

# Jacek Kaczmariski's life – after death – turned upside down, or the media discourse surrounding Patrycja Volny's book *Niewygodna. Autobiografia* [Inconvenient. An Autobiography]

Krzysztof Gajda

ORCID: 0000-0002-4456-9229

The announcement that by the end of November 2024, Agora publishing house would release Patrycja Volny's autobiography entitled *Niewygodna* [*Inconvenient*] generated considerable interest. For several winter weeks, the media was abuzz with talk about the publication and its author, with each press release also mentioning her father, Jacek Kaczmariski. Patrycja Volny, born in February 1988, was not yet 37 years old when her autobiography was published. Her acting career, which includes only a few supporting roles<sup>1</sup> at most, clearly indicates that it was not her artistic achievements that drew media attention to this relatively young person and her book. The genre label of the subtitle "autobiography" suggests a focus on her own life.

<sup>1</sup> Her Wikipedia bio contains four sentences concerning her acting career, e.g. her theatrical debut at the age of eight, performing in student etudes, or co-founding a theatrical group in the North of France. Her first meaningful role was that of the Good Tidings in Agnieszka Holland's *Pokot* [*Spoor*]. This was a supporting role, like others in, e.g. *Mr. Jones, Stulecie winnych* [*Our century*], episodes of the series 1983 or *Ojciec Mateusz* [*Father Mateusz*].

The circumstances of the publication, the promotional campaign, and the media and social reactions reveal a lot about the current state of the “personal document” genre.

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Autobiographical writing as a subject of research has already become the subject of extensive literature<sup>2</sup>, developing in many directions and taking into account the latest trends in the humanities. With the development of said humanities, research on autobiography also covers gender issues, drawing attention to women’s creativity and the relationship between the rules of the genre and the creation and image of the subject’s identity<sup>3</sup>.

In her article „The Other Voice: Autobiographies of Women Writers”, Mary G. Mason examines four autobiographical texts written by English female authors from the 15th to 20th centuries. She highlights an important pattern shared by all the authors discussed – the tendency to „combine one’s own image with another, equal image.” These images are often of husbands but can also include other women, children, or communities. A notable variation of this pattern of otherness and equality appears in narratives where the other is neither a life partner nor an equal, such as a spouse or a literary creation, but rather an overwhelming model or ideal—someone the author must confront to define her identity<sup>4</sup>. Simultaneously,

<sup>2</sup> As recently as 1992, Andrzej Cieński noted (not entirely correctly) that historical and theoretical literature on this subject is very scarce in Polish, but well-developed in Western countries (Andrzej Cieński, *Pamiętniki i autobiografie światowe* [Memoirs and autobiographies in the world] [Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1992], 5). Since then, a lot has happened in Poland, to name but the 2001 publication in of translations of the works of the world’s most famous researcher on this subject, Philippe Lejeune, *Variations on a Certain Pact. On Autobiography*, ed. by Regina Lubas-Bartoszyńska, transl. by Wincenty Grajewski et al. [Kraków: Universitas, 2001]). It includes texts from 1975–1999, among them the most famous one on the autobiographical pact and later authorial commentaries. In Polish literary studies, Małgorzata Czermińska is an undisputed authority on autobiography, so it is no surprise that she edited a selection of translations of canonical Western texts, *Autobiografia* [Autobiography], ed. by Małgorzata Czermińska [Gdańsk: Słowo/Obraz Terytoria, 2009]). It should be noted, however, that most of the articles included in the collection had already been made available to Polish readers much earlier, in issue LXX of *Pamiętnik Literacki* from 1979. The researcher herself published a number of works, including her best-known *Autobiograficzny trójkąt: świadectwo, wyznanie i wyzwanie* [The autobiographical triangle: witness, confession, challenge, Second edition, revised [Kraków: Universitas, 2020]), where she also refers to earlier publications on this subject. The development of the humanities, including interdisciplinarity, is also evident in autobiography research. In 1991, Anna Giza’s book *Życie jako opowieść* [Life as a Story] was published (Anna Giza, *Życie jako opowieść. Analiza materiałów autobiograficznych w perspektywie socjologii wiedzy* [Life as a Story: An analysis of Autobiographical Materials from the Perspective of the Sociology of Knowledge] [Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1991]). In 2000, the book *Autobiografia. Terapeutyczny wymiar pisania o sobie* [Autobiography: The Therapeutic Dimension of Writing About Oneself] by the Italian andragogist (adult educator) Duccio Demetrio was published in Polish (Kraków: Oficyna Wydawnicza Impuls, 2000). There are also journal issues devoted to autobiographical topics; in 2012, the cultural quarterly *Opcje* published a special issue entitled *Autobiografia* [Autobiography], and in 2018, the title *Autobiografie* [Autobiographies] was a special issue of *Teksty Drugie*. In the latter one can find, among other things, an article by Aleksandra Grzemska, which is of interest in the context of family relationships (Aleksandra Grzemska, „Matki i córki w polu autobiograficznym” [„Mothers and Daughters in the Autobiographical Field”], *Teksty Drugie* 6 [2018]: 77–91). In 2020, an issue of the scientific and literary quarterly *Tekstualia* entitled *Autobiografia w kulturze* [Autobiography in culture] was published. The importance and need for research on autobiography in contemporary cultural reality is most clearly demonstrated by the establishment of Polish Autobiographical Society in Szczecin in 2013 (its president is Prof. Inga Iwasiów). The Society supports the publication of scholarly semi-annual *Autobiografia. Literatura. Kultura. Media.*] This, of course, is but a cursory overview of the relevant literature.

<sup>3</sup> In 2014, women’s personal documentary literature became the subject of the semi-annual journal „*Autobiografia. Literatura. Kultura. Media.*”. The issue opened with an article by Inga Iwasiów (Inga Iwasiów, „Tożsamość, performatywność, komunikacja – genderowe aspekty autobiografizmu” [“Identity, performativity, communication – gender-related aspects of autobiography”] *Autobiografia. Literatura. Kultura. Media* 1 [2014]: 7–11).

