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FIRST LOVE IN THE EGODOCUMENTS OF GIRLS IN INTERWAR POLAND. A CASE STUDY OF TEXTS BY IRENA KWIATKOWSKA AND SONIA CAPLAN*

Abstract

The article puts forward a comparative analysis of two egodocumentary accounts written by girls who grew up in interwar Poland. The study draws on selected educational brochures and psychological guides that defined the emotional norms for girls and young women. How did the authors talk about their "first love"? The research tools developed by historians of emotions, as well as the perspective of girlhood studies, enable us not only to explore the complex nature of this experience, which is embedded in various cultural and social discourses, but also to highlight its emancipatory aspects.

Keywords: girlhood, gender, emotions, first love, egodocument, interwar

INTRODUCTION

They sat, snuggled into a favourite corner of the couch, as they usually do at that wondrous hour when twilight slowly fills the room, blurs the outlines of the furniture and extinguishes the last glints in the corners of the old-fashioned, pale-gold frames.

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> It was *their* hour, the one which they guarded jealously from other people, even from a handful of closest friends, incapable of comprehending and respecting the sanctity of the moment when eyes stare into the darkness and see every thought, while the words dropping from their lips are quiet and timid, and say more than the finest stanzas by a poet.[1]

The passage quoted above is the opening of *Pierwsza miłość* [First Love] by Wanda Miłaszewska, a novel published by F. Hoesick Bookstore in 1928. It is a story about a meeting of two lovers. Nina and Jerzy try to express their feelings using gestures and, most importantly, words. The woman feels insecure and tries to find out anything about her lover's past. When she hears about his subsequent crushes, she suddenly realises that while she is just another one for him, he is her first love. The sweetness of the initial paragraphs evaporates, although, as the narrator points out, the lovers chatter the entire spring night about jealousy, passions, and elation. The man, who embodies calmness and rationalism, and the anxious, emotional woman who accompanies him in a way, reflect traditional ideas about gender order.

The title of the cited work, *First Love*, is also the subject of this article. My starting point for the analysis presented herein is the concept of romantic love.[2] This topic has developed a substantial body of literature in the field of emotion studies.[3] From the point of view of a social historian, the study of affects is important insofar as – according to William Reddy and his concept of "emotional regimes", a theory which describes a certain normative order of emotions established by a given political regime[4] – the recognition of emotions at

[1] Wanda Miłaszewska, *Pierwsza miłość* (Warszawa, 1928), 87.

[2] Sarah Pinto, 'Researching romantic love', *Rethinking History*, xxi, 4 (2017), 567–85. Although my article focuses on the historical and social contexts related to the phenomenon of "first love", I should mention that the literature on this topic is vast and rich, particularly in its cultural, philosophical, literary, and psychological aspects. Cf. Sigi Jottkandt, *First Love: A Phenomenology of the One* (Melbourne, 2010); Peter J. Marston, Michael L. Hecht, Tia Robers '"True Love Ways": The Subjective Experience and Communication of Romantic Love', *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, iv, 4 (1987), 387–407; Anne E. Beall and Robert J. Sternberg, 'The Social Construction of Love', *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, xii, 3 (1995), 417–38.

[3] For example, Peter N. Stearns and Carol Zisowitz Stearns, 'Emotionology: Clarifying the History of Emotions and Emotional Standards', *American Historical Review*, xc, 4 (1985), 813–36.

[4] William Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling. A Framework for the History of Emotion* (Cambridge, 2001), 124.

a particular historical moment deepens our knowledge of social relations. This is evident in the analysis of love. Reddy, stating that love is a form of desire between two individuals who seek to form a relationship in secret from society,[5] points to the social dimension of this emotion. This notion is also confirmed by Katie Barclay and Sally Holloway, who place romantic love in a broader context, emphasising the importance of material culture and everyday experiences in creating or reinforcing specific emotions. Various objects, images, and rituals associated with lovers acquire a symbolic significance. Their value is defined differently depending on the culture or social relations that romantic love shapes.[6]

"Romantic love was supposed to give a sense of infinity and, contrary to the sense of reality, make it the foundation of human life", claims literary scholar Marta Piwińska.[7] The love invented by the Romantics was also a critique of the rationalist promise of the Enlightenment and the traditional institution of marriage. The concept constructed in this way was characterised by perfection and absolutism, independence from institutions and biology, law and reason. Such passion also meant "a new self-definition of man in relation to the world and his own life",[8] and in the Polish lands, that often had political meaning and could be associated with a process that was "analogous to the historical self-definition of nations, striving for political existence".[9]

After Poland regained independence in 1918, the patriotic context, while not losing its significance and still functioning as "love for the homeland", receded into the background, and the individual desires of social actors came to the forefront. For some girls and young women, rebellion against the traditional institution of marriage, the associated rituals and social obligations was emancipatory in nature. It also stemmed from a questioning of traditionally established gender roles and relations, as well as the increasing presence of girls

[5] *Id.*, *The Making of Romantic Love: Longing and Sexuality in Europe, South Asia, and Japan, 900–1200* (Chicago, 2012).

