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'Female' Music Criticism in Poland 1890–1939

Discussing the origins of 'female' music criticism, I wish to be excused for the awkward titular phrase which, being a direct replica of the commonly used expression 'female literature', signifies music criticism produced by women. In the present paper, I shall propose a provisional classification of various forms of female press and present information on the authoresses of musical reviews published during the specified period. In characterising the literary output under discussion, I shall also attempt to reconstruct the principles which guided the work of female critics, in line with the paradigm imposed by the chronological framework of the research presented. The paradigm in question refers to feminist discourse whose Polish origins go back to the turn of the nineteenth century. This was the period of the emergence of an organized female movement and of an incipient awareness of the 'otherness' of women and the fruits of their work. It was then that the notion of *l'art féminin* became widespread. The task embarked on in this article was considerably facilitated by the press of the discussed period, which focused on 'female affairs', as well as by the high professional self-awareness of women writers, which enabled them to thoroughly analyse their situation and make some generalisations pertaining to it.

The questions I should like to pose 'female' music criticism produced between 1890 and 1939 relate to the following issues:

- the conceptions of music criticism in the female press;
- women's motivation for producing critical music reviews;
- the social milieu of women writers and their educational background;
- the cultural gender of 'female music criticism';
- the possible restrictions related to the understanding at that time of what was 'female', and the ensuing tendency to isolate and belittle the fruits of female creative effort or, conversely, the possible desire to overcome the contradictions between the discourses of the two isolated worlds: male and female;

- the possible custom-related restrictions and/or knowledge- and skill-related limitations which gave rise to female music criticism;
- the attitude of women writers to 'male' criticism as an institution assessing the niche meaning of *l'art féminin*;
- the attitude of men to the phenomenon of 'female criticism'.

The feminist perspective adopted here gives an account of the phenomenon from the turn of the nineteenth century, when the discussed area of women's activity became their professional occupation. The presentation takes no account of earlier, arguably interesting and rich, periods when literary work, including music criticism, was performed on an amateur basis by women belonging to the noble or intellectual elite, which gave them an appropriate education and the desire to distinguish themselves in their intellectual work.

1. Historical Background

The origins of female music criticism date from the period when women's literary activity became a mass phenomenon (Maria Podraza-Kwiatkowska even writes about 'the invasion of women on the territory of Polish literature' in the period under discussion¹), assuming a professional character, which stemmed from the necessity to earn a living. It was then that women's social activity related to this kind of work began to be treated in terms of collective female effort performed for themselves and for the society in which they lived. It was viewed within the framework of women's organizations, which were growing in number in Poland in the early 1890s. The Polish female movement was one of the most important elements in the 'progressive trend', which comprised all aspects of Polish social life. Though its place on the political scene made it appear to some as dangerously close to socialism, it was even protected by the conservative milieu, due to the interest of women's organisations in charity and educational work.

Historians of the Polish society of the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries seem to confirm the increasing interest of women in the profession of journalist,² linking it with the increased professional activity of women in general, as well as with the accessibility of this pro-

¹ Maria Podraza-Kwiatkowska, 'Młodopolska femina. Garść uwag' [Female modernism. A handful of remarks], in *Ciało i tekst. Feminizm w literaturoznawstwie – antologia szkiców* [Body and text. Feminism in literature studies – an anthology of sketches], ed. Maria Podraza-Kwiatkowska (Warsaw, 2001), 12.

² Janina Żurawicka, *Inteligencja warszawska w końcu XIX wieku* [The Warsaw intelligentsia of the end of the 19th c.] (Warsaw, 1978), 18.

fession. As the most democratic and, at the same time, the most elegant of the professions available to the intelligentsia at that time, journalism attracted writers who did not have to hold any certificates or diplomas and could aspire to the so-called 'higher caste' in society; the 'literary' profession was not considered to be blatantly money-oriented, but rather the result of one's abilities and leanings.³ As an extremely elegant occupation, artistic criticism frequently attracted Polish authoresses, who produced a whole gamut of reviews in the fields of literature, theatre, painting and music. It should also be observed that the noticeable interest of women in these fields was also linked to their educational background.