<sup>4</sup> Mary G. Mason, „The other voice. Autobiographies of women writers”, in: *Autobiografia*, 202–203.

the researcher recognizes the paradox of being caught in such relationships, where "one is prevented from finding one's self by being too close to the other or others"<sup>5</sup>. Just looking at the table of contents of the book *Niewygodna* makes these comparisons clear. Individual chapters are titled: *On/ Oni/ My/ Ja* [*He / They / We / I*]. Each chapter explores a different relationship, ultimately leading to an attempt at defining oneself.

Anna Pekaniec highlights similar features in her work *Literatura dokumentu osobistego kobiet. Ewolucja teorii, zmiany praktyk lekturowych* [*The literature of women's personal documents: The evolution of theory, changes in reading practices*], noting that this type of autobiographical writing is called *specular autobiography*. The researcher also stresses that "reflecting themselves as if in a (distorted?) mirror in stories about close or distant friends, family members, loved ones or hated ones, autobiographers do not necessarily arrive at an adequate image of themselves"<sup>6</sup>. Pekaniec also cites the autobiographical concept of Susan Stanford Friedman, "who emphasizes the tensions in female autobiographical identity - connoted by the authors' vacillation between individuality and community"<sup>7</sup>.

In *Encyklopedia gender* [*Encyclopedia of gender*], the entry "Autobiography" concludes with a reflection on new trends in personal documentary literature of women, who uniquely reveal themselves or violate social taboos. Katarzyna Nadana-Sokołowska includes here Halszka Opfer's *Kato-tata* [*Torture-dad*] and Danuta Wałęsa's autobiography *Marzenia i tajemnice* [*Dreams and Secrets*].

The author of *Niewygodna* is clear about her disruptive intentions in her press comments: "I'm hoping to send a message to women that they don't have to remain silent"<sup>8</sup> – this turn of phrase is recurrent in her interviews. The declared and narratively realized universalization of experience is both the strength and weakness of the message. Its strength lies in arousing a sense of solidarity, speaking on behalf of women who are being harmed and see a reflection of their own traumatic experiences in this story. Yet this is also a source of its weakness, manifested in its susceptibility to ideological trends, similarity to other analogous narratives, all of which reduce the narrative's credibility, even if the atmosphere of media hype suggests otherwise.

Biographies of women often emphasize their unique qualities that allowed them to lead courageous lives despite the limitations imposed by the patriarchal order. This image is shaped, for example, by Jerzy Chociłowski's book *Niezwykłe kobiety drugiej Rzeczypospolitej* [*Extraordinary women of the Second Polish Republic*] or *Buntowniczkini. Niezwykłe Polki, które robiły, co chciały* [*Rebels: Extraordinary Polish women who did what they wanted*] by Andrzej Fedorowicz. Volna's autobiography is part of the tradition of women rebelling against the patriarchal world, for whom *mis andry* is a defensive stance developed during the years of suffering. Although the poet's daughter has been heard and even cherished by the media since her first revelations in 2007, her self-creation as a victim builds the legend of an "inconvenient" woman ("For years, Patrycja Volny, Jacek Kaczmarski's daughter,

<sup>5</sup> Mason, 206.

<sup>6</sup> Anna Pekaniec, „Literatura dokumentu osobistego kobiet. Ewolucja teorii, zmiany praktyk lekturowych” [„The literature of women's personal document. Evolution of theory, changes in reading practices”], *Autobiografia. Literatura. Kultura. Media* 1 (2014): 20.

<sup>7</sup> Pekaniec, „Literatura dokumentu osobistego kobiet”, 20.

<sup>8</sup> „«Nie pisz książki o ojcu». Ale Patrycja Volny napisała: o Jacku Kaczmarskim, przemocy i molestowaniu”, Natalia Waloch rozmawia z Patrycją Volny, [“Don't write a book about your father”. But Patrycja Volny did write: about Jacek Kaczmarski, violence and abuse”, Natalia Waloch in conversation with Patrycja Volny”], *Wysokie Obcasy*, listopad 2024.

has faced unprecedented attacks for telling the truth about the legendary bard<sup>9</sup>). Her confessions about the multigenerational relay of male violence against women, presented as the backdrop to her mother's family history and failed relationships with men, are meant to justify the confession that comes at some point: "I tried not to think about men. I stopped trusting them quite early on."<sup>10</sup> For some, this bitter truth will be a fully justified attitude of a person hurt by members of a violent gender; for others, it may be a red flag, a warning against a dangerous ideologization of discourse.

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For some time (after her father's death in 2004), Patrycja Volny was better known in Poland as Patrycja Kaczmarska. She was born in Munich, where her parents, Ewa Volny and Jacek Kaczmarski<sup>11</sup> lived and worked at the time. In the 1980s, her father was a legendary artist, the bard of the Solidarity movement, and author of *Mury*, *Oblawa*, *Nasza klasa*, *Zbroja*, and many other anthems of his generation. In the mid-1990s, after Radio Free Europe was shut down, her family moved to Australia.

As part of his "extra-curricular activities," the former singer translated several classic fairy tales for Disney drawings, which probably inspired him to try his hand at children's literature. The theme and inspiration came - as was often the case with Kaczmarski - from real life. His family's move (in 1995) and their first months in Australia served as the basis for a story entitled *Życie do góry nogami* (*Living upside-down*). The book blurb stated that Kaczmarski is known to everyone as the bard of the martial law generation and that "[after he had done several translations] he wrote his own [children's] book about the incredible adventure that was moving to Australia":

The co-author and narrator is eight-year-old Patrycja, whose fairy tales create the unique atmosphere of "*Życie do góry nogami*." Father and daughter have a wealth of imagination and a sense of humor that shines through on every page of the book. Comic realism? That seems to be the perfect description for this story - full of warmth, truth, love, and fascination with the exotic nature of the Antipodes<sup>12</sup>.