[6] Katie Barclay and Sally Holloway, 'Interrogating Romantic Love', *Cultural and Social History*, xvii, 3 (2020), 272–3.

[7] Marta Piwińska, *Miłość romantyczna* (Kraków, 1984), 524.

[8] *Ibid.*, 532.

[9] *Ibid*.

and women in public life during the interwar period.[10] Voices expressing the desire to follow one's own life path could be heard, among other sources, in personal narratives. This article focuses on the concept of first love in this context.

METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK, TYPE OF SOURCES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The article's subject is not only part of the field of emotion studies, but also fits into the research on girlhood and girls.[11] As theorists of girlhood studies point out, their field of research has its roots in both the study of childhood history and the study of women's history. Girls, as a separate research group, are often doubly overlooked by social historians: both as women and as young people. The task of girlhood studies scholars is therefore to identify the expectations placed on girls by adults, public opinion, or government policies, which vary according to time, society, and culture, and to examine the agency of female actors.[12] I also draw on personal documents to pursue the objectives of girlhood studies. For those researching history, these are special sources, and one of their basic cognitive values is their subjectivity.[13] In my research, I utilised excerpts from two sources of this type, written by authors who came of age during the interwar period: the unpublished diaries of Irena Kwiatkowska (1912–2011) and the memoirs of Sonia Caplan, née Roskes (1922–1987), *Passport to Reprieve*, published in 2021.[14]

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[10] Katarzyna Sierakowska, 'Kobieta i mężczyzna', in Włodzimierz Mędrzecki and Janusz Żarnowski (eds), *Metamorfozy społeczne. Społeczeństwo międzywojenne: nowe spojrzenie* (Warszawa, 2015), 167–88.

[11] Alys Eve Weinbaum *et al.* (eds), *The Modern Girl Around the World: Consumption, Modernity, and Globalization* (Durham–London, 2008).

[12] Jennifer Helgren and Colleen A. Vasconcellos, 'Introduction', in *eaed.*, *Girlhood. A Global History* (New Brunswick – New Jersey – London, 2010), 4.

[13] Cf. Katarzyna Sierakowska, *Śmierć – Wygnanie – Głód w dokumentach osobistych. Ziemie polskie w latach Wielkiej Wojny 1914–1918* (Warszawa, 2015), 16–32. On subjectivity and the study of the "self" in historical practice, see also Penny Summerfield, 'Subjectivity, the Self and the Historical Practice', in Sasha Handley, Rohan McWilliam, and Lucy Noakes (eds), *New Directions in Social and Cultural History* (London – New York, 2018), 21–44.

[14] Sonia Caplan, *Passport to Reprieve* (Toronto, 2021).

Irena (Irka) Kwiatkowska, the author of the first source text, was a Polish actress and a well-known stage and cabaret personality who enjoyed immense popularity in Poland during the second half of the twentieth century. Her written legacy included private notes covering the period from 1925 to 1940.[15] *Irka's Diaries* are documentary in nature; they were kept on an ongoing basis, with varying intensity and regularity; the text version also contains a small number of later additions made by the author. Irka was under thirteen when she began writing her diary on 11 January 1925. Therefore, the narrator of the extensive part of the text is a teenage girl. The diaries are kept in Polish, although there are also passages in French in case they should fall into the hands of her parents, who did not know the language.[16] The author's focus is on everyday life; she zooms in on school, family and friendship adventures, as well as love affairs. Constructed and themed in this way, Kwiatkowska's text does not stand out significantly from similar egodocuments of young girls of the time. Following Philippe Lejeune's findings, I would like to mention that in the nineteenth century, writing practice was class-based; authors typically belonged to the aristocracy or bourgeoisie and were, moreover, influenced and guided by their parents. These, as the French researcher of girls' autobiographies put it, were the traditional "diaries of adolescence"[17] focused on their maiden years, and helped them tame the often anxious waiting for a candidate for a husband. With the beginning of the twentieth century, the range of subjects of diaries or other documents written by girls and young women expanded. Personal texts – exemplified by *Irka's Diaries*, but

[15] Researchers had limited access to *Irka's Diaries* until 2022. This source was in the exclusive possession of Krystyna Kwiatkowska, Irena's niece and owner of her estate. I was perhaps one of the first people to have the opportunity to read the entire work. I drew extensively on excerpts from the diaries in a popular biography of the actress. Cf. Marcin Wilk, *Kwiatkowska. Żarty się skończyły* (Kraków, 2019). Since 2022, *Irka's Diaries* have been housed at the Museum of Literature in Warsaw, where they are accessible to researchers. Individual pages were presented to a broader audience during an exhibition organised by the Museum of Literature to commemorate the actress's 110th birthday. The manuscripts were on display from 17 September to 30 October 2022; https://muzeumliteratury.pl/110-urodziny-irki-kwiatkowskiej-w-muzeum-literatury/ [Accessed: 5 July 2025].

[16] Information provided by Krystyna Kwiatkowska.