In the 1890s there were only a few women who specialized in music criticism. They represented the commendable exceptions to the typical female model of journalism, which, when compared to male journalism, was far from perfect. The apparently lower status of Polish women on the literary market at the turn of the nineteenth century, stemming from their inferior education and lower position in the social hierarchy, determined their narrow ambitions, lack of intellectual independence, and inclinations towards assuming the 'ivy' position⁴ ('Ivy', Pol. *Bluszcz*, was the title of the most popular women's weekly of that period). A self-propelled mechanism active in those days discouraged 'average' women of letters from embarking on tasks that would make them equal to men, since the very idea was highly incompatible with the conventional roles of women in society and family: the servant-like, menial and 'down'-oriented jobs of women who tended to focus on children, service and the 'dark' masses. According to the conviction propagated by the conservative press, women could educate themselves 'not for the sake of showing off or to rule over men, but for the purpose of teaching their children what they themselves had been taught'.⁵ The representatives of the generation of 'enthusiasts' that bravely implemented poetry- and novel-related projects, as well as making courageous attempts at social journalism, tried to break away from the conventional model. In 1870 their leader, Eliza Orzeszkowa, endeavoured to convince the readers of the *Tygodnik Mód* [Fashion Weekly] that Polish women stood before a wide range of employment opportunities, including work as a translator, writer or artist, and had the

³ Ibid., 152 and 28.

⁴ Helena Gedrus Eydziatowiczowa included the following aphorism in *Album Kobiecte* [Female album], published in 1903 in Warsaw: 'Even in the 20th century, when considering female issues, many people mean for the most part the woman belonging to the elite or rich social circles. Rich women can be compared to flowers [...] When the family fortunes go to rack and ruin, they change into ivies stretching over the fruits of another's work.'

⁵ 'Czytelnik, Na straży rodziny' [The reader. The family guardian], *Kronika Rodzina* 17 (1902), 393.

chance of being equal to men, provided their inborn talent was supported by the hard work and conscientiousness needed to thoroughly master a given area.⁶ These aspirations, however, encountered some sort of self-limitations, aptly diagnosed by Aleksander Świętochowski:

Notions and words like 'family', 'country' and 'nation' are frequently employed by women. However, such words as 'humanity', 'earth' and 'universe' can only be found in the most comprehensive of their dictionaries.⁷

This statement illustrates the genesis of the specific attitude of women writers who consciously identified with the January Uprising generation of Mother-Poles and focused on implementing the social and patriotic missions they had been assigned. Female journalism was also confronted with an obstacle that placed the authoresses in a highly equivocal position. As 'emancipated' women, they 'had to be' – in the words of Jadwiga Krawczyńska, a leading journalist of the interwar period – 'exceptional and to abandon many of their feminine qualities'.⁸ Disguising themselves in heroic costume might have been a reaction to the loss of these characteristics. It might also have been employed as an argument supporting their decision to become 'emancipated' women.

It is worth emphasizing that women journalists tended to complain about being discriminated against; they contended that their work was not held in high esteem, and was worse paid than the same work performed by men. This problem was discussed by Eugenia Żmijewska in a paper delivered to the Congress of Polish Women in Warsaw in 1907. We learn from this paper, published in *Bluszcz*, that women had to be satisfied with the lowest editorial posts, and that 'they did not settle themselves comfortably and complacently at their journalist desks'. Instead, they were assigned the jobs of cashier or proofreader. The best educated among them were offered translations, daily columns and, finally, publications of original literary and journalistic works. Żmijewska reports that women journalists' pay was considerably lower than that of their male counterparts: 1–3 kopecks for a line in a regular newspaper section, compared to the 3–10 kopecks that men received for the same work.⁹

⁶ Eliza Orzeszkowa, 'Kilka słów o kobietach' [A few words on women], in *Publicystyka okresu pozytywizmu 1860-1900. Antologia* [Journalism of the positivist period, 1860–1900], ed. Stanisław Fita (Warsaw, 2002).

⁷ Aleksander Świętochowski, *Dumania pesymisty* [The musings of a pessimist] (Warsaw, 2002), 79.