The 80-page book, containing 14 neat, witty stories, was Patrycja Volna's only literary work until the publication of her autobiography. Large excerpts from these stories are quoted in *Niewygodna*, serving as counterpoints to bitter confessions about childhood, youth, and life. In the description

<sup>9</sup> Natalia Waloch, „Alkohol, przemoc, trauma. Patrycja Volny napisała autobiografię o życiu z ojcem Jackiem Kaczmarskim” [„Alcohol, violence, trauma. Patrycja Volny wrote an autobiography about life with her father Jacek Kaczmarski”], *Wysokie Obcasy*, 7.11.2024.

<sup>10</sup> Patrycja Volny, *Niewygodna. Autobiografia* (Warszawa: Agora, 2024, ebook MOBI), 35.

<sup>11</sup> Volny is her mother's surname, after her second husband, a Czech. The parents decided to give their daughter a more „international” last name, because „Kaczmarski” is difficult to pronounce outside Poland, which is where Patrycja was born and spent most of her life. In Poland, her father's surname would have been a burden, even though the daughter claims that she hadn't realised it for a long time. His mythology was reinforced by his political migration, when only his voice was reaching the isolated country via Radio Free Europe and cassette recordings produced in the underground. Kaczmarski boasts the largest discography in Poland: so far 62 CD records have been released (and a five-part DVD set) – these contain studio and concert recordings of almost five hundred songs. Anthologies of more than 650 of his texts have been reprinted (including music-less poems). As demonstrated in a number of scholarly works, Kaczmarski raised song lyrics to the status of poetry. He authored lyrics to a „blues-opera”, wrote numerous essays, gave hundreds of interviews, featured in a few documentaries. In the 1990s he published four novels, all of which include autobiographical elements. The most important one, *Autoportret z kanalią* [Self-portrait with a scumbag], is an ironic pamphlet against himself and the environment of the opposition and political emigration.

<sup>12</sup> Jacek Kaczmarski, Patrycja Volny, *Życie do góry nogami* [Living upside-down] (Warszawa: Egmont, 1997).

of collaborating with her father on *Życie do góry nogami*, Volny provides a glimpse of her relationship with her father, her worldview, and, above all, her enigmatic way of presenting events in language:

My dad enjoyed my writing. When I was eight, he came up with the idea of publishing my work - creating something together, daughter and father. He tried to follow in the footsteps of his mother, who was fascinated by the idea of education through art. He was interested in it too – in the concept. In practice, he didn't have the patience to fully participate in the writing process with me. I brought him stories about our lives and some made-up fairy tales, and he edited them, sometimes adding something or inserting commas. I liked that he liked what I was doing - the pride with which he talked about me. When „Życie do góry nogami” came out, I felt proud too. We were already living on the other side of the equator at the time and decided that „Living upside-down” was the perfect title for our joint book. There was a koala on the cover. My father was very upset about this cover. His name was written in a slightly larger font than his daughter's name. After his death, in the 2004 edition, the font used for my father's name was so large that I almost disappeared<sup>13</sup>.

The above excerpt clearly indicates that the eight-year-old girl was the true author of the described book. The father, who only “edited, added something, inserted commas,” seems to be someone who ultimately gained unfairly from his daughter's remarkable literary talent. The sense of (at least) equity in this relationship is reflected in the phrase “we decided” in the assessment of the title given (by whom - remains unknown) to the book. The paragraph, starting with expressions of positive emotions, begins with the word “dad.” What follows are mainly impersonal forms or coolly neutral pronouns, confirming the distance, lack of educational skill, and impatience of the parent. The pride shown by the antagonist in this story appears to be nothing more than a game, an illusion, a form of emotional trap into which the girl, craving affection, falls. Everything builds toward a dramatic conclusion. The father – this much more formal word appears twice at the end, and in negative contexts – “got terribly upset” about the book cover. But was the reason for his anger the koala mentioned in the previous sentence (the cover, like all the illustrations, was designed by the outstanding poster artist Waldemar Świerzy), or perhaps the fact that “his name was written in a slightly larger font than his daughter's name”? However, if – as is quite likely – this “terrible upset” was indeed about the font size used for the authors' names, was it because his name was written too small in relation to his daughter's name? Or perhaps the opposite: a father proud of his daughter (who had, after all, achieved a great deal artistically) was disappointed that his name had been unnecessarily enlarged instead of highlighting that of his talented daughter? The situation described in the last sentence would suggest precisely this motivation. When Kaczmarek died, there was no one left to look after the matter, and the publisher naturally highlighted the name of the famous artist. Another question is whether the artist was really upset or whether it was just a game, a pretense of indignation, which the hypersensitive child still perceives with dramatic seriousness, even now, years later. Throughout this passage, written by the 37-year-old author-narrator, the reader is struck by the intermingling of the emotional experiences of an eight-year-old girl with the objectified story of an adult. It is as if the author were unable or unwilling to interpret the events presented from a distance, or as if she deliberately created a context of danger in relation to herself. The infantilization of experience goes hand in hand

<sup>13</sup>Volny, 21.

with stylistic ineptitude, which, on the one hand, causes the reader to feel a sense of ambiguity, and on the other hand, a striking aversion to the character described.

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Patrycja Volny has been attracting media attention since her interview for TVN's *Rozmowy w toku* talk show, less than three years after her father's death (March 2, 2007). In her autobiography, she recalls that interview:

"You smashed it," said Weronika Ciechowska when we went out to eat after recording the program with Ewa Drzyzga.

Well, I did.

I wasn't really planning to say all of that. But I arrived at the TV studio emotional, all caught up in Michał. A resentful teenager. I sat on the couch in the studio as if it were a therapist's couch.

I remember it vaguely. Drzyzga interviewed the children of famous fathers. Kuroń, Ciechowski, and me. I answered honestly. That was that "smashing it".

After the recording, the production team came up to me and asked if I wanted them to cut something out of the conversation about my perpetually drunk father. I was tired, surprised at myself, at what I had said. If someone smarter than me had been with me at the time, they would probably have asked for it to be edited out. But I went there alone. I said: leave it as it is.