[17] Philippe Lejeune, *Le moi des demoiselles. Enquête sur le journal de jeune fille* (Paris, 1993).

also possibly by the published diaries of the teenage Zofia Nałkowska or the unpublished letters of the young Karolina Lanckorońska to her teacher and confidante, Eleonora Rzeszotko[18] – often constituted a practice of literary refinement and a space for naming one's ambitions, dreams or aspirations, closely related to the narrators' emancipating self.

The second source text, a memoir by Sonia Caplan, a Jewish girl who grew up in Tarnów, is a record of the interwar period and her carefree teenage years, as well as the period she spent living in Nazi-occupied Poland. Unlike Kwiatkowska's diaries, Caplan's text is an evoked source – the story is told from a temporal distance and from the perspective of a Holocaust survivor. For the reader, this perspective has specific consequences. Lawrence L. Langer, among other scholars, has written about them, discussing the difference between recorded and written memories.[19] The negotiation of collective and individual memory plays an important role here. A memoirist, depending on the circumstances, can model the narrative differently, which is evident, for instance, in the stories of experienced and recalled emotions. In particular, the situation of re-enacting a traumatic event can lead to memory blocking, which can result in, to invoke Hannah Pollin-Galay's term, the giving of "bad testimony"; it involves refraining from directly telling the truth, and can therefore be a form of self-censorship.[20] It is difficult to say to what extent this was the case with Caplan's text. However, we should keep in mind that recalling school acquaintances, giving accounts of significant events, and making plans for the future are all done from a post-Holocaust perspective. The author, unlike Kwiatkowska, also wrote with publication in mind, which certainly influenced her choice of narrative conventions. She was able to write about her intimate life with greater freedom. One can also assume that Caplan, in creating her unquestionably literary text, hoped to reach a broad audience. Emphasising yet another aspect

[18] Collections of letters covering the years of the Great War and the interwar period can be found in the papers of Karolina Lanckorońska, kept at the Scientific Library of the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences and the Polish Academy of Sciences in Cracow in Cracow, ref. no. K III-150.

[19] Lawrence L. Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies. The Ruins of Memory* (New Heaven – London, 1991).

[20] Hannah Pollin-Galay, *Ecologies of Witnessing: Language, Place and Holocaust Testimony* (New Haven, 2018).

of these notes, Natalia Aleksiun, editor of the text and researcher of Jewish girls' narratives, reminds us that stories like 'Passport to Reprieve', which present the experiences of young women and their role in the survival of Jewish families, have been largely ignored by most historians.[21] Yet they allow for a more nuanced discussion of female sexuality and survival strategies.

This article aims to analyse the phenomenon of girls' first love in the context of the emancipatory changes of the interwar period. The analyses of *Irka's Diaries* and Sonia Caplan's memoirs served as case studies. I focused on how the female authors conducted their narratives. Although the two texts differ in many respects, their juxtaposition was intentional. I treat not sources of a personal nature as representations of the two girls' narratives. *Irka's Diaries* were written by a Polish girl, a Catholic, growing up in a big city (Warsaw), in a working-class family (her father was a typesetter). In contrast, the Jewish girl, the narrator of Caplan's memoirs, came from a wealthier family (her father had a career in a textile factory) and lived in a provincial middle-sized town on the eve of the outbreak of war. The striking difference in religious criteria here was, in fact, of little importance. First of all, neither Irka nor Sonia grew up in strongly religious families. On the other hand, the girls were strongly dependent, both materially and emotionally, on their home environment. At the same time, social changes meant that school, organisation and popular culture became important points of reference, especially for girls living in larger cities (like Irka's Warsaw) or medium-sized centres (like Sonia's Tarnów).[22] The girls were born ten years apart from each other (Irka in 1912, Sonia in 1922), a factor that is significant in relation to the cultural and moral changes of the interwar period. Irena belongs to the generation of girls who were entering adulthood in the late 1920s. Their experiences were influenced more strongly by such factors as the economic crisis, but also by the emerging mass popular culture (including cinema). As mentioned earlier, girls were increasingly active in public life; for example, the number of women

[21] Natalia Aleksiun 'Introduction', in Caplan, *Passport*, xvi.

[22] Cf. Anna Landau-Czajka and Katarzyna Sierakowska (eds), *Procesy socjalizacji w Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej. 1914–1939* (Warszawa, 2013); Monika Graban-Pomirska, *Szkoła narzeczonych. O powieści dla dziewcząt w dwudziestoleciu międzywojennym* (Gdańsk, 2006).

graduating from Polish universities was on the rise.[23] Sonia, born in the early 1920s, entered adulthood virtually with the outbreak of World War II: she turned 17 in 1939 (Irena was 27 at the time). She belonged to a generation that, according to Aleksiun, was shaped by new opportunities, new educational ideas, and actively participated in the creation of the Zionist movement.[24]

To analyse Kwiatkowska's diaries and Caplan's memoirs within a socio-cultural framework, I consulted guidebooks and textbooks on girls' education used in the school system, as well as academic papers on the psychology of adolescence that focused on the psyches of young girls. In particular, I concentrated on a pamphlet by Elsa Croner, a renowned researcher on the girl question in Germany.[25] Her works were not only published in Poland in the 1930s, but were also recommended by educators, for example, in the scouting movement. An analysis of the discourses on the girl psyche contained in Croner's pamphlet helped me illustrate the historical context of the concept of love and the emotions that accompanied it. In the section dealing specifically with Irena Kwiatkowska's diaries and Sonia Caplan's memoirs, I attempted to demonstrate how the authors of the notes formulated their statements. I highlighted how a young girl spoke or could have spoken about love, whether she wrote directly about physical intimacy, and how she described her partners.

