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Shades of Emancipation: The Missed Opportunities and Difficult Choices of Julia Dickstein-Wieleżyńska

Abstract

The text discusses the emancipatory aspect of Julia Dickstein-Wieleżyńska's (1881–1943) activities, taking into account its sources and selected manifestations. It also draws attention to family relations and the alienation experienced by Dickstein-Wieleżyńska as a Jew and a woman, which, on the one hand, strengthened her emancipatory convictions and, on the other, hindered her from realising them.

Keywords: Julia Dickstein-Wieleżyńska, emancipation, feminism, Lusatian Serbs, Dickstein's family.

The struggle for the right to self-determination and making decisions about one's identity, even with the apparent acceptance of one's environment, is fraught with the risk of rejection and marginalisation. Such conclusions arise in the case of Julia Dickstein-Wieleżyńska, a cultural activist, poet, literary critic (Wilczak, 2024a) and translator (Kłos & Wilczak, 2021), an emancipated Jewish woman, who frequently encountered resistance due to prejudice, cultural and national stereotypes, and disregard from the social

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circles she sought to fit into. Acting for the emancipation of women, she often made difficult and problematic choices for herself.

A Lonely Grave

In a letter to literary critic, editor and columnist Jerzy Eugeniusz Płomieński (1893–1969) dated 26 October 1959, music teacher Halina Czaykowska (1883–1980) wrote that on the grave of their common friend, Julia Dickstein-Wieleżyńska, she had found only "some burnt grass. Apparently, this is how they destroy weeds on abandoned graves. It is beyond sad that a person with such outstanding contributions to Polish culture as Jula should be forgotten so quickly" (Czaykowska to Płomieński, 1959, p. 268).[1]

The oblivion into which Dickstein-Wieleżyńska fell, she who was deemed "the leading intellectual of her generation" by Płomieński (1956, p. 263), and "the last 'enthusiast'", "unable to live a common life, or approach life coldly, with calculation" by Juliusz Kleiner (1946, p. 409),[2] is a blank space on the map of literary and cultural history that demands to be filled. Someone who initiated numerous professional and cultural connections in the interwar period, who actively led the activities of organisational committees and institutions of culture and science, and whose address (Marszałkowska 117/9) and telephone number (6-19-59) were reportedly known throughout Warsaw, deserves to be commemorated, even though her tenement no longer exists and the manuscripts entrusted to her friend and carer during the war, writer and columnist Aurelia Wyleżyńska (1881–1944), were irretrievably lost in the bombing of Warsaw.

Family Background and Jewish Roots

Undoubtedly, her family background greatly affected her life choices. She inherited her passion for education and her organisational talent from her parents, Samuel and Paulina née Natanson. The legend of her uncle, Szymon Dickstein, additionally sparked her socialist interests.

She was born on 17 November 1881 in Warsaw (Birth Certificate No. I-2/509/1925). Her father, Samuel Dickstein, was born to Rafał Dickstein and Małgorzata née Waldenberg, real school teachers. He grew up against the backdrop of anti-tsarist street demonstrations, repressions imposed by the

[1] The List of Archival Sources can be found on pages 19–20.

[2] The doctoral dissertation by Mariola Wilczak, *Julia Dickstein-Wieleżyńska (1881–1943). Monografia dokumentacyjna* (Wilczak, 2024b), defended in 2024 under the supervision of Prof. Ewa Głębicka, seeks to investigate the reasons behind this.

partitioning powers, vivid memories of the January Uprising of 1863–1864 and the national mourning following its collapse. His participation in numerous scientific, cultural and educational initiatives reflects his association with the "Warsaw Main School Generation" and his loyalty to their intangible "idea of collective endeavours" (Paczoska, 2014, p. 527), as evidenced by his voluminous lifelong correspondence with other graduates of this school.

He instilled his beliefs in his daughter Julia, who not only assisted him in his work, but also initiated the creation of cultural and scientific institutions as well as social actions.

Thanks to Samuel Dickstein's pedagogical and scientific activity, his children spent their childhood and early youth immersed in an environment of intellectuals and individuals who were creative and outstanding in their fields. From a letter written by Marian Massonius, an outstanding pedagogue and representative of scientific philosophy in Warsaw, editor of *Przegląd Filozoficzny*, the first professional philosophical journal in Poland, we learn that by 1905 Dickstein's house hosted the Flying University [clandestine educational movement], which also educated the professor's daughter Julia (Massonius to Dickstein, 1924). By making their home a meeting place for extraordinary individuals, educators, scientists and writers, Samuel Dickstein and his wife Paulina created an atmosphere of high aspirations and intellectual demands, which had an impact on the further development and education of their children.

Julia Dickstein inherited her father's oratorical talent, making herself known as an excellent speaker at meetings both for the intelligentsia and for workers. She spoke at anniversary celebrations, including those for writers Narcyza Żmichowska and Eliza Orzeszkowa. In the monograph *W walce o równe prawa. Nasze bojownice* [Fighting for Equal Rights: Our Female Combatants], Cecylia Walewska characterised young Julia Dickstein as speaking "with the gift of gab and perfect enunciation, brilliantly and not superficially, logically building her assumptions and presenting her opinion piece in a refined manner" (Walewska, 1930, p. 87).

Julia benefited from her father's support and contacts with the academic world, including in her attempts to form the Leonardo da Vinci Polish-Italian Circle (Circolo Italo-Polacco "Leonardo da Vinci") in Warsaw (Porębowicz to Dickstein, 1920). This trailblazer of her "institution-building" activity was established in February 1920, actively working for Polish-Italian cooperation and modelled on the Frédéric Chopin Polish-Italian Circle (Circolo Italo-Polacco "Federico Chopin") founded in Rome in 1912 by Italian poet, writer, philologist and orientalist Angelo De Gubernatis (1840–1913).