It snowballed.

Kaczmarski would never lay a hand on a woman. He did drink, like everyone else, but a drunkard? Patrycja this, Patrycja that, what an ungrateful girl, a brat, a hysterical woman, and worse. Some of the comments claimed that I wanted to make money off my father, even though I was already living off royalties. I would have little interest in slandering him<sup>14</sup>.

"To smash it" means to do something exceptional, to impress someone. These words can be uttered by a rock star after an energetic concert, an actress after a dazzling performance, or anyone who has done something spectacular. Sometimes, as is often the case with language, these words can indicate criticism of someone's behavior, but here, more advanced communication techniques come into play, such as irony or sarcasm. "Couch" is usually associated with a doctor's office, typically a psychotherapist's, and that is precisely the function it serves here. First, it is worth noting the passage: "I answered honestly. That was that 'smashing it'." Honesty does not necessarily mean truth. It is a concept that refers to emotions, which the author emphasises years later. It is also worth noting the phrase "emotional, all caught up in Michał." On the one hand, this is a reference to a different (previously described) story of a toxic relationship (ending with a broken engagement just before the wedding, a dispute over the reimbursement of abortion costs, etc.) with a man who, according to many people familiar with the relationship, had a huge influence on shaping Volna's opinion of her father<sup>15</sup>. It is also a preliminary admission that external emotional factors were at play, rather than objective truth.

<sup>14</sup>Volny, 69.

<sup>15</sup>This was described in detail by Krzysztof Nowak in an entry published on 7.12.2024 on the webpage of Jacek Kaczmarski Foundation (<https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1CvbeQ6Sgu/>). His opinion was confirmed by Grzegorz Długi, Patrycja Volny's lawyer, representing her in property dispute after Kaczmarski's death. In my conversation with him on 13.02.2025, he claimed that he broke off with Volna because of communicative difficulties.

The ensuing discussion about editing can be understood in many ways. Someone who wants to understand the author's words as truth will interpret the sentence "I was tired, surprised at myself, at what I had said" as her own surprise at her honesty, openness, courage, and fortitude. But logically, these words can also be understood as surprise at the unexpected message created ad hoc, in the speaker's head, in the course of a recording for a TV show, "on the couch in the studio, as if it were a psychotherapist's couch." Today, the meaning of the words "if someone smarter than me had been with me then" must also be inferred by the viewer, and everyone will understand this content according to their own, often preconceived ideas. On the one hand, one can read here an expressed desire to undo the consequences created by this statement, to ease the tone of the unfortunate interview. On the other hand, there is no actual modification of the content spoken at the time. Why would someone who allowed editing, or - as it should probably be understood - cutting and falsifying this supposedly sincere statement, be "smarter"? Why would something like that be written by someone who promotes her autobiography "to encourage women who are being harmed not to remain silent"?

That is not all. We finally reach the paragraph where the author describes the critical reactions of those around her, referring to them as an avalanche (this is also an emotional hyperbole, emphasized by its form as a short clause in a separate paragraph—a common feature in this narrative). To keep the story engaging, the author uses seemingly informal speech and colloquial style: "Kaczmarek would lay a hand on a woman" and so on. What do the words "lay a hand on a woman" mean to the narrator? What were the people who knew and did not know Kaczmarek protesting against?

Let us take a look at how a journalist from *Gazeta Wyborcza* treated this phrase when interviewing the author about the book published by Agora. Both the form of the question asked and the answer given by the author say a lot:

Natalia Waloch: When you first spoke about your father's violence many years ago, there were voices saying that Kaczmarek would never lay a hand on a woman. Unfortunately, he did.

Patrycja Volny: My father was capable of being an incredibly warm, gentle, and charming person, and I believe that some people just weren't able to accept the truth. I'm grateful that there are people who got to see that side of him. I knew him that way, too. It's not like he was always a tormentor; he was also cool, interesting, and, you know, he was my father. In my view, there's something inside us that makes it nearly impossible to hate our own parents; love is always somewhere there. And that's a good thing because it shows our ability to love. I say this even though my love for my father makes my life very difficult. Luckily, as I get older, it's getting better and better<sup>16</sup>.

Referring to the relevant passage in the book, the journalist clearly tried to elicit more details from Volna. Characteristically, she used the same phrase as the narrator of *Niewygoda*, referring to "laying a hand on a woman." As it turns out, her statement hangs in a vacuum, even though in communication, it is supposed to create meaning. The interviewee responds in a completely different tone and direction, steering clear of the topic initiated by the question.

However, what remains most important in the above thread is the phraseological connection "to lay a hand on," or more precisely, the entire expression "to lay a hand on a woman." In

<sup>16</sup> „«Nie pisz książki o ojcu»”.

everyday understanding, this obviously means beating, and readers are supposed to interpret it that way. The point is that in Patrycja's story, this suggestion of beating, or even hitting, implies a blow or slap, or... let's read it anyway.

Mom said, "Pacia, go out into the street and scream."

At first, I thought my parents were fooling around. They sometimes did that. Pretend scuffles, pretend teasing. This time, they were standing in the kitchen, Mom with her nightgown torn, Dad with his hand raised.

He was pushing her with all his strength into the corner so she couldn't escape. It was late at night. "Don't hit her, don't hit her!" I screamed, and then I went out into the street to scream, just as she had asked.

I also remember that when she went to get dressed, he sat down next to me on the bed. He hugged me, and I think he said, "I'm sorry." I was afraid he wouldn't let me go. I could see that my mother was afraid too<sup>17</sup>.

So, a hand is raised. There is also a mother who speaks - she does not shout. Then she also asks. The understatement, confirmed by the fact that the child left, and later the child's emotionality, outweigh the facts. With this description, Patrycja Volny admits that she did not witness any beating or hitting. Beating, of which Kaczmarski has been accused for years by a whole crowd of internet judges, moralists, and media workers. Questioned more thoroughly by Małgorzata Serafin in the „Zwierciadło” podcast, she says:

I know that my mother was always combative and also came from a violent home, and – we've talked about this recently - she told me that my father knew she wouldn't be fine with it, so when he swung at her like that, well... it was more than just aggres... so decisive, it must have been calculated, because he knew that she would not accept it in the long run<sup>18</sup>.