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[23] See, for instance, Jadwiga Suchmiel, *Udział kobiet w nauce do 1939 roku w Uniwersytecie Jagiellońskim* (Częstochowa, 1994); Dorota Mazurczak, 'Kariery akademickie kobiet w Polsce międzywojennej – Uniwersytet Poznański', in Anna Żarnowska and Andrzej Szwarc (eds), *Kobieta i kultura. Kobiety wśród twórców kultury intelektualnej i artystycznej w dobie rozbiorów i w niepodległym państwie polskim* (Warszawa, 1996), 127–38.

[24] Natalia Aleksiun, 'Introduction', xxi. The circumstances mentioned above do not exhaust all the factors that influenced the characters of Irka and Sonia. See Joya Misra, 'Categories, Structures, and Intersectional Theory', in James W. Messerschmidt, Patricia Yancey Martin, Michael A. Messner, and Raewyn Connell (eds), *Gender Reckonings. New Social Theory and Research* (New York, 2018), 111–30.

[25] Else Croner, *Psychika młodzieży żeńskiej*, trans. by Jan Kuchta and Jan Lubomirowicz (Lwów–Warszawa, 1932). This is a translation of the German original, *Die Psyche der weiblichen Jugend*, which was first published in Germany in 1923 and went through a total of six editions. The last one, from 1935, was already adapted to the prevailing Nazi narrative.

LOVE AS AN AFFECT IN THE CONTEXT OF PEDAGOGICAL MANUALS

In light of the content of numerous psychology textbooks, as well as guides for educators and teachers in interwar Poland, first love was something that "happened", but was considered undesirable due to the perceived social health of young people, much like other emotions Social norms dictated that passion should be restrained, and emotions such as love were reserved for young people only in a few special areas, such as the homeland and country, family (social feelings), or possibly literature or theatre (so-called aesthetic feelings); however, especially according to pedagogical textbooks intended for school teachers, these feelings could only be experienced under the supervision of educators.[26] Although the emotional life of young people was acknowledged, adults exercised strict control over the objects of the youths' affection, and any behaviour that went beyond the boundaries set by educators was discouraged. Especially in the first decade of the interwar period, this kind of striving for a moral ideal was prevalent in many pedagogical narratives, such as those among Catholic educators.[27]

However, the regime of abstaining from passion did not apply to everyone and was not enforced equally. Walenty Gadowski (1861–1956), author of Catholic textbooks on youth psychology, argued that controlling emotions was impossible for members of the peasant class, and that women struggled in this regard as well. He associated the high affectivity with low intelligence and explained that this emotional type has its merits, namely "a good heart, negative volatility and unpredictability, as it is driven by feelings rather than reason".[28] The consequence of this conceptualisation of love was the separation of areas of sadness and bitterness, associated with life outside the model of a family based on a sanctified marriage. From the perspective of parents, a wife's love for her husband was the only form of female love permitted within intimate relations between the sexes, although, as researchers have already pointed

[26] Cf. Henryk Rowid, *Psychologia pedagogiczna. Podręcznik dla młodzieży przygotowującej się do zawodu nauczycielskiego* (3rd edn, Kraków, 1937).

[27] Eg. Walenty Gadowski, *Podręcznik psychologii wychowawczej dla seminariów nauczycielskich i wychowawców* (Tarnów, 1926).

[28] Walenty Gadowski, *Podręcznik psychologii*, 130.

out, both models of marriage and thinking about marital sexuality were changing.[29]

The Catholic pedagogical discourse, exemplified by Gadowski's textbook, although important in Poland during the interwar period, was not the only influence, and its impact was varied depending on many factors. The ideas associated with the discourse could be implemented differently in Catholic schools than in other types of educational institutions. Therefore, while the theory presented in textbooks may have been consistent in many respects, the practice varied greatly. A lot depended on the teachers, as well. It is also worth noting that while clergy who taught in girls' secondary schools were often zealous guardians of morality, girls did not necessarily have to follow the norms and rules, especially if they learned about life, including intimate matters, from popular literature or cinema.[30] In addition, changes in gender relations associated with social and moral transformations that began in the nineteenth century meant that different emotional regimes could function in the public consciousness; some of these regimes allowed boys to be sensitive.[31]

When characterising romantic love, contemporary literary historian Marta Piwińska does not differentiate between the genders.[32] Similarly, Stefan Baley (1885–1952), who drew on Freud's psychoanalytic work and focused on the changes in spiritual life during puberty, emphasises in his 1931 treatise *Psychologia wieku dojrzewania* [Psychology of Adolescence] "the intensity of emotional experiences during this

