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Women, Cats, the Moon. About Leo Lipski's Prose*

Kobiety, koty, księżyc. O prozie Leo Lipskiego

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Abstract. The aim of the article is to present images of women in Leo Lipski's modern emigration prose (in the works *Niespokojni* [*Anxious*] and *Piotruś* [*Peter*]). These representations are analysed in the context of patterns distributed by patriarchal culture (*femmes fatales*), with particular emphasis on aesthetic conventions produced in early modernity. Lipski references conventional imagery of the misogynised male-centric discourse, encoding gender differences using stereotypical attributes and associations such as lunar and animalistic topics. On the other hand, however, in these novels there is a clear erosion of schematic imagery, created on the basis of misogynist discourse, the writer intercepts and inverts modernist clichés, creating from them a complex symbolic structure, the specificity of which in many respects differs from that of early modernist literature. The analysis leads to the conclusion that Lipski is not so much trying to restore the planes of the male-female understanding in his prose as he is questioning them, and instead proposes, as a (self)therapeutic form, the possibility of paradoxical fulfilment of love through the story, which problematises and reveals the reasons for the fiasco of feelings, as well as points to the crevices of authenticity opening up in the reality of the literary game, where the world of eroticism is an important element.

Keywords: Leo Lipski, modern prose, *femme fatale*, misogynist discourse, emigration prose

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Abstrakt. Celem artykułu jest przedstawienie wizerunków kobiet w nowoczesnej prozie emigracyjnej Leo Lipskiego (w utworach *Niespokojni*, *Piotruś*). Reprezentacje te analizowane są w kontekście wzorców dystrybuowanych przez kulturę patriarchalną (*femmes fatales*), ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem konwencji estetycznych wytworzonych we wczesnej nowoczesności. Lipski odwołuje się do konwencjonalnych wyobrażeń, jakie przyświecały zabarwionemu mizoginią dyskursowi męskocentrycznemu, koduje różnice płciowe przy użyciu stereotypowych atrybutów i skojarzeń, takich jak topika lunarna i animalistyczna. Z drugiej jednak strony w powieściach tych dochodzi do wyraźnej erozji schematycznych wyobrażeń, wytworzonych na gruncie dyskursu mizoginistycznego; pisarz przechwytuje i przenicowuje modernistyczne klisze, tworząc z nich skomplikowaną strukturę symboliczną, której specyfika pod wieloma względami odbiega od tej, jaka dominowała w literaturze wczesnego modernizmu. Analizy zmierzają do wniosku, że Lipski nie tyle próbuje w swojej prozie restytuować płaszczyzny porozumienia męsko-kobiecego, ile stawia je pod znakiem zapytania, a zamiast nich proponuje jako formę (auto)terapeutyczną możliwość paradoksalnego spełnienia miłosnego przez problematyzujące i odsłaniające przyczyny fiaska uczuć opowiadanie, które wskazuje także na szczeliny autentyzmu otwierające się w rzeczywistości literackiej gry, gdzie istotnym elementem jest świat erotyki.

Słowa kluczowe: Leo Lipski, proza nowoczesna, *femme fatale*, dyskurs mizoginistyczny, proza emigracyjna

Modern literature has redefined traditional gender representations. This was the result of emancipatory processes, which at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries were gaining momentum, covering all aspects of social life. They were also clearly visible in Polish culture, especially after crossing the threshold of the 20th century, when laws,¹ the development of popular culture and the influence of new media redefined traditional patterns of femininity (Dauksza, 2013, pp. 167–188). This was tantamount to a gradual erosion of patriarchal culture and the representations produced on its foundation, which began to crumble under the pressure of new moral forms. This does not mean that the male-centric discourse disappeared from literature but it started to produce new figures in which male fears were encoded, as was the case with the images of *femmes fatales*, which were popular in early modernity,² characters from Leopold von Sacher-Masoch's novels, also resounded on the pages of Otto Weininger's *Sex and Character*.

¹ As Anna Miłoszewska-Kiełbiewska (2015, p. 7) emphasises, the culmination of intensified 19th-century emancipation movements was the year 1918, which was the date of the symbolic birth of the new woman, who was then granted numerous political privileges, such as voting rights.