However, the relationship between Samuel Dickstein and his daughter should be seen as complex and even difficult. In a letter to her friend and mentor, religious scholar Raffaele Pettazzoni (1883–1959), Julia Dickstein shared the suffering caused by her family's reaction to her intention to marry Colonel Aleksander Wieleżyński (1874–1933): "With my father everything is ruined forever, as he says, and I feel pity. Poor him, he's abandoned, unhappy, working beyond his strength, given his age, but what to do if he does not understand me, has never understood me and I have always taken his opinion of me as an insult" (Dickstein to Pettazzoni, 1926, p. 181).[3]

In her family's opinion, Colonel Wieleżyński was not a suitable match for a Dickstein. Paulina Dickstein in particular was convinced that, as Jerzy Eugeniusz Płomieński wrote: "Julia is ruining her career" and "this madness must be prevented" (Płomieński, 1956, p. 280). However, her daughter was happy, hoping to set up her own home and feeling that she had "reached the end line of complete self-sufficiency" (Płomieński, 1956, pp. 280, 284). In a letter to Pettazzoni dated near the end of January 1927, she requested that a text about to be published be signed "with her new name (Wieleżyńska), with the old one placed below in parentheses", thus acknowledging her need to begin a new stage in life. However, her escape into marriage turned out to be unfortunate. After failing to fulfil the hopes they had placed in each other, the spouses separated after less than a year.

Despite their difficult relationship, Dickstein-Wieleżyńska had taken care of her sick, widowed father since 1929. As of December 1936, he was no longer able to give lectures and required constant medical care due to myocardial weakness, and eventually officially retired in March 1938. His well-being was further harmed by the antisemitic attacks to which he fell victim while conducting his university lectures ([Information about antisemitic incidents], 1937, p. 3; *Robotnik*).[4] A few months later, in the autumn of 1939, he died of pneumonia.

Julia Dickstein was also raised with the living memory of Szymon Dickstein, a Marxist activist and member of the First Proletariat, an exceptionally gifted man who started studying natural sciences at the Imperial University of Warsaw as an auditing student because he had not yet reached the admission age required by the university authorities. Upon graduating, he enrolled at the Faculty of Medicine of the University of Kraków. However, he was forced

[3] All translations from Italian are by Dr. Anita Kłos.

[4] The journal also published an open letter from Halina Krahelska to Prof. Samuel Dickstein, describing these events as "an invasion of barbarism" and "a vigorous infiltration of Nazi influences into Poland".

to leave, threatened with arrest by the tsarist gendarmerie due to his socialist activity, and emigrated to Geneva.

The most famous works by Szymon Dickstein include a pamphlet from 1881, *Kto z czego żyje?* [Who Lives Off What] published under the pseudonym Jan Młot. In it, he popularised the main content laid out in Karl Marx's *Capital*, of which he was one of the translators in 1881. The brochure was repeatedly republished in Poland and translated into many languages, including Russian, German, Ukrainian, Japanese, Belarusian, Bulgarian and Armenian, as well as into Yiddish by Mordche ben Saul as *Fun wos ejner łebt* (London 1887). For Dickstein, translation was an important and responsible task aimed at making the most important works accessible, and he planned to translate the works of Charles Darwin and Herbert Spencer (Krzywicki, 1930, p. 96). Political exile and financial problems led Szymon Dickstein to take his own life at the age of 26.

His niece Julia was just under three years old at the time, but her revolutionary uncle's example must have played an important role in her life, since she spoke of him to Pettazzoni, her emotional and intellectual confidant, and confessed that she had also been part of the socialist movement during the 1905 revolution (Gandini, 1994, p. 253). This brought on her the distrust of government circles, who described her as "Trotsky in a skirt" ("*un Trocki in gonna*") (Dicksteinówna to Pettazzoni, 1925, p. 159). The 1905 revolution, however, had a different significance for her: it was an emancipatory, national and civic process. If we are to believe Walewska, who was a friend of the Dickstein family, during the 1905 revolution Julia Dickstein primarily assisted women at risk of or involved in prostitution, and worked in several prisons, including the so-called "Serbia", a Russian-built prison for women in Warsaw (Walewska, 1927, p. 3). Like her uncle, she refused to accept the surrounding reality, engaging in social affairs and journalistic activities.

The journey of Samuel Dickstein and Paulina Emilia née Natanson, whom he married in 1880, was different. Mrs Dickstein was a well-educated woman. A gifted student of Ignacy Paderewski (Płomieński, 1956, p. 268), she gave private concerts in her own music quartet (Kroszczor, 1979, p. 17). She was fluent in several foreign languages, including Italian. She translated, among others, a two-volume peasant-themed novel by Italian Nobel laureate Grazia Deledda: *La via del Male* (Polish title: *Po grzesznej drodze*),[5] published posthumously in 1928, as well as *La Biondina* (Polish title: *Blondynka*) by Marco Praga and *Suor Giovanna della Croce* (Polish title: *Siostra Joanna od Krzyża*)

[5] This work was incorrectly attributed to Julia Dickstein-Wieleżyńska by Walerian Preisner (1949, p. 218).

by Matilde Serao (1902). She worked in a women's sewing room under the wings of Polish feminists and social activists, founders of the Polish Women's Equality Union: Paulina Kuczalska-Reinschmit (1859–1921) and Józefa Bojanowska (1873–1945), for many years supervising the fifth sewing room. "It is obvious that what was smuggled under the guise of learning to cut and sew, was the Polish primer, banned under threat of imprisonment and deportation" (C. W., 1928, p. 16).