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[29] Cf. Anna Żarnowska, 'Schyłek wieku XIX – kształtowanie się modelu małżeństwa partnerskiego', in Anna Żarnowska and Andrzej Szwarc (eds), *Kobieta i małżeństwo. Społeczno-kulturowe aspekty seksualności. Wiek XIX i XX* (Warszawa, 2004), 287–96; Teresa Kulak, 'Nowe tendencje w myśleniu o seksualności małżeńskiej a zmiany generacyjne w Polsce lat trzydziestych', in *Kobieta i małżeństwo*, 341–64. Moreover, we know that there were also other intimate life practices other than heterosexual relations. The topic of sexual relations between women not limited to marriage in the 1920s and 1930s is still poorly researched in Polish historiography, despite recent publication of various studies on the subject, e.g. Paulina Pająk, '1933: The Year of Lesbian Modernism in Poland?', *Women's History Review*, xxxi, 1 (2022), 28–50.

[30] Robert Kotowski, *Dziewczęta w mundurkach. Młodzież żeńska szkół średnich w Polsce w latach 1918–1939* (Kielce, 2013), 253.

[31] Agnieszka Małek, 'Wychowawcze kształtowanie płci w poradnikach dla rodziców z okresu Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej', in *Procesy socjalizacji*, 231.

[32] Piwińska, *Miłość romantyczna*, 526–7.

period, the level which will never be reached again".[33] Baley also claims that the feelings that emerge at this age "are rather negative in nature and bring young people more torment than happiness".[34] Interestingly, for Baley, this specific emotionality resonates with the tone of the German Romantics, and this educator and psychologist illustrates the swiftness of transition from despair to frenzy of joy (and vice versa) with a quote from Schiller: "Himmelhoch jauchzend, zu Tode betrübt" – "shouting with joy, saddened to death".[35]

According to Else Croner (1878–1942), a Jewish writer and educator specialising in the upbringing and psychology of girls, adolescence is a period conducive to becoming aware of psychological differences. Like many other specialists, Croner emphasised the differences in educational models and the experience of a specific "psychological revolution"[36] that takes place at this stage of life. She also pointed out that female adolescents experienced that significant upheaval, "revolution", particularly intensely, because "preparation for motherhood is more deeply rooted in the nature of the young female individual than preparation for fatherhood". In her idealistic thinking, Croner not only placed girls in a heterosexual relationship model but also ignored the psychology of single girls and women. Although Croner did not limit herself to describing a specific social group or class, she clearly favoured girls who were receiving an education, as she began her observations with them. At the same time, she noted the essential nature of the problems faced by girls from lower social classes, including those employed as servants.

Regardless of varying material conditions, cultural resources, and home environment, the "young female soul", to cite Croner, was characterised by a stable emotional order, centred on the expectation of love. All possible and desirable emotionality was closely linked to a girl's preparation for her future roles as mother and wife. Croner pointed to the specific situation of girls in the context of the model of emotionality she proposed. She argued that while a child is innocence and a woman is experience, a young girl is intuition.[37]

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[33] Stefan Baley, *Psychologia wieku dojrzewania* (Lwów–Warszawa, 1931), 111.
[34] *Ibid*.
[35] Quoted after *ibid.*, 111.
[36] Croner, *Psychika młodzieży żeńskiej*, 13. Cf. Baley, *Psychologia wieku dojrzewania*.
[37] Croner, *Psychika młodzieży żeńskiej*, 15.

In her pamphlet, Croner identified four types of girls. In her view, apart from the distinctly maternal, sober type (who does not speak of love, but of inclination and affection) and the intellectual type, only two types of girls could potentially fall in love outside the accepted social norms of the time.[38] They are erotic and romantic girls, although the latter live more in a fantasy world than in reality. According to Croner, girls of the erotic type are more likely than other young women to read inappropriate books or watch inappropriate films, which makes them more libidinous.[39] Their clothing was also supposed to be designed to attract and seduce. "Stockings, shoes, hairstyles, everything is calculated for effect", wrote the educator.[40] These convictions echo traditional nineteenth-century views, which recommended "simple, tasteful, modest, and decent" clothing.[41] Meanwhile, at the turn of the century, these norms began to shift under the influence of the women's movement. Cultural changes in fashion were particularly noticeable in larger cities, where young women were more likely to take up paid work.[42] Even middle school students, who were often required to wear strictly regulated uniforms, found ways to dress fashionably and in an aesthetically pleasing manner, which did not necessarily mean that they wanted to "attract and seduce".[43]

According to Croner, the love of a girl with "pure feelings" had metaphysical undertones. Young women with broad interests are more often restrained, while "low-class women are more prone to succumbing to their urges". Croner, who wrote on the subject in the late 1920s, also notes that girls of her time are beginning to talk about "free love" and "the same morality as men". The educator seems to agree with many other contemporary experts, warning against excessive interest in the erotic sphere. According to them, that could lead, above all, to the inhibition of intellectual development.

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[38] *Ibid.*, 18–32.

[39] On the influence of reading newspapers and guidebooks on the sexual narratives by girls in Great Britain, cf. Lisa Z. Sigel, *Making Modern Love: Sexual Narratives and Identities in Interwar Britain* (Philadelphia, 2012).

