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**A CONTEMPORARY POLISH MOTHER. WOMEN’S
SUFFERING AND TRAUMA AFTER THE LOSS OF A CHILD
(*OBSOLETKI* JUSTYNA BARGIELSKA)**

The author shows “lost motherhood” which has so far been overlooked in the literature, relegated to the margin of privacy. Justyna Bargielska does not run away from everyday life and the problems of the modern world, which cause great suffering in the women’s environment, but in a poetic way, with irony, in the form of short stories, not related chronologically, but the subject of constant fatigue of everyday life, loss of a child through miscarriage, suffering and misunderstanding highlights the perennial problem of women.

Key words: *miscarriage, mother, suffering, child, everyday life, problems of the modern world, state, loneliness, women’s problem, motherhood, Mother of God*

Autobiographical literature by women has greatly increased in popularity in the last decade of the 20th century. It was imbued with opposition to the “patriarchal-fatherland” patterns that appeared along with censorship. They excluded from the world of writing things that were “not appropriate” to write about, such as threads from private life. It was believed that writing should involve the experiences of public beliefs, not individual beliefs. This resulted, in a later time, in taking up topics that had been overlooked until then, left in the privacy of home, such as women’s autobiographies – what had been hidden until then and was pushed to the margins of writing [2, 273].

Authors working at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, such as Justyna Bargielska, Natalia Fiedorczyk or Sylwia Chutnik, show the current image of the Polish Mother, a strong woman who fights for her “self”, and occasionally also present the weaker side of the female personality. In most works, the image of a woman does not differ much from the image of the traditional Polish Mother, according to which a woman is obliged to be a mother, the most important person in a child’s life, an individual who shapes its personality and raises its children, especially boys, to be patriots. We can find in Polish literature the way of presenting the Polish Mother as a person playing a special role in the lives of children and the family, she was also identified with the homeland. Polish literature is rich in many motifs related to the

theme of a suffering, loving and responsible woman. Slowacki, Adam Mickiewicz, Tadeusz Rozewicz and Czeslaw Milosz, who described from the point of view of a man, i.e. how they were perceived against the background of patterns of a given time period. Most of the heroines they describe suffered in a very similar way to the main character of *Obsoletki*, although not identically. They also lost their children, but after they were born, i.e. when they managed to raise them and prepare them for life.

The heroine of J. Bargielska, survived a miscarriage, did not manage to meet her child and this trauma permeates her entire life. This experience constantly recurs in nightmares, memories, stories and everyday situations. The author finds the image of the Polish Mother in a contemporary woman, mother, artist, photographs of dead fetuses, who tries to find her peace while living in a big city, Warsaw. She is surrounded by a huge number of people, and still feels lonely and longing after losing her unborn child. The author presents personal stories in a blunt, emotional and at the same time with a sense of humor, using poetic language as well as specialist language in the field of medicine, “idealizing female suffering and sacrifice for the good of the homeland”. She shows it on the basis of the cult of the symbolic Polish Mother [3, 11].

In her short stories, sometimes containing interrupted dialogues, memories, events full of experiences, trauma and death, she places the heroine between everyday life and memories and dreams, showing her “lost motherhood”. This allows us to know the strength and independence of women, but also to show their suffering. Thanks to the figure of the Mother of God, we can see the sanctity of the relationship between mother and child, not only during life, but also before birth and while dying in the mother’s womb. with his conception and lasts forever, even if he is not born, the mother always remembers him and suffers after his loss, sometimes secretly. *Obsoletki* contain several stories describing the figure of the Mother of God in a light and humorous way em, such as in the story *Our Lady of the River and the Sea*.

Is “Boska” going to the swimming pool with us? my daughter asked, holding in her hand a plastic blue Our Lady of Holy Water from Lichen and unscrewing her white-crowned head. “I don’t think so,” I ventured. My daughter turned me to tears with her eyes consisting only of pupils and put the Mother of God in a bag with costumes [1, 46].

Other times, she is serious, accounting for the heroine in conversations with her in dreams, such as in the story *How to Photograph Dead Children*. This short story not only shows us the religiousness of the main character, the worship of the Mother of God, but also the suffering of another woman after the loss of her child and the bonding bond, the willingness to do everything so that a part, even in the form of a photo of Haniutka, stays with them. We also notice the indifference of men towards women: “liver mother” – Haniutki and the heroine want to share their discoveries with her husband. Bargielska shows a woman in the heroine’s dream as the Mother of God who fights against evil.

I was not exactly the Mother of God that we all mean, rather her remote, but in order to effectively defeat evil, I had to be in constant, close contact with the Mother of God Central [1, 53].

At the end of the story *Pregnancy of Forgiveness*, there are memories of women who also miscarried, and although they were old and had children, they could not get rid of the trauma of losing the fetus, seeking support from others. The parent is presented here as the “Mother of God” aware of her rights, who cares for the good of everyone, giving a refuge of temporary peace and support to other women in their fight for their rights.

Trivialized religiosity does not allow for pathos in the words of the heroine of *Obsoletki*. It mainly tells about the suffering of women after miscarriage, showing the everyday life and monotony of a mother’s life, evoking constant memories, nightmares, catastrophic fantasies, as well as very sad stories about death, funerals, relatives or friends. Women’s suffering is also hidden in *Obsoletka’s* story as the heroine’s loneliness and longing. Suffering on this day brought the parents of lost children together, they could celebrate the memory of their unborn children together by spending time together. However, the joy and sense of community do not last forever; after the assembly, we notice a change in the mood of the heroine’s speech.