² *Femmes fatales* are nothing but a male phantasm. As Zofia Hadamik (2003, p. 114) claims: "They [*femmes fatales* – A.S.] were mostly created by men, therefore they are marked by male subjectivity. [...] According to a psychoanalytic and feminist interpretation, the phantasm of a *femme fatale* expresses the fear of losing the male identity" ["Tworzyli je [kreatcje *femmes fatales* – A.S.] w przeważającej mierze mężczyźni, dlatego też naznaczone są one męską subiektywnością. [...] Według psychoanalitycznej i feministycznej wykładni fantazmat kobiety fatalnej wyraża strach przed utratą męskiej tożsamości"].

The dynamics of change that modernity brought with it depended on many factors, not always corresponding to historical events. A valuable example is the prose of Leo Lipski. In his stories written after the war, on the one hand, he presented female characters in accordance with the patterns of pre-war modernism, while on the other, he consciously shifted accents and reformulated male-centric representations.

Perhaps this was partly due to the fact that Lipski was creating in exile, completely cut off not only from his language but also not exposed to the direct influence of the context of his native culture. The writer, who was struggling with somatic ailments, created his texts despite taking strong medication and typing with his left hand (Maciejowska, 2015, pp. 9–10). In his case, creation was inextricably linked with disease and a sense of alienation (Maciejowska, 2015, p. 11).³

There is no doubt that emigration is a great existential challenge, which in Lipski's case became different from that which dominated in post-war Polish literature, divided into two different circuits – domestic and foreign. Writers who left the country functioned within the new network of literary life, published in magazines, formed literary groups, exchanged views in magazines and private letters. Emigration reformulated identity models in various ways (Nycz, 2001, pp. 73–84), but in Lipski's case it also had a different effect – the distribution of literary patterns took place without any exchange with what was happening “outside” – Lipski probably had limited contact with books with new existential proposals. He had no contact with literature because he did not know the language of the country where he was living. He corresponded a lot, made friends through letters, and this type of his writing activity is larger in volume than his purely

³ After Maciejowska (2015, p. 11): letter from Lipski to Michał Chmielowiec from the first half of 1947, located in the Emigration Archive: “I’m threatened with complete loneliness, relieved by [...] speaking to myself in an alien voice: »Lo, don’t worry, darling«. I’m also in danger of being walled up in my own body. So the state in which Niusia said: »He doesn’t see«, and I saw, Anka said: »He doesn’t hear«, and I heard, Inka said: »He doesn’t understand what’s said to him«, and I understood, I just couldn’t talk, seems perfect. They don’t want to promise to poison me. Bricked up in my own body, just like the nuns were bricked up. I won’t be able to move a muscle. That’s the danger, but it’s not certain [...] I haven’t written for 4 months. I’m going on a protest strike. I protest against the sentences of so-called »fate«. It’s a shitty thing God has done. [...] That’s all I have to say about myself” [“Grozi mi zupełna samotność, przy której ulgę sprawia [...] przemawianie do siebie obcym głosem: »Lo, nie martw się, kochanie«. Grozi mi poza tym zamurowanie we własnym ciele. Wobec tego stan, w którym Niusia mówiła: »On nie widzi«, a ja widziałem, Anka mówiła: »On nie słyszy«, a ja słyszałem, Inka mówiła: »On nie rozumie, co się do niego mówi«, a ja rozumiałem, tylko nie mogłem mówić, wydaje się doskonały. Nie chcą przyrzec, że mnie otrują. Zamurowanie we własnym ciele, tak jak zakonnicę zamurowywano. Nie będę mógł żadnym mięśniem ruszyć. To mi grozi, ale to nie jest pewne [...] Od 4 mies[ięcy] nie piszę. Urządzam sobie strejk protestacyjny. Protestuję przeciwko wyrokom tak zw[ane]go losu. To jest świństwo ze strony p[ana] B[oga]. [...] Tyle o mnie”].

literary work. As he claimed in one of his letters to Michał Chmielowiec, he did not correspond with anyone from Poland. On the other hand, almost all of the letters he exchanged with Jerzy Giedroyc and the already mentioned Chmielowiec have been preserved (Maciejowska, 2015, pp. 10–11).