[40] Croner, *Psychologia młodzieży żeńskiej*, 25.

[41] Małgorzata Stawiak-Ososińska, *Ponętna, uległa, akuratna… Ideał i wizerunek kobiety polskiej pierwszej połowy XIX wieku (w świetle ówczesnych poradników)* (Kraków, 2009), 130.

[42] Joanna Dufrat, 'W okresie powolnej modernizacji. Kobieta w II Rzeczypospolitej – próba bilansu', *Prace Historyczne*, cxlvii, 4 (2020), 819.

[43] Cf. Kotowski, *Dziewczęta w mundurkach*, 200.

"Love plays such a prominent role in the spiritual life of women and is so central to their interests that once this true goddess of young girls takes hold of their souls, she demands that all other goals and interests be sacrificed on her altar. Her fire is the most powerful force".[44] Love understood as passion, desire, and erotic intimacy was therefore not a desirable condition. Convention dictated restrained behaviour and avoiding situations that could unleash "evil" forces. Thus, although Croner put forward a modern concept of recognising women's subjectivity, she was still aligned with traditional morality. The educator herself, who used modern means of communication (radio) to promote psychological knowledge about women, closely observed social changes and new patterns of behaviour among girls living in Berlin in the 1920s and early 1930s.

FIRST LOVE: THE CASE OF IRENA KWIATKOWSKA

For the narrator of *Irka's Diaries*, the first intense infatuation she writes about in some detail was her feelings for a family friend several years her senior, the married Andrzej, who is mentioned in her notes from the spring of 1928. The narrator is fifteen years old at the time, and she calls him "Jędrek" or "Mr. Andrzej".

From the first mention, we learn about the intense relationship, the almost physical closeness between the narrator and "Jędrek". According to the narrator, he is the one who seeks. a kind of intimate contact. The narrator, in her version of the story, keeps him at a distance, guarding the boundaries of her intimacy; the diary narrative paints a picture of a proactive girl who is in control. The whole intrigue is her choice.

On one occasion, when Irena was alone in a room with "Jędrek", he reached out, wanting to caress her. Her response was as follows:

> Without thinking much, I kicked him, or rather, I just raised my leg to block his movement. He was very startled and left. "I'm sorry", he asked, "can't you lift your leg higher?" I replied, "I can, but I don't want to". Then he left (22 June 1928).[45]

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[44] Croner, *Psychologia młodzieży żeńskiej*, 44.

[45] All quotations are taken directly from the manuscript of *Irka's Diaries*. The dates on which the narrator made her entries are provided in brackets.

From the narrator's perspective, her relationship with "Jędrek" is turbulent and often involves conflicts and arguments. Some of their conversations take the form of intellectual sparring matches. One day, as Irka writes in her diary, she even argued with him about politics in the street. The narrator notes verbal and non-verbal signs of the man's interest in her. "I felt that he liked me", she writes when he looks at her with "green eyes" and his "mouth agape". In some entries, there are also direct interpretations of his behaviour ("he's flirting").

In the diary, "Jędrek" reappears every few pages. The narrator writes increasingly often about her emotional and mental states related to her encounters with the older man. She feels a mix of excitement, sadness, and nervousness that is often incomprehensible, even to herself.

When she is seventeen, she writes:

> Mr. Andrzej was here yesterday. He showed up suddenly and unexpectedly. He walked in, my blood rushed to my head, not out of joy or confusion, but out of anger. Why did he come to disturb the peace of my soul? In an instant, I became excited and nervous. He forced me to sit next to him on the sofa, and this proximity made my heart beat faster and my blood rush. I wasn't excited because he was Jędrek, but because he was a man! I became playful and flirtatious, even though I was pale and my eyes were ablaze (1 February 1930).

We should note that the girl's descriptions contain almost literary phrases, which do not necessarily undermine the authenticity and accuracy of her affective account.[46] Other excerpts from the diary show that the author possessed a high level of literary culture. Raised in a home filled with books, as the daughter of a Warsaw typesetter, she devoured literature of all kinds. In addition to the books that broadened her imagination and enriched her vocabulary, her alternative view of love may have been influenced by her interactions with other girls at school and her discussions about contemporary cinema. Kwiatkowska, like many girls at the time, admired world film stars, following their achievements not only on the screen but also in their private lives, which began to be widely reported in the

[46] More on the subject, see Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, 'The Archives of Those Who Write Themselves: What and Where Are They', *Teksty Drugie*, Special Issue, English Edition, 1 (2020), 322–45.

press.[47] It is also worth noting that the scope of discussion on issues related to sexuality and physicality was expanding.[48]

In the narrative of young Kwiatkowska, one can also detect echoes of the dominant discourse about what love should be and what duties women have in the public's imagination. These echoes occur in the margins of the adventures associated with "first love" and demonstrate that the young girl possessed social consciousness. "When I fall in love, I certainly won't think about my duties to the state", she notes at one point, referring to the social regime of love for one's homeland, an emotion that characterises countries such as Poland. She also states:

> After all, the most proper vocation of a woman is motherhood; how to protect herself from this, like a man, where is the source of evil. In all kinds of gatherings, such as balls and parties. There hide those who very often try to deceitfully win her heart, which is usually still innocent, and use it to their advantage. How many assurances, oaths and vows that he loves nobody but her, that she's the one, and then on some beautiful day, the terrible veil is removed from the eyes of the misled girl and the other, dire reality shows before her eyes. Isn't it so? How many suicides are for the reason called love? So I ask the Blessed Mother to watch over me and not let me be deceived, but that I can distinguish between falsehood and truth, and that I walk through life on my own without the poisoned arrow of love! (27 January 1930).