⁸ Jadwiga Krawczyńska, 'Jak zostałam dziennikarką' [How I became a journalist], in *Moja droga do dziennikarstwa (1918-1939)* [My path to journalism (1918–1939)] (Warsaw, 1974), 123.

⁹ Eugenia Żmijewska, 'Kobieta polska w dziennikarstwie' [The Polish woman in journalism], *Bluszcz* 1907/50, 557, and 1907/ 51, 572.

The 'female' music criticism produced by the representatives of the generation active at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries consisted in daily reviews or popularising articles. It occupied a rather low position in the hierarchy of journalistic work, in the vicinity of the gossip column and news 'from the town', and had little in common with 'high', opinion-forming professional criticism, which was reserved for men only.¹⁰ The case of Bronisława Neufeldówna, which is presented below, constitutes an exception to the rule. The imposed restrictions were determined by the requirements related to a specialized education in music, which had to be confirmed by a conservatoire diploma, but most of all by the strictly obeyed dictate to recruit editorial staff from among members of society who were held in high social esteem. Thus, the authors of serious criticism had to have at their disposal extensive knowledge in a given area. Over time, they also acquired more and more experience, broadened their cultural horizons and improved their literary skills. As members of the opinion-forming social milieu or political parties, they were confident and witty in society and endowed with specific features of character. All these things were theoretically accessible to women. However, before 1914, no women music critics, even the best professionally educated, were held in such esteem. What is more, no woman even attempted to scale these heights. As Waleria Marrené-Morzkowska states, 'a woman is hampered by the disbelief that surrounds her'.¹¹ This hampering had crucial consequences. It made the majority of women writers place themselves, of their own free will, in the 'popularising' position, inferior to that of 'high' criticism, and led to them 'playing safe'. All of this effectively prevented women writers from contributing to the essential part of music criticism, which consists in making decisions concerning the artistic content of concerts, participating in generational breakthroughs, and engaging in various forms of polemic of crucial significance to the theory of art. In a nutshell, the overwhelming majority of the authoresses of the period and specialisation of interest to us here adopted a passive and conservative attitude, which made them 'withdraw from any audacious attempts at launching something new, since novelty is most frequently badly received and needs to be guaranteed by the one who aims at it'.¹²

¹⁰ At the turn of the 20th c. even in the West it was predominantly men that engaged in music criticism. Christian Goubault, author of a monograph on music criticism in France in between 1874 and 1914, mentions only four women working in the French press of the period in this area. Two of them, however, wrote under male pseudonyms. See Christian Goubault, *La critique musicale dans la presse française de 1870 à 1914* (Geneva, 1984), 162.

¹¹ Waleria Marrené-Morzkowska, 'Kobieta w malarstwie' [The woman in art], in *Kobieta Współczesna* [The modern woman] (Warsaw, 1904), 82.

¹² *Ibid.*

2. The Beginnings of 'Female' Music Criticism

At the beginning of the twentieth century, a handful of women of letters embarked on ambitious journalist tasks. The work and wide range of interests of Waleria Marrené-Morzowska, née Malletska (1832–1903), a well-known and widely acknowledged writer of the turn of the twentieth century, is typical in this respect. In addition to receiving Warsaw feminists in her private drawing room, she wrote novels and translated for a living. Having received a thorough, albeit only private, education, she could also deal with serious literary criticism. She was one of the first critics to become interested in Norwid's works, and wrote sketches for the Parisian *Revue des revues*.¹³ At the turn of the century, she was a professional journalist, writing the critical section on fine arts in the *Kurier Poryanny*. The crowning achievement of her work was the publication of her *Historia malarstwa* [History of painting]. She was also skilled in writing articles and papers on music, dealing with various problems related to history, aesthetics and pedagogy. Far from passive in her writings, she frequently adopted a belligerent attitude and fulfilled her ambitions in heated polemics treating of not only art-related issues, but also social problems.