The situation of being cut off somehow preserved the stereotypes brought from Poland, and at the same time made them crumble not so much under the pressure of patterns from outside, but under the influence of the intellectual work of the writer who deliberately inverted them. In other words, Lipski brought a multitude of modernist clichés to Israel, and his work was a process of their reformulation and decomposition. In front of the reader's eyes, therefore, there is a kind of self-destruction of these clichés, which gradually began to bend under the influence of their own weight. The images of women and the theme of femininity in the prose of Leo Lipski, who is still in the radiation zone of modernist discourse, are thus an expanding imaginarium of characters, arranged into symbolic structures, overwritten over plot events. The novel *Niespokojni* [*Anxious*] can be interpreted in this perspective.

The central female figure here is the mother, who – slightly different than in stereotypical images – is an oppressive figure, there is no sensitive and caring language of motherhood, but rather her absence. The narrator says about the mother: “the character always present in it, standing in the background, noted everything with a still face” [“zawsze obecna w nim postać, stojąca na drugim planie, notowała wszystko z nieruchomą twarzą”] (Lipski, 2015a, p. 93). She exercises an apodictic power and, through the coldness of her feelings, condemns the boy to an emotional vacuum, which – as Sigmund Freud and his pre-war psychoanalysis tried to prove – could translate into his later relationships with women.⁴ It is a figure constructed by castration anxiety and patriarchal discourse. On the one hand, it is an image of Jewish motherhood reflected in a distorted mirror, on the other hand, it is a prefiguration of the infirm hero of Lipski's later works, who reveals and accepts his female element (Cuber, 2011, p. 97). Emil grows up in a vacuum, because his father is interested in him sporadically, and he is mainly under the care of a governess. The child, therefore, has neither a male nor a female relationship pattern.

⁴ According to Freud's assumptions, the Oedipus complex was to be a common phenomenon among children (the so-called phallic phase of psychosexual development). Its course runs differently according to gender. In boys, lust for their mother and hostility towards their father give rise to *castration anxiety*, which causes the denial of these feelings towards their parents and the formation of the superego. The correct solution for this complex directly translates into the emotional sphere of the human being and their later adult life, and thus also into relations with the opposite sex. Freud tried to explain many human behaviours in this way, but in reality, the existence of this mechanism was never proven. However, its assumptions have become inspiring for many authors and literary researchers (Czernianin and Czernianin, 2017, p. 21).

It is symptomatic that the protagonist calls the governess Medusa with humorous contrivance, referring to the character who functions in culture as a symbol of the persecution of men and their castration, which Marta Cuber (2011) motivates with an attempt to tame the fear of women. The governess “is the intermediary between what was originally maternal and the symbolic power of the father” [“jest pośredniczką między tym, co pierwotnie macierzyńskie, a symboliczną władzą ojca”] (Cuber, 2011, p. 97).

Another important figure is Ewa, who does not fit into the image of female sexuality produced by the patriarchal discourse, perceives her own femininity as a burden, something that binds her hands and limits her movements. As the narrator says, “she was the height of femininity, its height and its abyss at the same time” [“Była szczytem kobiecości, jej szczytem i zarazem otchłanią”] (Lipski, 2015a, p. 94). This is the core of the heroine’s disposition, which is at the same time a condensation of all the phantasms and fears associated with the opposite sex that torment and fascinate male minds: alien, mysterious, and beyond the laws of male logic. In her actions, Ewa is irrational to the limit, but thus hypnotising for the protagonist, because she is “a storm of realness, destroying everything that is not biology” [“orkan realności, który niszczy wszystko, co nie jest biologią”] (Lipski, 2015a, p. 215). We keep reading:

Ewa consisted of a dark, volcanic mass, which was a vital force, fluid life and charm, from which unnamed ideas gushed out because her technique of manifestation could not – and did not want to – match the anonymous ideas of brains infected with logic. (Lipski, 2015a, p. 95)⁵