In the passage quoted above, several distinct discourses can be identified that define the social and emotional situation of young girls in interwar Poland. The popular Catholic discourse on puberty is also evident, as is the fear of seduction portrayed within it as a result of carelessness and excessive flirtatiousness. In this context, we should take note of the narrator's attempt to pray, which is supposed to discipline the girl to behave in accordance with the moral norm. The vocabulary she used, e.g., *bałamucona* ('seduced'), *niby mężczyzna* ("like a man"), also suggests the language of popular romantic and sentimental stories.[49] Her description of her experience is largely an

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[47] Robert Kotowski, 'Książka, kino, teatr – rozrywki intelektualne młodzieży żeńskiej w międzywojennej Polsce', *Rocznik Muzeum Narodowego w Kielcach*, xxviii (2013), 82–94.

[48] Katarzyna Sierakowska, 'Elementy kobiecego dyskursu o seksualności na łamach międzywojennych periodyków dla kobiet', in *Kobieta i małżeństwo*, 365–80.

[49] Cf. Graban-Pomirska, *Szkoła narzeczonych*.

emotional fantasy. In reality, young girls and women could also be, and often were, seductresses and temptresses.

FIRST LOVE: THE CASE OF SONIA CAPLAN[50]

The story is slightly different for Sonia Caplan. The narrator of the memoirs writes primarily about two simultaneous first loves. They are colleagues in the circle of close acquaintances. "Milek" was, as we learn among other things, optimistic, while "Zyga" is described as "tall and spindly", and at the same time the most well-read, intelligent and ironic among the narrator's friends.[51]

Caplan does not write at great length about intimate encounters with her loved ones, but when she does decide to do so, she describes them explicitly, not tabooing anything. For example, when mentioning walks or conversations with Milek, she also talks about kissing and touching each other at home while the parents are away.[52] We should note that this account was written a long time after the events presented therein. The mature narrator looks at herself as a young girl. She can also use expressions that may have been more acceptable at the end of the twentieth century than at the time of the events she writes about. We can cautiously assume that this is why intimate issues in the story are not shrouded in great secrecy. While Kwiatkowska's narrative of first love is loosely intertwined with an analysis of the social or political situation, in Caplan's memoirs, such issues play a crucial role at times. Both "Milek" and "Zyga" have gone abroad or are planning to do so. The narrator knows that this is the usual path of the wealthier Jewish youth, the milieu to which she belongs. Caplan plans to study journalism in Paris. She treats the potentially prolonged separation due to the departure with sadness rather than concern. She knows that she has limited influence over the decisions

[50] In the analysis, I use the name of the author of the narrative, Caplan, because she is the person I am interested in, even though in the period covered by the memoir, the protagonist's surname was Roskes.

[51] "I felt secretly drawn to him, attracted both by the analytical and ironic cast of his mind and burgeoning masculinity, but was on my guard in order not to fan the flames of Mileks' notorious jealousy", Caplan, *Passport*, 6–7.

[52] "We walked for hours in the sun-drenched golden fields of wheat, climbed the grassy slopes of St Martin's, and spent time kissing and touching indoors in our apartments during our parents' absences", Caplan, *Passport*, 20.

of "Milek" and "Zyga". However, she is afraid not so much that they will abandon her, but that she will end up with no peers around.

The first loves cited in Caplan's memoirs take place over the spring and summer of 1939, and the mounting sense of danger is a meaningful context. The text suggests that the youngsters were living a rather carefree existence, unaware of the real threat. On the other hand, a group of friends considers the list of more or less dramatic likely scenarios. According to "Zyga", for example, Hitler would not invade Poland, because the country was a natural buffer between the Reich and the Soviet Union.

The peer group is significant in Sonia's case insofar as it is – and not the home circle, as in Irka's case – the source of the narrator's first erotic fascinations. On the other hand, the home environment plays a rather important role in shaping her identity, but also in defining girlhood and femininity. In Sonia's home, her parents speak Yiddish with each other, but address their daughters in Polish. They also sent Sonia to a school run by the Safa Berura Association: a Zionist-leaning modern institution with Hebrew as the language of instruction.[53] Sonia is aware of the differences within the Jewish community she is a part of. The narrator recalls that radically Orthodox Jews made sure that their children were taught according to "their" education in a traditional *cheder*, and the consequence of this approach was to educate boys, never girls.[54] The girl realises that, as she was not raised in a family of Orthodox Jews, she can afford to do more.