Paulina Dickstein organised a secret lending library for poor young people at her home. She also ran an artistic and literary salon there, with guests including Jan and Irena Karłowicz, Maria Konopnicka, Eliza Orzeszkowa, Cecylia Walewska, Henryk Sienkiewicz, Ignacy Paderewski, Antoni Sygietyński, Aleksander Świętochowski, Prof. Szymon Askenazy, Tadeusz Korzon, and a member of the Paris *Polonia* [expatriate Polish community], Władysław Mickiewicz (Klemba, 2018, pp. 153–165; Kroszczor, 1979, p. 16).

Paulina Dickstein's strength of character and self-confidence were also manifested in family life. Memories of her reveal an image of a domineering and overbearing person who left a lasting mark on the lives of her children, including Alfred, two years Julia's junior (Kroszczor, 1979, p. 17; Płomieński, 1956, p. 266) and a talented architect, co-founder of the monthly *Architektura i Budownictwo* [Architecture and Construction].[6]

During the terms of 1934–35 and 1935–36, Alfred Dickstein sat on the board of the Warsaw branch of the Association of Polish Architects (SARP) established in July 1934. It may be inferred that his absence from the SARP board in later years resulted from an Aryan clause adopted by the association, which excluded persons of Jewish descent from membership ("Paragraf aryjski w S.A.R.P.", 1938, 1939).

In their salon, the Dicksteins "almost completely ousted the Jewish Warsaw bourgeoisie from their list of carefully selected guests" (Płomieński, 1956, p. 267). According to Czaykowska's account sent to Płomieński, who was working on an article about Dickstein-Wieleżyńska, "only once did [she] meet at the Dicksteins' salon an old, greyish, tall gentleman of Semitic features, who turned out to be a well-known philanthropist and distinguished socialist, [namely] Warsaw industrialist Mathias Bersohn" (Płomieński, 1956, p. 267), a banker by profession, an art historian and collector by passion. Bersohn was also the brother of Ludwika Berson, who had married Ludwik Natanson, Paulina Dickstein's uncle, in 1848. Therefore, both his social position and family ties explain his presence in Paulina Dickstein's salon.

[6] He is not mentioned as an editorial board member in the magazine's issues in 1927, but his name is listed among the architects who founded the magazine.

However, contrary to what the cited facts might suggest, Mrs Dickstein did not hide her Jewish roots. Among other things, she was a board member of one of the largest aid organisations: the Jewish Association for the Protection of Women established in 1904 (Sikorska-Kowalska, 2008, pp. 448–449), which, supported by assimilationist circles, helped women at risk of human trafficking and prostitutes of Jewish descent. Notably, this work was part of innovative activities that did not gain widespread recognition. However, the moral imperative was to help people who had failed in life – regardless of their nationality.

Samuel Dickstein also participated actively in the life of the Warsaw Jewish Community. From his election to its board in 1885, he chaired the School and Statistical departments, the Section of Shelters and Nurseries, and the Society for the Protection of Jewish Children, among others. In recognition of Samuel Dickstein's contribution to the Jewish community, the Jewish Community Board organised a celebration of the 25th anniversary of his work.

Did Dickstein-Wieleżyńska distance herself from her Jewish origin? The answer is ambiguous. She considered herself non-confessional,[7] and was baptised in 1926 only because of her marriage to Colonel Aleksander Wieleżyński.[8] However, she did not agree to a church wedding: on 6 February 1926, a civil wedding took place in Poznań. Her identity is worth perceiving through the idea of integrationism (Goldszmit & Goldszmit, 2017; Mendelsohn, 1993)[9], or, more precisely, through one of its currents, in which

> the prevailing tendency was to develop a secular Jewish identity based on knowledge of history and appreciation of the native philosophical tradition. This was conducive to the overlapping of various worldviews. … Knowing the cultural achievements of one's own community was considered helpful in a creative approach to cultural adaptation from the outside. (Goldszmit & Goldszmit, 2017, p. 11)

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[7] As declared in the register of students – auditors at the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Berlin, in the terms: 1907/1908, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin – Archiv, SS 1906, Gasthörerin SS 1906, No. 767.

[8] Birth certificate of Julia Dickstein, No. I-2/509/2025, drawn up in 1925 in the Roman Catholic Parish of St. Barbara in Warsaw due to the baptism witnessed by Aleksander Wieleżyński, Archive of the Civil Registry Office.

[9] The term "integrationism", introduced by Ezra Mendelsohn (*On Modern Jewish Politics*; Mendelsohn, 1993), refers to the attitude of striving to preserve the identity and distinctiveness of Jews as Poles of the Mosaic faith. See also e.g. A. Jagodzińska (2008, 2010, pp. 15–31); P. Jasnowski (2016, pp. 447–490); Z. Kołodziejska (2014); S. Ury (2000, pp. 327–342).

Such a view eliminates the contradictions not only between awareness of Jewish roots and Polish identity, but also between religion and nationality.

It should be mentioned that in 1910 Julia Dickstein cooperated with the weekly *Izraelita* ((J. D.), 1908; Kołodziejska, 2014, pp. 54, 95) published by integrationists, with which her father also collaborated (Jagodzińska & Wodziński, 2015, p. 34). Julia Dickstein's name is listed among the editorial board members from 1910, but, although she is known to have signed herself as J.D., it is difficult to clearly identify her texts in this journal, apart from "Kwiatek Chaimka" [Chaimek's Flower] (J. D., 1910, pp. 6–7). It is possible that she was the author of some of the anonymous translations published in *Izraelita*. However, her collaboration with this journal was short-lived. Its policy was likely insufficient for Dickstein, whose intellect did not align with its confines.

Dickstein-Wieleżyńska repeatedly experienced manifestations of antisemitism, which she reported on an ongoing basis in her letters to Pettazzoni. In a letter dated 28 March 1924, she stated sadly that, in Poland, "if anything is considered Jewish, it is lost and buried" (Dicksteinówna to Pettazzoni, 1924, p. 147). She made this remark in the context of rumours disseminated by National Democracy politicians about the "Jewishness" of the Leonardo da Vinci Polish-Italian Circle.