So, this is not only an interpretation of the event but also an admission that "laying a hand on a woman" is not just a euphemism but a literal gesture of raising a hand, intended to frighten and provoke a negative reaction. This is a far cry from the image of a female boxer and tormentor of women that has been created online based on earlier, often modified confessions by his daughter.

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In the September 2007 issue, six months after Ewa Drzyzga's program, the magazine *Charaktery* published a letter from a reader in the section "Adult Children of Alcoholics"<sup>19</sup>, in which she detailed her childhood experiences with her alcoholic father, an artist beloved in Poland but violent at home. For those familiar with the biography of the bard and his daughter, it was clear that the antagonist in the story was Jacek Kaczmarski. Listing numerous signs of youthful rebellion against her relationship with her father, the letter writer casually states: "I was getting really paranoid." She mentions, among other things, theft, driving without

<sup>17</sup>Volny, 37.

<sup>18</sup>„My father told me I was stupid, fat and self-serving». Patrycja Volny with an «inconvenient» story about Jacek Kaczmarski”, Małgorzata Serafin in conversation with Patrycja Volny, *W czułym zwierciadle* (podcast), 6.12.2024.

<sup>19</sup>„Dorosłe Dzieci Alkoholików” [list czytelniczki], *Charaktery* 9 (2007): p. 70, <https://imgur.com/a/zHfom>.

a license, and skipping classes. She also admits to lying, talks about the first symptoms of serious illnesses (bulimia, anorexia), but also about making things up (“I lied, I said I had cancer, diabetes”), which is related to “treating life like a theatrical performance” since her father died in 2004. The author - signed as Patrycja - confesses to numerous behaviors that suggest a tendency to manipulate those around her: “I made up roles for myself. Between the ages of 15 and 17, I tried to commit suicide maybe four times, but a friend always saved me.” After describing her current behavior, betrayals, failed relationships, and hurting others and herself, the author concludes: “I took revenge on everyone around me, and I hurt myself the most, because I guess I got used to it. Now I have my own addiction: hurting people.”<sup>20</sup>

Thanks to focusing on her pathological relationship with her father, the author’s internal problems are relegated to the background, even though she often mentions them in her long autobiographical narrative (covering not only the publication of her latest book, but also interviews and self-presentation on social media). The author herself sometimes asks questions that reveal her anxiety: “Is this schizophrenia? I feel guilty that I didn’t get closer to my grandmother, that I was afraid of her. Today, I see how similar I am to her: a complete void in my head.”<sup>21</sup>

The therapeutic dimension of writing about oneself is a frequent theme in autobiographical reflection. In a chapter devoted to maturity and intimacy, Duccio Demetrio writes, among other things, about illuminating the dark sides of human existence:

Suffering and torment stem from the awareness that our life is a shapeless creation, a failed work of art. The harm and wounds experienced in the past give rise to torment. The desire to thoroughly investigate one’s autobiography, to reach every point without exception, brings the desired effect, at least in some respects<sup>22</sup>.

The Italian andragogist, listing several procedural conditions, notes that “the diagnosis of an illness and its effects usually make it impossible to draw vital strength from the past<sup>23</sup>.” Psychologist Urszula Struzikowska-Marynicz sheds more light on the failure of Volna’s therapeutic treatments: “Blaming others gives us the illusory belief that we are relieved of responsibility for ourselves. We

<sup>20</sup>It is hard to guess why a letter containing such intimate details, which allowed an easy identification of its author, was published in a psychological journal. It is difficult to understand the psychologist in charge’s motifs but Patrycja Volny herself admitted - in the course of a discussion on an Internet forum - that she wrote that letter asking for help, although hadn’t realised her words would be published. She said she had been hoping to receive a private answer.

<sup>21</sup>Patrycja Volny’s grandmother, Jacek Kaczmarek’s mother, Anna Trojanowska-Kaczmarek, undertook numerous suicide attempts, at least from the 1960s right until her death in 2007. She was suffering from schizophrenia, living in a sense of her own grandeur but also experiencing an incessant sense of external danger and prosecution from closer and more distant milieu. She would provoke extremely dangerous situations, including alcohol and drug abuse, marital infidelity and the resulting excesses, she also physically harmed herself. Experiencing excessive existential pain, she caused suffering to herself and her loved ones. This information comes from a letter that Janusz Kaczmarek wrote to his wife in 2006, and from medical records obtained for the biography of Jacek Kaczmarek, *To moja droga* [This is my way] (Wrocław 2009). Kaczmarek dedicated the first typescript versions of the song *Krzyk* [Scream], an ekphrasis interpreting Edvard Munch’s painting, written in 1978, to his mother; he removed this dedication in the official publications of the text.

<sup>22</sup>Duccio Demetrio, *Autobiografia. Terapeutyczny wymiar pisania o sobie* [Autobiography. A therapeutic dimension of writing about oneself] (Kraków: Oficyna Wydawnicza Impuls, 2000), 33.

<sup>23</sup>Demetrio, 33. Duccio Demetrio invokes here Paul Fraisse, using an indirect quotation from an Italian-language publication.: Pietro Rizzi, *I percorsi del tempo. Sulla psicogenesi della temporalità* (Milano: Unicopli, 1988), 92.

cannot rest on it”.<sup>24</sup> An interview with Struzikowska-Marynicz in „Gazeta Wyborcza” preceded the premiere of her book *Wszystkiemu winni są twoi starzy* [*It's all your parents' fault*] almost six months to the day after the premiere and promotional campaign for *Niewygodna*.