Maria Loevy, nee Mirecka (1854–1927), also exemplifies modern, committed journalism. She wrote miscellaneous pieces for magazines and newspapers operating in the three separate regions of partitioned Poland, employing the pen name of Maria Szeliga or Alma.¹⁴ In the 1890s the readers of the *Echo Muzyczne, Teatralne i Artystyczne* became acquainted with her interesting reports from Paris, in which she depicted current musical events, adopting a firm, but also conservative aesthetic stance. In 1895, facing imprisonment for her illegal educational work in Warsaw, she emigrated to Paris, where she continued working as a journalist. In 1895 she founded the magazine *Revue feministe*, and from 1922 she edited the *Ognisko* weekly.¹⁵

Cecylia Walewska, née Zaleska, pen name Selika (1859–1940), is another important figure in this group. She graduated from the Institute of Music in Warsaw with a diploma in teaching. Working mainly as a teacher of music, she also took part in illegal educational work. Owing to

¹³ Information from her obituary, 'Śp. Waleria Marrene-Morzowska', *Gazeta Polska* 277 (1903).

¹⁴ Dubious deciphering; cf. *Słownik pseudonimów pisarzy polskich* [Dictionary of Polish pen-names], ed. Edmund Jankowski (Wrocław, 1996).

¹⁵ Zofia Zaleska, *Czasopisma kobiece w Polsce (materiały do historii czasopism rok 1818-1937)* [Women's periodicals in Poland (materials for a history of periodicals during the period 1818–1937)] (Warsaw, 1938), 87.

her participation in patriotic demonstrations in 1901, she was forced to live in exile in Kursk, where she spent several years.¹⁶ She made her literary debut in 1876, and was the first in this group of female writers to specialize in music criticism. She wrote for the leading literary, women's and art magazines in Warsaw, such as the *Tygodnik Mód i Powieści*, the *Echo Muzyczne*, *Teatralne i Artystyczne*, and the *Wędrowiec*. In 1894 she wrote the music column in the *Prawda* (ed. Aleksander Świętochowski), the leading weekly of the Polish intelligentsia. Walewska's pieces showed her gift for writing, as well as her equable style of expression, which oscillated between the traditional chatty and modern erudite style.

Another acknowledged authoress of the period was Bronisława Neufeldówna (b. Warsaw, 1857; d. Warsaw, 1931), who worked as a full-time employee in various editor's offices in Warsaw. Having graduated from a boarding-school for girls, she additionally received private schooling, thus gaining extensive knowledge in the humanities, music and art. She made her debut as a journalist in the *Nowiny*, in 1882, subsequently working for many years with the *Gazeta Polska* as the editor's secretary. Although specializing in literature, theatre and music criticism, she also addressed social issues. Having replaced Walewska in the *Prawda*, in the years 1895–1898 she wrote music reviews, in which she focused on the current problems of Polish musical life, propagated high norms of participation in musical culture, criticised the cult of virtuosity, and encouraged respect for traditional national music. Speaking to the public in an admonishing and condescending manner, she had no hesitation in using musical terminology and the names of new trends in music. Though her views on music tended to be rather conservative, she expressed them with enthusiasm and a flair for polemics.

The beginning of the twentieth century in Poland witnessed the first attempts at 'female' music criticism in women's magazines. Music criticism was considered to be 'female' if it was created by women and exclusively treated the areas of activity accessible to women. The reports produced by Walewska in which she discussed musical life in Warsaw in its female aspects exemplify 'female' criticism understood in this way. These reports were published in 1896 in the pages of the feminist periodical *Ster*.

'Feminist' music criticism was also practised in the *Głos Wielkopolski*, issued in Poznań. Presenting reviews of concerts and operas performed in Poznań, it focused, for the most part, on the appearances of local artists. The Poznań press also had a few representatives of 'female'

¹⁶ 'Cecylia Walewska (w 70-lecie urodzin)' [Cecylia Walewska (on her 70th birthday)], *Gazeta Lwowska* 1928/51.

music criticism. One of them was the poetess and critic Maria Paruszevska (1864–1937), who was also a keen propagator of Fryderyk Chopin's music and known in the interwar period as a patroness of the arts in Poznań. There were also others, like Cecylia Wolniewiczówna or Teresa Panieńska. The latter was the owner of a private vocal school in Poznań and also worked on the *Śpiewak*, where she published her articles on the teaching of vocal technique. She additionally wrote articles on musical life in Poznań for the professional press. Helena Rzepecka also worked for the *Śpiewak*, writing articles on music history, whereas Maria Łebińska, née Korybut-Daszkiewicz (unknown dates of birth and death) wrote musical reviews for the *Przegląd Wielkopolski*, which was issued from 1911 to 1914.