At least twice, Dickstein was the object of an aggressive and antisemitic attack by Adolf Nowaczyński, who wrote the article "Juliusz About Julia" in *Liberum Veto* magazine in 1919 (Wyleżyńska, 2022, vol. 2, p. 251), deprecating her historical and literary work and mocking her friendship with literary critic and historian Juliusz Kleiner (1886–1957), who was enthusiastic about her writing, including the volumes *Prometeusz-Paraklet. Dwutorowość dziejów ducha* [Prometheus-Paraclete: Double History of the Spirit] (Dickstein, 1913) and *Idee i twórcy* [Ideas and Creators] (1918; see Kleiner, 1919a, 1919b). Nowaczyński also stigmatised her single marital status and Jewish descent (Nowaczyński, 1919).

In May 1923, when Julia Dickstein was trying to take over the chair of Polish literature and language at the Sapienza University in Rome, in the article "Judeotyma" published in the periodical *Myśl Narodowa*, Nowaczyński objected to her candidacy, writing that "there seem to be half-hearted attempts and manoeuvres to send to Rome, as the chair for the lectorate of Polish literature, a brilliant offspring from the Dickstein family, one of the hitherto not 'abducted Sabine women', whose maidenhood blooms with the flower of poetry;[10] an unstoppable verse-spinner, Giulietta Dickstein" (Nowaczyński,

[10] This refers to the poetic works of Dickstein-Wieleżyńska, who was the author of the 1919 volume of poetry *Na duszy mej palecie*.

1923). At the same time, he dubbed Dickstein a "kosher Deotyma"[11], and called the periodical *Głos Inteligencji*, where she published, "a rag of printed tissue paper".

The chair at the Italian university was eventually entrusted to Roman Pollak (1889–1972), a literary historian associated with the University of Poznań.

During World War II, the dilemma of "double betrayal" – the renunciation of unassimilated fellow Jews – was alien to Julia, perhaps because the Dickstein family was not to experience the trauma of Jewish families who survived the hell of war. However, it can be argued with substantial probability that the Dicksteins' belief in the moral value of social, scientific and patriotic activity as a service and duty allowed them to adopt a belief system that abolished this division.

These beliefs accompanied Julia throughout her education, from the private school of Zuzanna Morawska, through the Flying University and philosophical studies in Berlin and Rome, to a doctoral degree obtained in 1929 at the Jan Kazimierz University in Lviv [then: Lwów in Poland] under the aforementioned Juliusz Kleiner, the supervisor of her dissertation: *Konopnicka. Dzieje natchnień i myśli* [Konopnicka: The History of Inspirations and Thoughts]. These studies further developed her critical, independent, free-thinking approach to all categorisations and restrictions imposed on the individual: social, religious, cultural and moral.

Loyalty to these principles manifested itself in all fields of Dickstein-Wieleżyńska's activity, including her efforts for the equality of women, for oppressed nations and national minorities, including Lusatian Serbs. It affected her popularising and translation work as well as her comparative research (Kłos & Wilczak, 2021). For the sake of brevity, this discussion will be limited to activities for the emancipation of women (Wilczak, 2014, 2018) and the Lusatian Serbs (Wilczak, 2015).

Fighting for the "New Woman" and "New Man"

Dickstein-Wieleżyńska was an emancipated woman who "went through all the feminist breakthroughs" (Walewska, 1930, p. 88). First, at the Polish Women's Equality Union, she taught a course in the history of philosophy and literature. During the 1905 revolution, she helped women at risk of or involved in prostitution, and by 1910 she had created and run the first coeducational craft school for children in Warsaw and one of the first Sunday commu-

[11] Deotyma (Jadwiga Łuszczewska) was a Polish Romantic poet, novelist and salonniére.

nity schools for female employees in Warsaw (Walewska, 1930, pp. 91–92). She was also involved in the activities of the Patronat Prisoners' Aid Society and its Pawiak Prison Library (Ossibach-Budzyński, 2016, p. 193). She also worked for the so-called "Serbia" – a women's prison adjacent to the Pawiak prison.

At one of the meetings of the social and ethical section of the Polish Women's Equality Union, she presented a paper on the impact of the women's movement on the democratisation of society. In her lecture titled *Wyzwalająca się kobieta współczesna* [Self-Liberating Modern Woman], she said that "the current that demands freedom for women flows swiftly and nothing can stop it. Next to the white woman, Indian, Chinese and Turkish women have reached out for their legitimate rights. Soon, black women and daughters of the far north will follow. These women, claiming their rights, make their demands in the name of justice and for the good of all humanity" ("Odczyty i wykłady: Tragedia kobiety", 1909, p. 1).

Around 1910, together with Walewska and a group of activists, Julia Dickstein left the Polish Women's Equality Union and joined the Women's Labour Commission of the Polish Culture Society, founded in 1906 and headed by Aleksander Świętochowski. She took part in his lecture campaigns. She was a secretary in a survey titled *What was the influence of Orzeszkowa on the generation of contemporary women?* After the dissolution of the Polish Culture Society and the liquidation of the Commission for Women, she joined the Society for Women's Vocational Education, and with the outbreak of World War I – the Polish Women's League of Emergency Service, founded in 1913, which strongly emphasised its patriotic demands and combined the women's issue with the issue of Poland regaining its independence. In September 1917, she participated in the Polish Women's Congress for Political Equality in Warsaw (Dickstein, 1918).