The essence of femininity is therefore associated with matter: volcanic, liquid, and amorphous. Inadvertently, there is an association with Schulz’s vision from *Traktat o manekinach albo Wtóra Księga Rodzaju* [*A Treatise on Mannequins, or The Next Book of Genesis*]: “Matter is prone to endless fecundity, an inexhaustible vital force; it has a beguiling power of temptation that entices us to become creators in our own right” [“Materii dana jest nieskończona płodność, niewyczerpana moc życiowa i zarazem uwodna siła pokusy, która nas ęci do formowania”] (Schulz, 1934, p. 49).⁶ The heroine is, therefore, the personification of Bergson’s *élan vital*, laced with anxiety and mystery. There is no doubt that this is a patriarchal image of femininity, “voluptuously pliant and yielding in a feminine way, acquiescent in

⁵ “Ewa składała się z ciemnej, wulkanicznej masy, która była siłą witalną, płynnym życiem i wdziękiem, z której tryskały nienazwane idee, bo jej technika uzewnętrzniania się nie mogła dorównać – i nie chciała – anonimowym pomysłom mózgów zarażonych logicznością.”

⁶ All translated citation from *The Cinnamon Shops and Other Stories*, translated by John Curran Davis, CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 1934.

the face of all impulses” [“lubieżnie podatnej, po kobiecemu plastycznej, uległej wobec wszelkich impulsów”] (Schulz, 1934, pp. 49–50), standing in opposition to the hard ordered world of male logic.

Femininity in Lipski’s artistic vision is a cliché built on patriarchal images that make us perceive women as elemental beings, often described by means of animalisation. Lipski usually compares them to cats which, although domesticated, still seem to be half-wild and untamed. Ewa is somehow one of them, she lives around them, and her room is full of cat mascots. In Lipski’s prose, women, like cats, are pure instinct, the essence of life, its sensuality and spontaneity.

Ewa is a symbol of the essence of femininity, a physical representation of the first mother, the biblical Eve, and is part of the circle of associations linked with what promotes fertility and growth, but also with what is seductive and inevitable as destiny. In this context, the identification of the heroine with matter is not accidental, because “the mother is always the same, in the final analysis, it is always the earth, which in the human race is replaced by the woman in a whole range of mothers and daughters” [“matka zawsze jest ta sama, w ostatecznym rozrachunku jest nią zawsze ziemia, którą w rodzaju ludzkim zastępuje kobieta w całym szeregu matek i córek”] (Neumann, 2008, p. 62). Emil, losing his beloved, reaches the last, initiating moment – he grows out of anxiety, which was born of a difficult relationship with his mother, and which had its extension in the relationship with the obsessive-compulsive Ewa. This is the moment of the protagonist coming to terms with the absence of a mother figure in his life while freeing himself from her emotional yoke. Through her death in water, Ewa completed Emil’s initiation process because:

the vitality and activity of the archetype of the mother [...] is reproduced in a continuous cycle of symbolic rebirth in a complex formation of the mental order of (every) person and gives birth to an unconscious longing to return to the womb of the mother (earth, water, tree) and to achieve a rebirth. (Jaworska-Witkowska, 2014, p. 94)⁷

Emil is no longer a prisoner of the Great Mother – “insatiable, never to be satisfied, with the unbridled spontaneity of the forms taken, with the lustful and passionate nature of *all life*” [“nienasyconej, nigdy niedającej się zaspokoić, o nieokiełznanej żywiołowości przyjmowanych form, o pożądlivej i namiętnej naturze *życia wszelkiego*”] (Jaworska-Witkowska, 2014, p. 91).

⁷ “żywołność i aktywność archetypu matki jest odtwarzana w nieustannym cyklu symbolicznego odrodzenia w złożonej formacji porządku psychicznego (każdego) człowieka i rodzi nieświadomą tęsknotę powrotu do łona matki (ziemi, wody, drzewa) i dostąpienia odrodzenia.”

The specificity of Leo Lipski's literary vision of femininity is certainly to show it in the context of the hydrological-lunar metaphor. It is no coincidence that the anthropocosmic fertility syndrome, which was created on the basis of the research of numerous cultural anthropologists, includes water, earth, moon, and woman (Masłowska, 2014, p. 37). Femininity in Lipski's prose is inextricably linked to the phases of the moon, which functions in the broadly understood culture as a symbol of, among other things, femininity itself, and in the surroundings of or vicinity of water, or even under its surface. There is a strong cult of the moon and sun, which can be noted even in archaic cultures, called "eyes of the sky," in which the sun embodied the good eye, and the moon, the bad. In other legends, both celestial bodies were children of the supreme being, the sun – a son and thus a male element, while the moon – a daughter and a symbol of femininity. It was then known that the moon reflected the sunlight (Sawicka, 2002, p. 6). This aforementioned subordination of the moon to the sun is significant in the context of exposing patriarchal images encoded in the mentioned narratives.