In Vilnius there was no permanent pool of journalists. When, in 1905, the Russian authorities allowed the publication of periodicals in Polish, editor's offices began to recruit amateurs as full-time reviewers, more frequently than in the 'old' centres, including women. The Polish-language periodicals issued in Vilnius from 1905 employed five outstanding women. Emilia Węslawska, who wrote for the *Goniec Wileński*, was a leading activist in the women's movement and authoress of books on pedagogy and for children, as well as writing numerous reports on theatre life in Vilnius. Helena Stanek-Łowmiańska, a pianist, Moscow conservatoire graduate and music teacher, wrote for the same periodical. Zofia Kowalewska, née Łętowska (1853–1918), and Jadwiga Leszczyńska, née Bogucka, pen-name Fuga, wrote for the *Kurier Litewski*. The former was a popular woman of letters in Vilnius and authoress of articles on social issues; the latter was a graduate of the Warsaw conservatoire who also worked for the Vilnius Society for the Protection of Children.¹⁷ Helena Łopuska (b. 1887), a pianist and composer, wife of Adam Wyleżyński, conductor of the Vilnius Symphony Orchestra (est. 1909), wrote for the *Przegląd Wileński*. She represented a type of writing quite rare at that time, marked by an authority backed by talent and youthful self-confidence. Critical of the existing reality, as was typical of the 'Young Poland' generation, she was open to novelty in music. Describing symphonic concerts performed in the city, she frequently raised the issue of the parochial character of musical culture in Vilnius. With her clearly formed aesthetic views, she boldly attacked the programmes of concerts given by local and visiting artists alike, using such terms as 'common-place', 'mawkish', 'trashy' or 'tasteless'.

The discourse of the music criticism developed by women at the turn of the nineteenth century can by no means be treated in isolation, as it

¹⁷ Information from 'Wileński Parnas niewieści' [The women's Parnassus of Vilnius] *Świat* 1908/4, 9.

distinguished itself neither in form nor in substance from its male equivalent. None of the authoresses mentioned above worked with women's periodicals or dealt with issues related to *l'art féminin*. Their writings neither diagnosed nor investigated the sidelining and marginalizing of female art, and they cannot be viewed as attempts at enhancing its value. The distinction between what is 'female' and 'male' is virtually non-existent, be it in reference to the reality of art or in relation to any of the aspects of criticism: its conception, methods, functions, arguments or literary skill. The language of criticism created by women at the turn of the twentieth century does not seem to employ the terms 'female' or 'male' at all. The absence of these words appears to point to the unwritten law that forbade women to deal with problems that would draw readers' attention to their gender- and culture-related identity, which would, as a consequence, place their writings in stark contrast to men's. The literary output under discussion here contains no trace of any reaction to the discrimination of women performers and/or composers by their male counterparts, which arguably might have stemmed from the fact that such discrimination, though apparently evident, passed almost unnoticed due to the very small number of women working in the Polish musical market at the turn of the nineteenth century. Since women created no consolidated environment and had at their disposal no common forum of representation (such as art galleries exhibiting female works of art or the Parisian concerts where 'female' compositions were performed), their activity remained almost imperceptible, and unrepresentative of the 'female trend'.

3. The Situation of Women Critics in the Interwar Period

The First World War considerably precipitated the course of 'female affairs', creating favourable conditions for women to enter the areas of life which had been thus far reserved for men. After 1918 the female movement entered a new phase. Walewska expressed its underlying conception in the following words:

Our efforts now focus on revealing those distinctive aspects of the female intellect, which – given the appropriate cultural context – would broaden the (existing and all-pervasive) horizons of knowledge, bringing to them hitherto unfamiliar values.¹⁸

¹⁸ Cecylia Walewska, 'Kobieta w prasie i naokoło prasy' [Women in and around the press], *Bluszcz* 1929/46, 32.