As a columnist, Dickstein made her debut in 1906 in *Nowa Gazeta*, demanding that the declining *Nowe Słowo* be replaced with a journal that would support women's emancipation aspirations (Dickstein, 1906b). In 1906, in the periodical *Odrodzenie*, she countered an article by Aleksander Szczepański (1906) entitled "Młodzież a kwestia kobieca" [Young People and the Women's Issue], which saw a solution to the female question mainly in the moral repair of the institution of the family, dismissing its political and economic aspects (Dickstein, 1906c). She clearly emphasised that a woman should go beyond the socially sanctioned roles of a mother and wife, and become an equal partner of men, also in terms of the right to make decisions about her future. In her treatise published in *Nowa Gazeta* in 1911, "Z ewolucji duszy kobiecej"

[From the Evolution of the Female Soul], she pointed out that "without a complete recalculation of values in the world of eroticism, there is definitely no tomorrow for a woman". Love, perceived as "basically a military duty of female citizens", should be and becomes "the free right of every human individual, who can weave it into their life without supervision, in such colour, quality and size as they desire … As individuality is and will remain the cornerstone of all future human relations" (Dickstein, 1911a, 1911b).

Her views are part of the discussion on the concept of the "New Woman", referring to the concept described in 1894 by Sarah Grand in the article "The New Aspect of the Woman Question".[12] In her article, Grand emphasised the importance of the "New Woman" as opposing male domination, and highlighted the marginalisation of women that limited their activity to the repertoire of roles performed in the family: wife, mother, daughter. She also saw it as an opportunity for the future change of men, raised by stronger and wiser women, free both from a patronising attitude towards women and from delight and submission which could lead them to moral, emotional and financial ruin (Grand, 1894, pp. 270–296).[13]

Dickstein-Wieleżyńska's views on motherhood and family, similar to those presented above, are also evident in a piece from 1933, "Rodzina na przełomie" [The Family at a Turning Point] (Dickstein-Wieleżyńska, 1933) from her 1933–1934 collaboration with *Wolnomysliciel Polski*, a journal published in 1928–1935 by the Polish Association of Free Thought that criticised the patriarchal model of the family and granted women the right to self-determination, including divorce (Kotwica, 1934; Wawrzeniecki, 1933).

Dickstein's commitment to emancipation was supported, among others, by Walewska, to whom Dickstein dedicated the study "Idea wyzwolenia kobiety na szczytach polskiego natchnienia" [The Idea of Women's Liberation at the Peak of Polish Inspiration], published in her collection of works *Prometeusz-Paraklet* (Dickstein, 1913). Both women were partial to the emancipatory project of pre-war suffragettes, described by Dickstein-Wieleżyńska as

[12] The question of the "New Woman" is discussed by, among others, A. Górnicka-Boratyńska (2001, pp. 146–192); E. Kraskowska (2008); A. Godzińska (2015, pp. 9–19); I. Iwasiów, A. Krukowska and A. Zawiszewska (Iwasiów et al., 2017); M. Wiatrzyk-Iwaniec (2013).

[13] The discussion on the "New Woman" project was transferred to Poland by Maria Turzima, Cecylia Walewska, Wincenty Kosiakiewicz, Teodor Jeske-Choiński and Ludwika Jahołkowska-Koszutska, among others, but already in 1901 *Bluszcz* reported the phenomenon of the "New Woman" in British literature and culture. The term "New Woman" was often replaced with synonyms: "modern woman", "contemporary woman", "self-liberating woman", or – as in Dickstein-Wieleżyńska's works – the "approaching woman".

"We, pre-war feminists", when she characterised their activities: "We rebelled against the mutilation of individuality within domestic confines, against severing abilities from the sources of knowledge, and against hindering initiatives in community service and self-reliance" (Dickstein-Wieleżyńska, 1932c).

The emancipatory ideas of women at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries were often transmitted through translations of their works into Polish (Kłos & Wilczak, 2021). This is a particularly important issue, given that her translations are a significant and best-remembered part of Dickstein-Wieleżyńska's legacy, together with the transnational nature of her activity, allowing her to create a network of international, institutionalised, and also informal relations.[14] There were times, however, when she regretted her translation decisions, like when her financial situation and desire for financial independence prompted her to translate Italian texts. In one of her letters to Płomieński from 1927, she could not forgive herself for taking on the translation, commissioned by *Bluszcz* magazine, of Gina Ferrero-Lombroso's (1872–1944) book *L'anima della donna* (*The Soul of Woman*), which she considered harmful. She felt compelled to accept it due to "a terrible health condition which begged for Zakopane, and my mother's pressure to leave … I will see Zakopane, but at the expense of my dignity!" (Płomieński, 1956, p. 289; Wilczak, 2024c, p. 200). The only possible solution seemed to be to remain anonymous, and the unsigned translation was published in *Bluszcz* in 1928 (Ferrero-Lombroso, 1928).

In her work, Lombroso criticised contemporary feminism, among other things for its tendency to masculinise women and assign them social roles contrary to their nature, which she perceived as being determined by a biological maternal instinct and an "altruistic instinct" (*alterocentrismo*) that guides a woman's self-realisation through fulfilling the ambitions and needs of those around her. For this reason, she envisioned a specific repertoire of roles and professions for a woman, focused on direct interaction with others, limited to charity work and such fields as medicine, agriculture, science and literature. Meanwhile, from the outset of her engagement in the women's emancipation movement, Dickstein-Wieleżyńska clearly emphasised women's right to free choice, including liberation from social expectations and assigned roles.

A summary of Dickstein-Wieleżyńska's beliefs concerning the role of women in the modern world and in shaping the future is her work "Die Frau im heutigen Polen" (Dickstein-Wieleżyńska, 1929), published in 1929 in the

[14] The transnational network of contacts between activists and the transfer of programme content of the women's movement into national discourse spaces is described by A. Szudarek (2020, pp. 455–476), among others.