\* \* \*

The publication of Patrycja Volny's autobiography caused quite a stir because it implied behaviors that, initially unnamed, were eventually described in the media as sexual harassment. The book contains three passages that refer to these initially vague memories<sup>25</sup>. Obviously, the veracity of the accusations cannot be confirmed. I also respect contemporary ethical standards, which state that “the point of view of the perpetrator of harassment, who does not see anything wrong with their behavior, is [...] irrelevant when assessing such cases – the key issue here (like in contemporary legal definitions of domestic violence) is the individual assessment of the victim”<sup>26</sup>. Out of respect for the victims of many crimes of a similar nature, one should also refrain from commenting in detail on even the narrative itself. For the above-mentioned reasons, I will not subject this topic to linguistic analysis, referring instead to the relevant excerpts in the source text<sup>27</sup>. I will only note that here, too, the poetics characteristic of many other fragments applies, making the testimony susceptible to open interpretation.

In his text *Ołowiany sarkofag Kaczmarskiego* [*Kaczmarski's lead sarcophagus*], Wojciech Stanisławski uses far-reaching metaphors (such as “depth charge,” “arsenic from a crime novel,” and “radioactive dust”) to illustrate the delayed mechanism associated with the publication and its accompanying promotional campaign. He also illustrates the dramatic effect of the situation:

And what is worse – perhaps the comparison to the dust from Chernobyl, which fell on the fields near Białystok and Brno, turns out to be the best – we are helpless in the face of this threat: we cannot cover the world with plastic sheeting, we cannot vacuum the forest. We will never know whether Jacek Kaczmarski, the author of stories about the Polish fate, committed one of the most heinous crimes – or whether this crime exists only in the weary, traumatized imagination of his daughter. And this ignorance will accumulate in us, settling like a gray shroud of lead<sup>28</sup>.

<sup>24</sup> „Zdrowy dorosły wie, czego mu zabrakło w relacji z rodzicem. Ale go za to nie punktuje” [„A healthy adult knows what was missing in their relations with a parent. But they don't blame the parent”], Paula Szewczyk rozmawia z Urszulą Struzikowską-Marynicz, *Wysokie Obcasy*, 22.05.2025, <https://www.wysokieobcasy.pl/zycylepiej/7,181615,31955497,zdrowy-dorosly-wie-czego-mu-zabraklo-w-relacji-z-rodzicem.html>.

<sup>25</sup>In the first of these memories, which date back to when she was five years old, her father, according to the narrator, allegedly pushed his tongue into her mouth for fun while saying goodbye at the train station, which the protagonist of these memories recalls unpleasantly as an act against her will. Other suggestions cast an unpleasant shadow on the mother, who sent the father to check her daughter's panties before bedtime. The third concerns a situation in which the father cuddled up to his (8-year-old) daughter as she lay down, and she perceived the subsequent caressing and kissing on the neck as unpleasant and today interprets this behavior as sexual. The probability of situations described in the latter case is questioned, among others, by Alicja Delgas, who claims that Jacek Kaczmarski – if only out of fear of a possible relapse into alcoholism – would never have been alone with his daughter in such circumstances (a solo trip by the father away from civilization with two children, including a son from his first marriage).

<sup>26</sup> „Molestowanie seksualne” (hasło) [„Sexual harassment” (entry)], in: *Encyklopedia Gender. Płeć w kulturze* (Warszawa: Czarna Owca, 2014), 325.

<sup>27</sup>Volny, 36, 58, 136.

<sup>28</sup>Wojciech Stanisławski, *Ołowiany sarkofag Kaczmarskiego* [*Kaczmarski's lead sarcophagus*], Facebook post, 18.01.2025.

Will the name of Kaczmarek, covered with the radioactive dust of infamy, be condemned to non-existence? Will his work survive under the conditions of “cancel culture”? For some, these are issues of national importance, for others, a loss of a secondary order, less important than social benefits from raising awareness among the masses subjected to various forms of violence.

\* \* \*

Exaggerated headlines and publications appear on internet portals („Shocking confession of Jacek Kaczmarek’s daughter. “My father was my tormentor”: “Abuse, violence, neglect – the daughter’s disturbing memories”<sup>29</sup>; “Patrycja Volny: how Jacek Kaczmarek beat, drank, and abused”<sup>30</sup>). Excessive “horrorization” of language, the presentation of incidental events, hearsay stories (“smearing potatoes on her face” allegedly happened when the girl was two years old), and casual levelling of accusations (of abuse) fuel a spiral of emotions, leaving no room for rational reflection.

It is also important to observe how the ideologization of discourse comes to the forefront. The reviewer for „Krytyka Polityczna”<sup>31</sup> identifies several weak points in the book. For example, he notes that the author describes her own suffering extensively but fails to consider the extent of the harm she has caused others. However, when he reflects on “a revelation that will shake the world so much that it will topple the monument that was previously knocked off its pedestal,” the previously critical reviewer unequivocally labels Kaczmarek as a sex offender. These words are not nullified by his earlier doubts or his mistrust in the author expressed in the conclusion. This contradictory judgment is concealed by a notably poetic phrase: “The father drank, and when he drank, he beat.” Ultimately, the entire text not only calls for but insists that, in line with the spirit of cancel culture, Kaczmarek’s name, persona, and legacy be erased, discredited, and condemned to oblivion.

\* \* \*

The high-profile dispute between Joanna Kuciel-Frydryszak and the publishing house in the spring of 2025, which quickly escalated into a conflict among different groups – authors, publishers, and distributors – not to mention readers – demonstrates that the book market is a battleground for real disputes over material capital, which holds significant value. There is no reason to exclude the autobiography genre from these dynamics.

As Dominik Antonik notes in his article „Przemysł autobiografii. „Ghostwriting”, kultura sławy i utowarowienie tożsamości” [“The autobiography industry: Ghostwriting, celebrity culture, and the

<sup>29</sup>Katarzyna Pajęczek, „Szokujące wyznanie córki Jacka Kaczmarek. «Mój ojciec był moim oprawcą»”, [„Kaczmarek’s daughter’s shocking revelations: My father was my abuser”] *rmf.fm*, 21.11.2024, <https://www.rmf.fm/rozrywka/plotki/news,72813,szokujace-wyznanie-corki-jacka-kaczmarek-moj-ojciec-byl-moim-oprawca.html>.