The perception of the moon in symbiosis with water bodies is confirmed by the following excerpt from *Niespokojni*: "The moon – a magic rock, which makes dogs howl, cats scream, lunatics go wandering out of their rooms, menstruation flow, Negroes dance, and silence or strange anxiety come down on people – was floating on the water" ["Księżyc – czarodziejski kamień, z którego powodu wyją psy, wrzeszczą koty, nawiedzeni luną wychodzą z pokojów, miesiączka płynie, Murzyni tańczą, a na ludzi schodzi cisza lub dziwny niepokój – pływał po wodzie"] (Lipski, 2015a, p. 146). As a result of this interaction, living beings function as if in a trance.

Emil writes down words which are significant in this context:

Women. Women's ovaries swell up, their vaginas grow plump; deranged, they sit and cry on piles of gowns, or stare through windows with vacant eyes. They are tired of the moons. (Lipski, 2015a, p. 141)⁸

The moon is also connected to the menstrual cycle. Women are therefore suspended between mystery and pure biology, which is a signal of the loosening of male-centric discourses about the categories of femininity and women. For centuries, there has been a conviction that women menstruate during the new moon, while ovulation takes place while the moon is full. It is possible that Lipski thus suggests that Ewa is in a trance since there is a full moon, during which women are guided by intuition and instinct. It can be supposed that the writer combines

⁸ "Kobiety. Kobietom puchną jajniki, pęcznieją pochwy; obłąkane, na stosie sukien, siedzą i płaczą, albo patrzą pustymi oczyma przez okna. Męczą je księżyce."

the fatality of women with the full moon. From this, it can be concluded that at the time of Ewa's suicide, there was also a full moon because the ritual of intercourse with Emil preceded this act, and the next chapter is entitled *Ewa i księżycy* [*Ewa and the Moons*]. Without a doubt, her suicide was nothing more than the second stage of the ritual.

After the full moon, it starts to disappear so that it can completely "vanish" for some time. The new moon indicates the end of a cycle or stage. By freeing herself from her restraining body, Ewa freed Emil, who thus closes a stage of his life, marked by a tormenting mother figure. The full moon is a time of fertility, and after the ritual, Ewa felt Emil "like a mental fetus." With her two-stage ceremony, she gave him a new birth, giving him freedom. Thus, Emil reached the final stage of initiation.

The reflection of the moon on the surface of the water – the most unstable mirror – brings to mind the Buddhist category of reflection. It concerns mainly transitoriness, unreality, as well as constant movement and changes in the world (Olszewski, 2002, p. 220). The bodies of water presented in Lipski's novels are also a source of death. The chapter *Ewa i księżycy* from *Niespokojni* is significant here. One would like to say that the heroine was presented here in the manner of Ophelia, who was a very popular motif in modernist literature:

She walked slowly along the marina like a blind woman, in the dark, with the instinct of unknown places, she found one boat that was not tied up. A tugboat horn sang out from far away, and she, lying under the great sky, let herself be carried by the current, slowly, because at the mouth, the river is tired after travelling such a long way. (Lipski, 2015a, p. 145)⁹

It is worth recalling in this context the observation by Marta Cuber (2011) – Lipski recorded the prophecy of Ewa's suicidal death in Emil's prophetic dream: "He went to sleep. He dreamt of a water-dripping, charred moon being carried out of the house" ["Poszedł spać. Śnił mu się ociekający wodą, zwęglony księżyc, który wynoszono z domu"] (Lipski, 2015a, p. 42).¹⁰ The moon burned down, just like Ewa, who, immersed in her autistic-schizophrenic trance, finally found solace

⁹ "Poszła powoli wzdłuż przystani jak ślepa, po omacku, instynktem miejsc nieznanych, znalazła jedną łódkę, która nie była przywiązana. Z daleka zawył holownik, a ona, leżąc pod wielkim niebem, dawała się unosić prądowi, pomału, bo rzeka przy ujściu zmęczona jest przebyciem dalekiej drogi."