Slavic journal *Slavische Rundschau* established in the same year in Prague, containing a synthesis of the history of the Polish emancipation movement up to modern times, but, above all, Dickstein-Wieleżyńska's answer to a 1932 questionnaire called *Kobieta, która nadchodzi* [The Woman Who Is Approaching] conducted by *Kurier Poranny*, where she openly described herself as a pre-war "old-school feminist" (Dickstein-Wieleżyńska, 1932c, p. 3). To such a feminist, "the existence of the new woman is not evidenced by the nameless multitudes who often conveniently shield themselves with the slogans of the day to feed their life's desires and hungers, but by activists focused on working within the broadest, universal scope", "strong women who struggled with theoretical truths before the war, and who today are able, due to changed conditions, to hold responsible roles in the country, even in Europe". Thus, according to Dickstein-Wieleżyńska, the concept of the "new woman" had already been established at the end of the 19th century and was not a coincidence but an "ironclad historical necessity" (Dickstein-Wieleżyńska, 1932c, p. 3).

In her treatise "Ewolucja kwestii kobiecej" [Evolution of the Women's Issue], Dickstein devoted a lot of space to the development of feminism, whose stark first appearances gave way to in-depth social analyses (Dickstein, 1906a, p. 3). Another sign of the times was the transformation of the attitude towards men: the initial disavowal of them, the pursuit of creating a separate female world, gave way, according to Dickstein, to the pursuit of partnership. She wrote about bridging the gap between men and women. A careful reader of Herbert Spencer's works, she shared his faith in the progress of humanity, in reaching a stage when the answer to the more perfect "type of man" would be the currently developing type of the "woman of the future". Her belief in the possibility of creating the "new man" and the "new woman" places Dickstein-Wieleżyńska among the thinkers who believed in an inherent human capacity for determining one's own development and path. Individuality, which Dickstein-Wieleżyńska understood as an autonomous value, requires society to respect the individual's right to freedom and self-fulfilment, while the individual also contributes to the community by meeting its needs and offering creative input.

Spokesperson for Oppressed Nations

In 1924, Dickstein published an article in the periodical *Kultura Słowiańska*: "Serbowie łużyccy w prasie włoskiej" [Lusatian Serbs in the Italian Press], in which she discussed a piece by literary scholar and Russianist Wolf Giusti (1901–1980), "I resti di un'antica civilta slava: I serbi di Lusatia", printed in the May 1921 issue of *L'Europe Orientale*.

Summarising the history of the struggles between the "conquering Germans and the conquered Lusatians" presented by Giusti, Dickstein regretfully stated that World War I, which had instilled hope for national freedom in so many, had not brought this freedom to the Lusatians. She placed the responsibility for this on the signatories of the Treaty of Versailles – at the peace conference, the Lusatian representation, although endorsed by the Czech delegation, was not supported by some of the others, including the Polish representatives. "The only … result was new Prussian repressions and the imprisonment of a new delegate (Ernest Bart)" (Dickstein-Wieleżyńska, 1924, p. 16). Dickstein appreciated the attitude of Giusti, who did not treat the Lusatians as a "museum curiosity" and Lusatia as "a forest and muddy nook whose population pushed for speaking a strange dialect and dressing in graceful national costumes to show themselves off to foreigners, who drive there from Berlin every single day". In her opinion, societies that had experienced captivity and struggle should stand in solidarity with this nation.

She wrote in a similar tone in 1938 in *Dziennik Ludowy*, in a piece titled "W kraju niewoli" [In a Country in Bondage], emphasising the inequality of the struggle and the unwarranted suffering of a nation with a long history and tradition (Dickstein-Wieleżyńska, 1938b, p. 5). The poems of renowned Serbian writer and poet Jakub Bart-Ćišinski (1856–1909), *Krwawe wspomnienia* [Bloody Memories] and *Słowianom*[15] [To the Slavs] in her Polish translation, printed alongside the article, served as an artistic accompaniment to the issue.

Dickstein-Wieleżyńska's texts, including the article "Najnieszczęśliwszy naród na ziemi – Łużyczanie" [The Unhappiest Nation on Earth: Lusatians] (Dickstein-Wieleżyńska, 1938a) and the piece "Poezja serbołużycka" [Lusatian Serbian Poetry] (Dickstein-Wieleżyńska, 1936b), discussing works by poets including Jan Arnošt Smolerj (1816–1884), Michał Hórnik (1833–1894), Handrij Zejler (1804–1872), Bart–Ćišinski, and Józef Nowak (1895–1978), are a guide to the history of Lusatian literature and culture, and a passionate appeal to the European conscience.

As an expression of her commitment to the cause of the Lusatian Serbs, Dickstein-Wieleżyńska participated in the creation of the Lusatian Nation Friends' Society in January 1923, of which she became vice-president. It aimed to work for the cultural rapprochement of Poles and Lusatians, spreading knowledge about the Lusatian nation among Polish society and providing moral and material assistance to Lusatians residing in Poland. This was to be

[15] Two poems by renowned Serbian writer and poet Jakub Bart-Ćišinski (1856–1909), whose titles in English translate as *Bloody Memories* and *To the Slavs*, are cited in Polish translation by Julia Dickstein-Wieleżyńska.

achieved by publishing, acquiring collections, organising artistic events, lectures, discussions and excursions, and collaborating with organisations sharing similar ideas.

Dickstein-Wieleżyńska's activity in this society is all the more noteworthy because after World War I, interest in the fate of the Lusatian Serbs in Poland was limited to narrow academic circles, mainly the linguistic and ethnographic communities (Gajewski, 2000, p. 146; Jaroszewicz-Kleindienst, 1970, p. 149). At the same time, however, the Poles and the Czechs (Siatkowska, 2005) were the most invested in the problems of the Lusatians among the European nations: even before 1914, the Slavic Club was established in Kraków, transformed into the Slavic Society after the outbreak of the war (Giza, 1998, pp. 151–158; Siatkowska, 2000, pp. 471–479).

