicated to Holy Mary, which – in doggerel rhymes – asks merciful God for succour and compassion with the writer's lot. The self-pity which gave rise to that quasi-poetic fragment is conspicuous. For once, Pilsztynowa's sensibilities come to the fore forcefully and explicitly, and the "hic mulier" façade, constructed and reflected in an overwhelmingly consistent manner throughout the text is lifted.

³⁷ R. S. Pilsztynowa, op. cit., pp. 55, 56, 60, 62, 63, 74, 75, 79, 85, 86, 96, 157, 172, 175, 178, 180, 193, 216, 222, 223, et al.