<sup>30</sup>Jacek Cieślak, „Patrycja Volny: jak bił, pił i molestował Jacek Kaczmarek” [„Patrycja Volny: how Jacek Kaczmarek drank, beat and abused”], *Rzeczpospolita*, 23.11.2024, <https://www.rp.pl/literatura/art41488741-patrycja-volny-jak-bil-pil-i-molestowal-jacek-kaczmarek>.

<sup>31</sup>Jakub Szafranski, „Skrzywdzona i harda, ale czy szczerza? [o książce «Niewygodna» Patrycji Volny]” [„Hurt and bold: is she honest, though? [on Patrycja Volny’s *Niewygodna*”], *Krytyka Polityczna*, 21.12.2024, <https://krytykapolityczna.pl/kultura/czytaj-dalej/skrzywdzona-i-harda-ale-czy-szczerza-o-ksiazce-niewygodna-patrycji-volny/>.

commodification of identity”], “stories about oneself are inseparable from the complex system of contemporary culture, and the subject of an autobiography is nowadays also the subject of economy.”<sup>32</sup> Antonik, the author of *Autor jako marka* [*The author as a brand*], analyzes the relationship between literature, culture, and the marketplace in late capitalism, along with the media and the broader social sphere. In his analyses, he focuses on the author as the primary agent of literary production. This language is quite different from traditional tools of literary studies, but it reflects a reality that many in the literary community intuitively understand. It is in reference to these values that the publisher and the author are accused of exploiting the bard's memory and his undeniable fame.

Rather than offering judgment on the intentions of any of the parties involved in this communication, let us consider their argumentation in the logic proposed by a literary anthropologist who studies the relationship between the autobiographical genre and market mechanisms. Antonik, discussing a range of contemporary practices, highlights the inadequacy of Lejeune's “autobiographical pact's” idealistic assumptions when juxtaposed with the current situation on the book market:

Lejeune wrote that “autobiographies are not objects of aesthetic consumption, but social means of interpersonal communication. This communication has several dimensions: ethical, emotional, and referential.” In other words, reading an autobiography is an encounter with another person who wants to reveal the whole truth about themselves to the reader, which makes “the heart always beat faster when opening the first page.” Faced with the modern autobiographical industry, this somewhat lofty and caring language seems inadequate, also stylistically. Using this language to describe modern autobiographical work would be something of a joke and a provocation [...]. This is not because contemporary autobiographies are trivial or uninteresting from a research perspective. Rather, traditional theory expects answers to questions that do not target the core of recent phenomena. For this reason, I propose that, contrary to Lejeune's claims, autobiography is an object of consumption, not only in the aesthetic sense - it is at the very center of the economic practices of late capitalism<sup>33</sup>.

This statement, which seems obvious in our increasingly cynical and disillusioned society, does not seem to apply to journalists and media workers, who use words such as “truth” and “honesty” and make accusations with the confidence of an eyewitness. It is therefore not surprising that much of the public accepts this abridged message as their own, creating an atmosphere not so much of suspicion or doubt, but of certainty about the guilt of the accused.

As evidenced by numerous findings of market entanglements, “[i]n contemporary conditions, autobiography does not allow for sincere confession and is rarely an expression of such a need, because its basic function is to increase attention capital,”<sup>34</sup> and “the vast majority of authors of contemporary autobiographies are prominent figures in the attention market, capitalists in a new economy in which the value of individuals and goods is determined by the scale of their visibility and recognizability, as well as the level of consumer interest.”<sup>35</sup> In the case of

<sup>32</sup>Dominik Antonik, „Przemysł biografii. Ghostwriting, kultura sławy i utowarowienie tożsamości”, *Teksty Drugie* 1 (2019): 81.

<sup>33</sup>Antonik, 86.

<sup>34</sup>Antonik, 95.

<sup>35</sup>Antonik, 90.

Patrycja Volny's autobiography, the opposite is true: only after the publication does its author become a prominent figure, thanks to her connection with her father, who is a real magnet for the public. Following this, we read that "presence in contemporary society and the market depends solely on the attention of others, which is in constant short supply."<sup>36</sup> The word "attention" is repeated a number of times in the text in question. "Attention is increasingly becoming the supreme currency because it is infinitely exchangeable, from money to prestige"<sup>37</sup>. As Davenport and Beck write, "[i]n this new economy [...] capital, labour, information, and knowledge are in abundant supply. [...] What is lacking is human attention."<sup>38</sup>

By capitalizing on her brand through the publication of her autobiography, Volny enters a higher communication threshold, appearing briefly in mainstream media (today, this mainstream is divided into traditional media – television and radio – with their sense of prestige, and online media, which sometimes bring about much greater viewership and reach). Nowadays, both forms coexist, thanks to the publication of traditional media content on the internet. In this way, Volny joins the ranks of "celebrities" (which, as David Marshall writes, is a privileged group of individuals who "have a greater presence and a wider range of activity and influence than those who make up the rest of the population"<sup>39</sup>).

Regardless of the category of truth, which, as we have pointed out above, is a highly devalued concept in the contemporary autobiography market, it cannot be denied that the sensational nature of the confessions and the atmosphere of breaking taboos increase interest in the publication and in the author herself, which is in line with the strategy of maximizing visibility, highly beneficial for the publisher. The intense promotional campaign for the book and its author earned Volny a nomination in the "Superheroines 2024" poll organized by the editors of „Wysokie Obcasy”. The nominee's profile reads: „Patrycja Volny. Author of the book *Niewygodna*. For breaking taboos, for speaking out against violence"<sup>40</sup>. As we can see, according to the model, "autobiography can occupy such an important place in the economy of attention and the system of fame because it is the best tool for a celebrity to negotiate their public identity."<sup>41</sup> Such recognition of related entities is difficult to isolate from the following observation: "It is a mutual interest – the star increases their visibility, and the publisher benefits from the attention capital they have accumulated, thereby increasing their own capital (not only the economic one)"<sup>42</sup>. Antonik is writing about ghostwriting, but his comments also pertain to more general market relations.