During the heightened persecution of the Lusatian Serbs, in 1936 this society began publishing the monthly *Biuletyn Serbsko-Łużycki*. It featured translations from Czech and German as well as Polish texts on the Lusatians. Dickstein-Wieleżyńska translated most of the Serbian literary texts published there, which were an artistic expression of the moods and hopes of the Lusatians, and at the same time an accompaniment to the explicit appeal to the Polish conscience. Her first translation from Serbo-Lusatian was published in 1934, in issue 7 of *Kamena*: "Słowianom" [To the Slavs] by Bart-Ćišinski. Poems by Bart-Ćišinski, Zejler, Nowak, Mato Kósyk (1853–1940), Jan Radyserb-Wjela (1882–1907), Jan Lajnert (1892–1974), Jan Skala and Mina Witkojc (1893–1970) translated by Wieleżyńska were also published in periodicals: *Bluszcz*, *Dziennik Ludowy*, *Kamena*, *Kultura Słowiańska*, *Przegląd Humanistyczny*, *Skawa*, and *Ruch Słowiański*.

In a letter dated 20 February 1937 to Tadeusz Władysław Wisłocki, the editor of *Ruch Słowiański*, Dickstein-Wieleżyńska wrote about the *Lusatian Poetry Anthology* being prepared for publication by the Lusatian Nation Friends' Society. She also intended to publish a collection of poems by Polish authors – including Adam Asnyk, Maria Konopnicka, Juliusz Słowacki, Kornel Ujejski – translated into Lusatian, "to lift the spirit of the Lusatians", as she wrote in a letter to Wisłocki, whom she asked for help in finding translators (Dickstein-Wieleżyńska to Wisłocki, p. 172). At the request of *Ruch Słowiański*, she also prepared an extensive article dedicated to Lusatian issues. She asked the editor of this periodical to publish a one-day paper in honour of Adolf Černy (1864–1952), whom she greatly appreciated for his achievements for the Lusatians, which she expressed in articles published in 1939 in *Bluszcz* and *Wiadomości Literackie* (Dickstein-Wieleżyńska, 1939). Wisłocki agreed to this project.

Before his death in 1933, Professor Alfons Parczewski (1849–1933), a historian and activist for the Lusatian cause, entrusted Dickstein-Wieleżyńska with the care of the "poor, dying nation" of the Lusatian Serbs (Sieczkowski, 1992, p. 39). In her memoir piece about Parczewski, printed in *Ruch Słowiański*, Dickstein-Wieleżyńska recalls a touching meeting during which Parczewski told her: "Never, ever forget about Lusatia!". She treated these words as his last will: "It is an absolute and honourable duty to appeal to the convictions of Polish society as a whole" (Dickstein-Wieleżyńska, 1938c).

However, acting for the emancipation of the Lusatians did not prevent her from controversial involvement in the Polish branch of the European Cultural League, founded in 1922 in Vienna by Karl Anton Rohan, initially for rapprochement and understanding among artists, intellectuals and scholars from European countries after World War I. Since the German issue became its focal interest in 1925, and Germany joined in 1926, its founder did not hide his sympathy for fascist Italy. Nevertheless, in the spring of 1933, the Polish Cultural Union and the Polish Lusatian Nation Friends' Society sent him a joint invitation to a celebration in honour of Adolf Černy, held on 6 May 1933.

A year later, on 13 June 1934, Tadeusz Zieliński, president of the Polish Cultural Union, welcomed the German Nazi minister of propaganda, Joseph Goebbels, at the Warsaw airport.

It is unclear what led Dickstein-Wieleżyńska to remain in the position of secretary of the Polish section of the European Cultural League in 1933: she might have been motivated by friendliness and a sense of duty towards Professor Zieliński, who showed her kindness and supported her academic activity. In cases where transnational connections and networks of interpersonal contacts were the source of power abuse, and such was the case of the European Cultural League, Dickstein-Wieleżyńska firmly expressed her position, e.g. at the 10th International PEN Club Congress in Budapest in May 1932, the course of which she reported in the periodicals *Kobieta Współczesna* and *Kurier Poranny*. In her report, she unequivocally condemned a speech by Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, a representative of Italy, whose views she may have already been familiar with from his visit to Poland in March 1933 (Strożek, 2011). In *Kurier Poranny* she also made sure to briefly mention the difficult situation of the Hungarian nation, an echo of the Treaty of Trianon (Dickstein-Wieleżyńska, 1932b, p. 3). However, she was optimistic about the future, believing that "sharply divided nations … for a few days directed their thoughts towards possible common signposts. A *united literature of the world* begins to take shape from domestic literatures, from islands separated by seas of otherness" (Dickstein-Wieleżyńska, 1932a, p. 2). It is also possi-

ble that Dickstein-Wieleżyńska was guided by her loyalty to the president of the Polish Cultural Union, Zieliński, who – as we learn from her letters to Pettazzoni – in 1932 made efforts to secure her participation in the International Congress of Historians, which was not easy, given that the organisers included her detractors, such as medievalist and historian Marceli Handelsman (1882–1945), "a man who boasts around that thanks to him I am not part of the university" (Dickstein-Wieleżyńska to Pettazzoni, 1932, p. 221). Was Dickstein-Wieleżyńska's status as a freethinker collaborating with the Association of Free Thought and the journal *Wolnomyśliciel Polski*, while Handelsman was a convert, the reason for his hostility? Or was it discrimination based on gender or descent? One of the many examples cited by Dickstein was the Warsaw Scientific Society's actions in 1915 when they sought an excuse to exclude her translations of Giordano Bruno's philosophical works from their publishing plan. Ultimately, the works were withdrawn, officially because they were deemed unworthy of translation, and unofficially because the translator was a woman (Dicksteinówna to Pettazzoni, 1915, p. 80; Kłos & Wilczak, 2021).