Sonia's case shows that Jewish organisations, common cause and involvement in the Zionist ideology may have played an important role for Jewish youth in forming intimate ties.[55] That is when young people danced together or talked about the books she mentions. Writing about literature in the context of first loves, Caplan recounts titles and authors, including Hegel, Marx, Freud, Dostoevsky, Kafka, Mann and Shakespeare. However, it is unclear to what extent these

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[53] Edmund Jusko, 'Edukacja dzieci żydowskich w Tarnowie w okresie II Rzeczypospolitej', *Resovia Sacra: Studia Teologiczno-Filozoficzne Diecezji Rzeszowskiej*, 27 (2020), 319–42.

[54] See also Kamil Kijek, *Dzieci modernizmu. Świadomość, kultura i socjalizacja polityczna młodzieży żydowskiej w II Rzeczypospolitej* (Kraków, 2020).

[55] Emma Zohar, 'Feeling Communists: Communism, emotions, and gender in interwar Polish Jewry', *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies*, xxi, 1 (2022), 38–56; Kijek, *Dzieci modernizmu*.

readings and authors aided erotic communication and allowed an individual to find a language to help define their feelings or emotions.[56]

When scrutinising Caplan's narrative, we should also keep in mind that in addition to literature, school, and peers, cinematography may have influenced the formation of her linguistic and erotic imagination. One of the scenes depicted in Caplan's narrative bears a resemblance to a cinematic tale. I am referring to an excerpt about the dramatic kiss and confession of love by "Zyga" made under dramatic circumstances: just after the outbreak of war, in September 1939.[57]

CONCLUSION

In both *Irka's Diaries* and Caplan's memoirs, the record of actual events is interwoven with philosophical, literary or cinematic embellishments characteristic of many ego documents. For the historian, the text of this kind provides a source of knowledge about the contexts related to "first love". The confrontation of the record of individual behaviour and reactions with psychological and pedagogical discourse allows us, to some extent, to define the scale and scope of the emotional autonomy of the authors.

Juxtaposing *Irka's Diaries* with the expectations formulated for girls in the interwar expert texts, we learn that the narrator, first and foremost, does not succumb to the pressure of restraint. In the world depicted in Kwiatkowska's story, individualisation – one of the social change processes of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries – assumes a mature form. In that formative world, one is not only allowed to talk about emotional states, but also to name one's desires. The narrator uses terms and linguistic images reserved

[56] On the relevance of reading culture to the formation of the identity of Jewish youth in interwar Poland, see Ido Bassok, 'Mapping Reading Culture in Interwar Poland: Secular Literature as a New Marker of Ethnic Belonging among Jewish Youth', *Simon Dubnow Institute Yearbook*, 9 (2010), 15–36.

[57] "I stretched out my hand to shake his, but he, stooping from his great height to put his face close to mine, kissed me and held me in a tight embrace. In a voice choked with suppressed emotions, he whispered hoarsely, "I love you, although, because of my reputation for callousness and cynicism, I couldn't say it before. I want you to know it now, for I may never see you again". Unable to respond, I clung to him passionately for a few moments, and then, the tears streaming down my face, gave him one last lingering kiss, wiggled out of his embrace without daring to look back, and darted out of the yard", Caplan, *Passport*, 32.

for popular narratives, such as romance novels. The choice of such a mode of communication about her emotionality indicates the author's emancipatory consciousness. At the same time, the young Irena Kwiatkowska is well aware of the social and cultural framework in which she functions. References to literature, cinema, religion or public opinion, as well as the use of French in the narration, can be considered as camouflage techniques. By employing them, Irena Kwiatkowska, on the one hand, obstructs the readers' direct access to the emotions she actually experienced, but on the other hand, she may also be consciously protecting her autonomy.

Similar to *Irka's Diaries*, Caplan's memoirs reveal the social and cultural context of first love. Written after a certain period, the text does not provide the same insight into the actual emotional states of the narrator as in the first case we examined. However, this time gap does not invalidate the emancipatory dimension of the author's actions. In her relations with her admirers, she reveals herself as a proactive, self-defining and rational individual. Her directness in writing about erotic encounters probably testifies to the autonomy and self-confidence of the adult author, who reminisces about the past. In rewriting, in a way, her girlhood history, the narrator highlights her independence at the time the events from the memoir took place.

In both cases, we can clearly see borrowings and quotations from various cultural registers in which normative traditional mores functioned alongside new forms of intimate communication. These new patterns were present in popular culture, especially literature or cinema, and functioned in larger urban centres, like Warsaw, but also medium-sized ones, like Tarnów; they may have provided a focal point for girls' emancipatory aspirations. From the two sources about girls' emotional discourses, it is possible to see to what extent educators' ideas about girls' emotionality may have diverged from their actual experiences. Importantly, the analysed examples make it clear that girls could make individual choices in their love life. Despite the many differences stemming from various environmental and generational affiliations, as well as the place of residence, one can also see manifestations of a certain, as Barbara Rosenwein would say, affective community of girls.[58] However, only further research

[58] Barbara H. Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY, 2006).

using a larger and more diverse collection of sources of a personal nature can tell more about the scale of emotional regimes and the actual extent of the agency of girls who were entering adulthood in interwar Poland.

Translated by Krzysztof Heymer

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