Patrycja Volny is open about the fact that she wants to use the attention she has gained through her autobiography to exert influence and embolden other women who are being harmed. Although it

<sup>36</sup>Antonik, 91.

<sup>37</sup>Antonik, 91.

<sup>38</sup>Antonik, 91.

<sup>39</sup>P. David Marshall, *Celebrity and Power. Fame in Contemporary Culture* (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), IX (as quoted in: Antonik, 92).

<sup>40</sup>„Twój głos ma moc! To już ostatnia chwila na wybór Superbohaterki 2024 [GŁOSOWANIE]" [„Your voice is powerful! This is the last moment to vote for the Superheroine of 2024 [POLL]"], Wysokie Obcasy, 31.01.2025, <https://www.wysokieobcasy.pl/akcje-specjalne/7,156847,31645947,12-historii-14-wspanialych-kobiet-lista-nominowanych-do-superbohaterki.html>.

<sup>41</sup>Antonik, 97.

<sup>42</sup>Antonik, 94.

would be easy to generalise, there are no other women in a situation similar to hers - none of them will ever be the daughter of this particular Jacek Kaczmarski, and suggestions like hers reduce that human being (not to mention - an artist), with all his psychological complexity – which his daughter herself mentions repeatedly – only to the negative traits that one wants to stigmatize socially.

Dariusz Rosiak calls the contemporary political reality of the West a media-emotional democracy. This term applies not only to the world of politics, but also reflects the broader chaos of communication in highly polarized societies:

Nowadays, words are subject to the highest law of the media world of the internet, namely “optimization.” Its point of reference is not reality, but the audience’s feelings. They are grouped into “bubbles” – political, aesthetic, racial, and gender – and sold as a package of political or business products, which amounts to the same thing. For those who trade in our attention, the ideal world is one in which we argue with each other to the bitter end on any topic – not to arrive at the truth, because there is no truth, but to continue the wars that generate specific profits<sup>43</sup>.

The image of Kaczmarski created in the media today is subject to the same rules as the language of politics and other emotionally charged discourses. The reduced bard becomes a useful example to illustrate many of the ills of the modern world, which „Gazeta Wyborcza” often writes about. One does not have to be critical of the content presented by the editorial staff to notice recurrent topics: domestic violence, alcoholism in the family, ACoA syndrome, social inequalities, sexual violence, anachronistic parenting methods, and generational trauma caused by violence – all of these are issues that require in-depth debate. In addition to its obvious financial interests, the publishing house also pursues ideological capital, but in the case of Patrycja Volny’s *Niewygodna*, all these issues become entangled in communicative noise, generating a highly simplified and distorted image.

Autobiography, as a genre on the borderline between literature and documentary, is often perceived as sincere, based on truthful confessions. Although Philippe Lejeune has already modified the idealistic assumptions of his “autobiographical pact” by writing: “An autobiographer is not someone who tells the truth about their life, but someone who says they tell it,” there is still a tendency to perceive autobiographical messages as if they were not acts of self-creation. People have a profound need to search for their identity and redefine their position in relation to others, and this has been recognized for centuries, but these are only part of the complex system of motivations behind autobiographical efforts. A combination of market, media, and ideological circumstances overlaps with the original intentions, turning the confessional genre into an object of market games, on a par with other products of the culture industry. The media situation surrounding the publication of *Niewygodna. Autobiografia* shows that both the book itself and the entire autobiographical message built up over the years are not free from these problems.

translated by Justyna Rogos-Hebda

<sup>43</sup>Dariusz Rosiak, „Co się dzieje z demokratycznym światem? Idzie fala większa od Trumpa” [„What is happening to the democratic world? A wave larger than Trump is coming”], *Tygodnik Powszechny* 5 (2025), <https://www.tygodnikpowszechny.pl/co-sie-dzieje-z-demokratycznym-swiatem-idzie-fala-wieksza-od-trumpa-189555>, 28.01.2025.

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# KEYWORDS

Jacek Kaczmarek

PATRYCJA VOLNY

*autobiography*

**personal document**

**ABSTRACT:**

This article reflects on the current status of autobiographical writing, on the example of Patrycja Volna's book *Niewygodna. Autobiografia*. Publications in traditional media and social media reactions have shown that works bearing the emblem of autobiography are treated unreflectively as confessions of truth, inciting greater emotions the more sensational their content. Patrycja Volny arouses particular interest as the daughter of a well-known and respected artist, and her confessions attract attention, positioning the author in relation to other participants in the media discourse. A combination of market, media, and ideological circumstances overlap with the original intentions, turning the confessional genre into an object of market games, on a par with other products of the culture industry.

## WOMEN'S BIOGRAPHIES

## ATTENTION CAPITAL

*publishing market*

## AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL WRITING

### **NOTE ON THE AUTHOR:**

Krzysztof Gajda – Ph.D., professor at the Independent Literature and Culture Research Laboratory at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. He studies the lyrics of Polish songs, searching for signs of literary merit that elevate the message above the purely entertaining patterns of the genre. In particular, he finds such innovations in the singer-songwriter model. Author of: *Poza państwowym monopolem – Jan Krzysztof Kelus* [*Beyond the state monopoly – Jan Krzysztof Kelus*] (1998), *Jacek Kaczmarski w świecie tekstów* [*Jacek Kaczmarski in the world of texts*] (2003, 2nd edition 2013), *To moja droga. Biografia Jacka Kaczmarskiego* [*This is my way. A biography of Jacek Kaczmarski*] (2009, 2nd edition 2014), *Szarpidruty i poeci. Piosenka wobec przemian społecznych i kulturowych ostatnich dekad* [*Plunkers and poets. Songs and social and cultural changes of recent decades*] (2017) and, with Krzysztof Grabaż Grabowski, *Gościu. Auto-bio-Grabaż* [*Dude. Auto-bio-Grabaż*] (2010). |