Last Will of an Emancipated Woman

At the beginning of 1939, Dickstein-Wieleżyńska suffered from severe health issues (Płomieński, 1956, p. 290). In the summer of 1939, she managed to go on holiday to Milanówek. After the outbreak of the war, however, she hurriedly returned to her father and brother in Warsaw, where she spent the German occupation.

At the end of October 1939, she was hit by a German car. Her brother Alfred, who was with her at the time, died as a result of his injuries. Her husband's surname saved her from the ghetto (Leszczyński, 1995) until, in January 1941, as a result of a denunciation, she was arrested by the Gestapo, severely beaten and jailed in the prison in Daniłowiczowska Street for not wearing an armband with the Star of David.

Thanks to the intervention of friends, including Aurelia Wyleżyńska, she was released after about a year. It was clear that Dickstein-Wieleżyńska, now forced to hide, would need assistance and care. During her release from prison, possibly due to an oversight, she was only given a certificate stating that she had served her sentence "for not wearing an armband" (Wyleżyńska, 2022, vol. 1, p. 451). However, she changed her place of stay several times. She managed to obtain false documents in the name of Julia Mianowska. In August 1943, Wyleżyńska transported Julia to the Hospital of the Holy Spirit

in Ujazdów. Describing that day, she mentioned: "I took manuscripts, translations, poetry, often scribbled on the back of coloured painkiller wrappers" (Wyleżyńska, 2022, vol. 2, p. 258).

In her will dictated to Wyleżyńska, Julia expressed her wish to establish a scholarship in the name of Professor Samuel Dickstein and his wife for students of the Faculty of Mathematics and Humanities regardless of their gender and descent. She also wanted to financially support the scientific activity of the Association of Freethinkers. She expressed the desire for the publication of two more volumes of her *Idee i twórcy* [Ideas and Authors] series, an elaboration of the works of Ignacy Krasicki (Dickstein-Wieleżyńska, 1936a)[16] – an extended version of her work included in the commemorative book of the Ignacy Krasicki Scientific Meeting, and her anthology of translations from Italian and Lusatian literature (Wyleżyńska, 2022, vol. 2, pp. 103–104).

She died on 20 September 1943 under the assumed name of Julia Mianowska in the Infectious Disease Hospital in Grochowska Street in Warsaw (Death Certificate No. VI-171/534/1943).

It is impossible to ignore a certain analogy, a repetitiveness of fate: like her uncle Szymon Dickstein, she was "still at odds with herself" (Krzywicki, 1930, p. 90), torn between her own ambition and self-realisation and sacrifice for others, and, like him, she found partial fulfilment in translation and popularisation activities. At the same time, she faced discrimination due to her Jewish descent and her gender. Exposed to having her competence undermined due to gender and ethnicity, she felt alienated on various levels: as a daughter, as a Jew, as an "old-school feminist". Personal, professional and health obstacles contributed to her involuntary gradual surrender. In the end, her fate was sealed by the war and witnessed by Wyleżyńska, who wrote in her diary:

> I am haunted by the scene of Julia leaving her parental home where they had lived for forty? fifty? years. They would not leave it voluntarily, it would be taken by force. … I can picture this invisible scene, it unfolds cruelly before my eyes. This house, so different from the old one, the cradle of so many initiatives, the nest of so many associations, those from the heroic pre-World War era and the subsequent lawful ones, which earned her official accolades and tributes. (Wyleżyńska, 2022, vol. 1, p. 213)

[16] Dickstein-Wieleżyńska was the author of an undelivered paper, "Krasicki jako historyk i teoretyk literatury" [Krasicki as a Historian and Literary Theoretician], published in *Księga Referatów. Zjazd naukowy imienia Ignacego Krasickiego we Lwowie w dniach 8–10 czerwca 1935 roku*.

* * *

Julia Dickstein-Wieleżyńska's grave is not visited often. I have been unable to determine who is currently taking care of it. There is still a lot to be determined and clarified, not only in this matter. However, the publications resulting from research on the life and work of Julia Dickstein-Wieleżyńska, as well as the joint effort of scholars interested in her person and achievements, give hope that this grave will not be forgotten, and that the gaps on the historical and literary map will gradually be filled. The latest proof of this is the Leopold Staff Award granted to Dickstein-Wieleżyńska posthumously in 2024, which joined the few, albeit important, awards that Julia received during her lifetime, i.e. the Award of the Department of Art of the Ministry of Religious Denominations and Public Enlightenment in 1918 for the translation of *Do Jutrzenki* by Giosuè Carducci, and the Polish Academy of Literature (PAL) Silver Laurel in 1937 for her services to Polish art and culture.

Her critical, literary and social activity deserves to be remembered and extensively researched especially today, in an era of crises and disturbing political and historical analogies, when emancipation in a broad sense, which Dickstein-Wieleżyńska saw as a vital universal value expressed in shedding enslavement and marginalisation in the personal, social and national spheres, is at risk of being marginalised.

Translation into English
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Odcienie emancypacji. Stracone szanse i trudne wybory Julii Dickstein-Wieleżyńskiej

Tekst jest próbą przypomnienia emancypacyjnego aspektu działalności Julii Dickstein-Wieleżyńskiej (1881–1943), z uwzględnieniem jego źródeł i wybranych przejawów. Zwraca również uwagę na relacje rodzinne i wyobcowanie, którego doświadczyła Wieleżyńska jako Żydówka i kobieta, a które, z jednej strony, umacniało ją w przekonaniach emancypacyjnych, z drugiej zaś – utrudniało jej realizację tych przekonań.

Słowa kluczowe: Julia Dickstein-Wieleżyńska, emancypacja, feminizm, Serbowie Łużyccy, Dicksteinowie.

Note

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