¹⁰ This is also important in the context of the autobiographical aspects of this prose, as Cuber (2011, p. 100) writes in his *Trofea wyobraźni [Imagination Trophies]*: "This is a contamination of three different experiences: Ewa's suicide in the novel, the motif of the Shoah, evoked by the vision of a charred body, and the ritual of carrying the deceased in a coffin out of the house" ["Jest to kontaminacja trzech różnych doświadczeń: powieściowego samobójstwa Ewy, motywu Zagłady, ewokowanego wizją zwęglonego ciała, oraz rytuału wynoszenia nieboszczyka w trumnie z domu"].

in the water, with which she was bound by a strange, almost mystical, connection. The moon in the dream was carried out of the house, just as Ewa's femininity left her restrictive body. The dream of a charred moon that disappears into the depths of water and then returns and is born again can also be a metaphor for a full moon that will from now on die to be born again.

Ewa, after drowning, takes on clearly androgynous features, and this refers the viewer to the motif of the androgyne, popular in the modern era, which is antinomial because it means unity, but also a kind of dissonance. "The mythical androgyne was to be the human form of the cosmic egg, the beginning of all cosmogony and the end of all eschatology" ["Mityczny androgyn miał być człecoształtnym upostaciowieniem jaja kosmicznego, początkiem wszelkiej kosmogonii i końcem wszelkiej eschatologii"] (Gosk, 1998, p. 64).

Moreover, the motto, which opens the chapter, originating from Adam Mickiewicz *Świtez*, is also significant here:

The stars above you
and the stars below you
And you will see two moons. (Lipski, 2015a, p. 142)¹¹

The creative impulse for the creation of this ballad was a communal story about nymphs, living in a lake, who preferred death by drowning and turning into herbs, i.e. a complete connection with nature, rather than a disgrace and an attack on their femininity. In addition, the quoted passage refers to two moons, one visible in the sky and the other reflected on the surface of the water, which in turn reflects the whole world. It is also a reference to the Buddhist vision of awakening, the discovery of truth because reaching the full level of cognition is often compared to a reflection on the surface of the water, which has two dimensions: superficial and deep. In the context of modernist art, the latter aspect is particularly important.

However, the vision of femininity in *Niespokojni* differs slightly from its creation in *Piotruś* [*Peter*], a mini-novel where, apart from

themes of annihilation [...] and post-war struggles [...], one tends to accentuate the writer's inclinations to impress with a licentious, sometimes pornographic eroticism, portraying "customary boundaries" and the predilection to present images of ugliness, decay, rotting and excrement, emblematically suggesting the condition of the world after a disaster. (Doha, 2013b, p. 73)¹²

¹¹ "Gwiazdy nad tobą / i gwiazdy pod tobą / I dwa obaczysz księżycy."

¹² "zagładowych wątków [...] oraz powojennych zmagają [...] zwykle się uwypuklać skłonności pisarza do epatowania wyuzdaną, niekiedy ocierającą się o pornografię erotyką, portretowanie

So, in the latter of the aforementioned works, it also has a second, more demonic face. While Ewa of *Niespokojni* (and Batia of *Piotruś*) is a physical representation of the life-giving momentum of existence, Mrs Cin is the personification of an enemy force. Although she is in denial of the young heroines, she breaks the rules of society just like they do, she is just as intense and addictive, just as lively and, above all, she also has power over men. She is characterised by a kind of perverse, but also repellent sexuality. Mrs Cin “[is] the opposite of the femininity that the heroine of *Niespokojni* embodies. If we assume that femininity is the »fullness and abyss« everything and nothing, Mrs Cin can be considered a logical counterweight to Ewa” [“Jest odwrotną stroną kobiecości, którą uosabia bohaterka *Niespokojnych*. Jeżeli przyjmiemy, że kobiecość to »pełnia i otchłań«, wszystko i nic, panią Cin (Nic) można uznać za logiczną przeciwwagę Ewy”] (Jędrzejewska, 2017, p. 15).