The twenty-year period between the two world wars saw a significant increase in the number of women working as professional journalists. In an article published in *Bluszcz* in 1929, Jadwiga Krawczyńska reports that trade unions representing journalists had fifty women members, accounting for eight per cent of the professional group. As Krawczyńska observes, 'females' publishing their articles in the daily press tended to be, for the most part, interested in social, political and cultural issues, which points to the continuity of the tradition born in the nineteenth century. A few years later, in an article entitled 'Kobieta w prasie i naokoło prasy',¹⁹ Walewska reports the further expansion of the environment of female journalists and, most importantly, the fact that women had achieved an equal professional status to men: 'they have become part and parcel of the press and its various departments'.²⁰

Discussing the reasons why authoresses in the interwar period dealt with musical issues, it seems that these are related to the improved level of female education in music. In between the two world wars, women in Poland and abroad more frequently majored in conducting, composition, musicology or even church music, which were the areas of study that had been previously reserved for men. It is also worth noting that in 1925 the Institute of Liturgical Music for women opened in Warsaw. This all created favourable conditions for the development of professional female criticism, as well as a separate female discourse, which focused on propagating women's achievements in music. Thus, it can be said that the origins of the female musical environment in Poland, and mainly in Warsaw, date back to the 1920s. It is then that a group of pianists, including Lucyna Robowska, Janina Familier-Hepnerowa, Zofia Rabcewicz-Poznańska, Róża Benzefowa and Maria Rydygier-Badowska, following the example set outside Poland, started to organize 'female' concerts. The Warsaw Society of Art Lovers, which was founded in 1928, did not lag behind. Starting from 1930, when Jadwiga Zalewska became its president, the society organized a series of 'female' concerts. It had its own female choir and worked with a large circle of performers. In addition to the pianists mentioned above, there were also Stanisława Korwin-Szymanowska, Eugenia Umińska and Grażyna Bacewiczówna. The 1930s witnessed the emergence of a uniformly organized group of collaborating female composer-writers, which included Helena Dorabalska, Ryta Gnus, Anna Maria Klechniowska and Irena Białkiewiczówna. They organized in Warsaw several concerts of chamber and symphonic music

¹⁹ Cecylia Walewska 'Kobiety w dziennikarstwie polskim' [Women in Polish journalism], *Bluszcz* 1929/20, 3–4.

²⁰ Walewska, 'Kobieta w prasie', 46.

featuring 'female' compositions and also spread the idea all over Poland and abroad, where they tried to reach Polish emigrants. Their work was supported by the leading interwar women's magazines in Warsaw, such as *Bluszcz* and *Kobieta Współczesna*.

The typical woman reviewer of this period was a graduate of a conservatoire or university. As for music criticism, the lead was taken by musicologists who had graduated from foreign universities, as well as from Polish institutions of higher education that offered musicology majors, shortly before the war.

Polish musicologists approached the task of writing about music professionally, treating it as a basic way of earning their living. Accordingly, the apparently narrow discipline of music criticism tended to expand into an area accessible to the general public. Consequently, their numerous articles appeared in various papers and magazines, including those targeted at women, and the subject matter of these articles ranged from topics determined by the demand of the press and its readers, current events in the country's musical life and the reception of foreign cultural ideas, to the authoresses' individual interests. Polish female critics writing popularising articles on music often had to refute the charge of producing too many dilettantish pieces. In response, they argued that they were trying to accomplish a kind of social mission. Stefania Łobaczewska, for example, viewed music criticism as a sort of 'high cultural mission'.²¹ Likewise, Zofia Lissa, in one of her polemic articles published in *Muzyka Polska*, thus phrased the idea:

The written word should be seen first and foremost as social action, especially the word which reaches thousands of readers and pertains to issues which the general public finds interesting.²²

Reference to some 'action' or 'idea' or to the needs of society is typical of the generation of female critics in the interwar period and points to the continuity of the specific ethos of female journalism from the previous epoch, of which the 'militant' writings of Łobaczewska are a model example.