As I have already signalled, Mrs Cin, who is a personification of chaos and the yawning abyss, gains power over Piotruś through sadomasochistic practices (a theme popular at the time as a result of the work of Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, who was fascinated with Freud). She is the most demonic vision of femininity, but also the most vulgar. She has total power over the male protagonist. She preys on Piotruś’s weaknesses, who presumably sees her as the physical representation of all the physical conditions that imprison him, which, like Mrs Cin, cannot be resisted.

This state of affairs continues until Batia, who is the essence of life, stands in the protagonist’s way. Iwona Jędrzejewska (2017) rightly observes that the artist-painter is somebody between the lovely Ewa of *Niespokojni* and the repellent Mrs Cin (cf. Jędrzejewska, 2017). She radiates magnetic charm. She has eyes the colour of the sea, she often stays near bodies of water, from where Lipski’s heroines seem to draw energy, which is symptomatic in the context of femininity understood through the prism of water metaphors.

There is no doubt that Lipski is the heir to the modernist fear of emancipation. The “fall” of the epoch in the form of a fear of women was here converted into fascination, thus shifting the centre of gravity to a fetishist fascination with fluids and instincts. All these heroines, Ewa, Batia and Mrs Cin, bear the hallmarks of the fatal woman. All of them take control of the male protagonists. The source of the fatal nature of women in this prose is the moon.

Paradoxically, in Lipski’s prose, women have a fatal trait and power over a man, but only to help him be born again, to reach the next level of initiation, they are his liaisons with the Transcendent, so again we are dealing with a patriarchal framing that puts the man in the foreground. A woman is supposed to be just a guide,

»obyczajowej graniczności« oraz upodobanie do przedstawiania obrazów brzydoty, rozpadu, gnicia i ekskrementów, emblematycznie sugerujących kondycję świata po katastrofie.”

someone to “lead him to the other side,” which is significant in the context of the metaphor of the reflection on the surface of the water. Despite all the differences between female characters in this prose, they have a lot in common, which indicates that we are dealing with several reinterpretations of the same motif – the original femininity, which is close to nature. As Emil stated, women are the quintessence of the intensity of experience. This view of femininity finds its extension in *Piotruś*:

Women are kind of more real. They are a storm of reality that destroys everything that is not biology. A woman is more human. Men are a secondary, random creation. They weren't part of the plan. They took over. Human actually means – woman. Men revolve around her, choosing the most bizarre functions [...] and they will never find satisfaction, not anywhere. Women, on the contrary. On the beach. The satisfaction of men is not in the plan of Earth. (Lipski, 2015b, p. 215)¹³

Undoubtedly, the female creations from *Piotruś* are an extension of the predatory vision of femininity from *Niespokojni*. They are “more human” here, not because men are more spiritual and they are more mundane, on the contrary: women are closer to the empirical and transcendental reality.

Batia is described through the prism of an animalistic-aquatic metaphor: she lives by the sea, and therefore in close proximity to a vast body of water. In *Piotruś*, the sea, which is in close correlation with femininity, “stretched like a cat” [“przeciągało się jak kot”] (Lipski, 2015b, p. 221), so it also gains the characteristics of a predatory animal. The heroine's eyes were also “the colour of the sea and changing with it” [“były koloru morza i wraz z nim zmieniające się”] (p. 221), reflecting its wavy motion: “She looked at me with her big, glassy, green, neon-blue eyes, in which the sea rippled” [“Ona patrzyła na mnie dużymi, szklistymi oczami, zielonymi, neonowoniebieskimi, w których falowało morze”] (p. 235). During sexual intercourse, Batia also “slowly, just as the sea [...] climbed the stairs of desire” [“wolno, tak jak morze [...] wchodziła na stopnie pożądania”] (p. 221) and “purred like a cat all the time” [“mruzczała niczym kot przeciągle”] (p. 221). Her eyes were “shining in the dark like a cat's” [“błyszczały w mroku jak kocie”] (p. 226) and she “smelled of sea salt” [“pachniała solą morską”] (p. 229). Batia's body was not yet the body of a woman, but of a girl, slightly boyish, which emphasises her androgyny and self-sufficiency.

¹³ “Kobiety są bardziej jakby naprawdę. Są orkanem rzeczywistości, który niszczy wszystko, co nie jest biologią. Kobieta jest bardziej człowiekiem. Mężczyźni stanowią uboczny, jakby przypadkowy twór. Nie byli w planie. Zawładnęli nim. Człowiek to właściwie – kobieta. Mężczyźni krążą wokół niej, wybierając najdziwaczniejsze funkcje [...] i nigdy, i nigdzie nie znajdują zadowolenia. Kobiety wprost przeciwnie. Na plaży. Zadowolenie mężczyzn nie znajduje się w planie Ziemi.”

Each of the heroines bears the characteristics of the mythical Magna Mater, Mother Earth, the All-Mother. Beautiful Ewa has power not only over a man but also over life in general, like the liberated Batia, who is the quintessence of the *élan vital*. The repellent and commanding Mrs Cin represents the chaos of life, the destructive element, the brutal practices of nature that limit humanity. Each contact between the male protagonists and the women takes on an epiphanic character and becomes another revelation on the way to the final initiation, the Mystery of Existence.

In Lipski's prose, women are the quintessence of energy, flowing from nature. The movement or element of life, which is represented on the pages of the novels by women, is Lipski's obsession.¹⁴ The female literary creations in Lipski's prose are not so much the carriers of death as the forces that ensnare men. Among other things, this is the difference between Lipski's vision of the *femme fatale* and the traditional view of this motif, as they do not lead to the direct defeat of the protagonist. However, it is at the same time the quintessence of the androcentric look at women, because even when one speaks about them, it is only to instrumentalise and then functionalise them.

Taking into account the biographical facts of the writer's life, several conclusions can be drawn. First of all, Ewa, whose prototype is seen in Ida – Lipski's great love – is, therefore, a carrier of his difficult experiences of love, all the more dramatic because the author was probably also tormented by the uncertainty of the fate of the woman whom he symbolically kills in the work, which most likely restrained Lipski for years (Maciejowska, 2015, p. 9). Batia is the quintessence of life's momentum, the epitome of the vital forces that Lipski undoubtedly desired, which was impossible due to his worsening health, but also to the traumatic experiences that burdened him. And finally, Mrs Cin, who represents the objectification of the crippled individual, who is fully dependent on the grace of other people – as we know, most often women.¹⁵

¹⁴ As noted by Barbara Zielińska (1998), “The language in *Piotruś* is particularly predisposed to record all kinds of variations of movement, circulation, entanglement, pulsation of biology. [...] All of these motifs of circulation, floating, rising, and falling, tide and drain are regulated as if by one movement of the hands, which can only form circular and fluid shapes. This is how cyclicity speaks, eternally reborn biology [...]” [“Język *Piotrusia* odznacza się szczególną predylekcją do zapisywania najróżniejszych odmian ruchu, krążenia, oplatania, pulsowania biologii. [...] Wszystkie te motywy krążenia, opływania, wzrastania i gaśnięcia, przyływu i odpływu regulowane są jakby jednym ruchem rąk, które potrafią wykonywać tylko kształty koliste i płynne. W ten sposób przemawia cykliczność, wiecznie odradzająca się biologia [...]”].

¹⁵ There were, of course, men among the writer's friends, but on a daily basis, he was at the mercy of women. He was taken care of by Łucja Gliksman, and the roles of secretaries were often played by friends who wrote his texts, went to the post office, or even created together with him.

In his prose, Lipski is not so much trying to restore the planes of the male–female understanding as he is questioning them, and instead proposes, as a (self) therapeutic form, the possibility of paradoxical fulfilment of love through the story, which problematises and reveals the reasons for the fiasco of feelings, as well as points to the crevices of authenticity opening up in the reality of the literary game, where the world of eroticism is an important element. The women in this prose are masters, operating with ancient intuitive knowledge of the world, which attracts and hypnotises the “logically infected brains” of men, because only through this Mystery can they reach further degrees of initiation, the fundamental element of which becomes abandonment. Women here are the guardians and enforcers of male destiny, so there is no doubt that we are dealing with a reinterpretation of the *femme fatale* motif functioning in culture. The fear of women, which is a symptom of modern misogynist discourse, has been transformed here into fascination, resulting also, or perhaps above all, from the awareness of the inevitability of the male fate.

Translated into English: Lingua Lab

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Thus, both on a daily basis and in the space of artistic activity, the writer was fully dependent on numerous women (Maciejowska, 2015, p. 13).

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