Łobaczewska began working for the *Gazeta Lwowska* in 1928. Already in her very first articles, she clearly expressed her ideas on contemporary music. The leitmotif of all her works was the assessment of the developments and achievements of Polish and European contemporary music. She was democratic in her views and did not even try to hide

²¹ Stefania Łobaczewska, 'O celach i zadaniach krytyki muzycznej' [On the aims and tasks of music criticism], *Lwowskie Wiadomości Artystyczne i Literackie* 1929/12.

²² Zofia Lissa, 'Dylematy krytyki muzycznej w Polsce' [Dilemmas of music criticism in Poland], *Muzyka Polska* 1934/1, 132.

her fondness for left-wing authors and tolerance of popular trends and genres in music.

There were also other female critics whose position in the history of Polish musical culture is unquestionable. They include the pianist Emma Altberg, a critic with the *Kurier Poranny* of Warsaw, as well as Helena Dorabialska, a composer, musicologist and music critic who published her articles in the *Robotnik* for many years. In her accounts, displaying her self-confidence, great ease and flair for writing, she employed the first person singular to underscore the subjectivity of her judgements. Expressions such as 'it seems to me' or 'I have the impression that' appeared frequently in her articles. She officially admitted that criticism is essentially a subjective activity, and that success in this area is dependent on one's resistance to 'environmental and personal experiences', as well as on 'life-long learning and honest self-criticism, which lead to the critic developing his/her individual judgment, informed by expert knowledge'.²³

The best-known female critic and authoress of the interwar period, however, was Melania Grafczyńska. She graduated from the University of Vienna, where she studied musicology and philosophy. She also studied piano playing, under Leopold Godowski and Teodor Leszetycki. During the First World War she volunteered to work as a nurse in a field hospital of the Polish Legions. In the 1920s she hosted a literary drawing room in Cracow. She also initiated and organized the Festival of Polish Music in Prague in 1927. She was one of the members and co-founders of the Polish Musicological Society. However, as a music critic, Grafczyńska could not hold a candle to Łobaczewska or Dorabialska. The professional aspect of her writings left a lot to be desired, and her reviews are characterized by a highly artificial style, with an overuse of adjectives such as 'wonderful', 'inspiring' and 'shocking', as well as an obsolete method which focused on interpreting the 'content' of music.

In addition to musicologists and composers, there were also professional journalists and women of letters engaged in music criticism, the most notable being Wanda Melcer-Rutkowska (1896–1972), who studied philosophy at the University of Warsaw and painting and sculpture at the Academy of Fine Arts. Her literary debut came in 1912, when her poem 'Listening to the sounds of Chopin' was published in *Sfinks*. However, the vast majority of her writings focused on social issues, problems related to the situation of women (in 1911 she became a member of the Women's League), the milieu of the Polish Jews, and the protection of

²³ Helena Dorabialska, 'Krytyka krytyki muzycznej' [A critique of music criticism], *Robotnik* 1930/9.

animals. From the very beginning, she collaborated with the *Wiadomości Literackie*, where her most important articles appeared. She also addressed cultural issues, writing reports on concerts and concert-related events in Warsaw, which were published in the *Lwowskie Wiadomości Muzyczne i Literackie*. In 1936 she became a full-time music critic with the *Tygodnik Ilustrowany*. Some of her musical reviews published there epitomise her approach to music criticism, which can be described as extremely superficial, tending to forgo substance in favour of considerations of a political and high-society nature, complemented by frequently nonchalant descriptions of 'atmosphere', not always successful from a literary point of view, as well as plenty of personal observations irrelevant to the subject in hand.

In 1939 'female music criticism' was in full bloom, and there were strong indications that it would continue to develop and consolidate, similarly to other aspects of female activity. However, the post-war reality proved unpropitious for the women's movement, as it did for the development of other democratic or 'bottom-up' trends. After 1945, no reference was made to the tradition of 'female' music criticism. Neither did anyone reflect on the specificity of the output produced by female critics. This fact does not, however, mean that it is impossible to discover many hidden 'feminist' aspects to this output. The present work may contribute to demonstrating the continuity of attitudes and strategies adopted in the times when the 'female movement' seemed to be a powerful and forward-looking project capable of influencing the future of the world.

Translated by Elżbieta Lesiak-Bielawska