– Look how wonderful it is, we experienced misfortune, but how many extraordinary people we met thanks to how much, often for the better, our lives changed, how much good we experienced, right? In my bag I have a doll, one of those sold in Ruch’s kiosks twenty years ago: it is naked and bald, although it does not have baby shapes at all. And it’s exactly the same height as my baby was when it died. Oh, that’s how I wear it. “You know what,” I say, “fuck you bitches. Now I want to spend a thousand years alone with my doll at the bottom of a dirty river. “Fuck off yourself, bitch,” they reply. – And we don’t? [1,88].

Community is about neighbors, friends, sisters, acquaintances and strangers; however, it is impermanent, it lasts a moment, because such pain after the loss of a child cannot be finally soothed, especially by a common ritual.

Title *Obsoletki*, from latin. *obsoleta* means something past, worn out, and in relation to all the stories it can be found in the content presented by the author. The heroine is left to herself, deprived of her value and condemned to oblivion, as the author points out in the short story *As I Thought That What Was in the Jar*. Women have been left to fend for themselves and “treated like madmen” by the state, health services and friends. They cannot get support and understanding, on the contrary, they are judged and left in their suffering, lost motherhood. The author also shows the social and religious value system by asking questions:

Is the phrase <<born dead>> constitutional?

Because logically, it’s not [1, 80].

Bargielska does not run away from everyday life and the problems of the modern world, which cause great suffering in the women’s environment, but in a poetic way, with irony, in the form of short stories, not related chronologically, but the subject of

constant fatigue of everyday life, loss of a child through miscarriage, suffering and misunderstanding highlights the perennial problem of women.

It draws attention to the negligence of the government in the case of miscarriages.

Bronka lectures me before the visit of the Minister of Health, when I moan that why the fuck are we going there, since it's not about the liquidation of death, especially death by miscarriage [1, 104].

The miscarriage trauma stays with them for the rest of their lives, and they seek help to unite. The author also shows a sad, depressing picture of hospitals and morgues where children rest, and the lack of decent conditions and sufficient places deepens the mothers' sadness and disorients them. Bargielska complements her sad stories with colors such as pink, blue, orange, green, and in this way, in my opinion, she tries to give hope to the readers, but also to arouse greater interest in the reader in a given fragment of the story.

The main character is a mother and wife who cares about her family, but still lives what happened in the past. The constant fear and anxiety of losing a child haunt her not only in her dreams, but also in her everyday life. Her profession as a photographer of deceased children does not help, although, on the other hand, it soothes her pain, and the mission to help mothers who have lost children soothes suffering for a moment. She approaches each order very emotionally, full of care and understanding for the other woman, bringing her help not only with a kind word, but also with tips on what needs to be done at a given moment. She is not indifferent to the suffering of other women, and escaping into the work of a photographer of children of the dead stops her from breaking down, gives her the meaning of life and a sense of value.

In the story *Peter, One of Those*, the main character approaches the task very emotionally, even individually, with motherly care.

He wants to prepare for Peter's death, so I can't let him go away even for a moment. I want to prepare for Peter's death by playing with my own children and feeding my own children. I want to prepare properly and make up for Peter's death for this pathetic, pathetic, pathetic unpreparedness that we presented on Good Friday [1, 131–132].

A very personal description does not allow her to distance herself from Piotruś, emphasizing the fact that the boy is not her child, she knows everything about his illness and fetal defects. She shows her unpreparedness for the death of her own child, the fact that she could not prepare for it and come to terms with what came so suddenly. The author presents a mother's love not only for her own children, but also for strangers who are not indifferent to other mothers. Running away from her suffering, she accepts the suffering and pain of Peter's mother, constantly thinking about him, knowing that while in the mother's womb, the child is unaware of what is about to happen. Unfortunately, on the outside, everyone has already condemned him to death and they are mourning him.

It is also worth paying attention to the heroine's relationship with her own mother, who is recalled in childhood memories and shows the image of an anti-mother, a person who neglects maternal bonds with her child and is deprived of love. The heroine mentions a mother in *Fantasia about the Death of a Child*.

Every day the closer death of my mother does not disintegrate me. When my mother was a child, she would lean back against her grandmother's legs in church, and her grandmother would stroke her face. My mother never stroked my face in church, but it probably happens every other generation [1, 121].

The narrator showed generationalism, wanting to emphasize the lack of care and love for each other. She also uses the words "mother" and "mom" to emphasize her feelings. On the one hand, she is her daughter and owes her life, but on the other hand, it is hard for her to live remembering her childhood neglect. Of course, the main character's mother provided her with everything she needed for life, but did not give her the most important thing, love. The story also touches on the topic of death in the imagination of each of the Polish mothers having children and caring for them. It reveals the inner world of a woman who is full of cares and worries about her offspring.

The unspeakable death of a child becomes the main thread in Bargielska's stories; is combined with painful memories of the death of loved ones in the vicinity of the main character. Despair and sadness appear suddenly and in the same way disappear for a moment thanks to ironic statements, but women's suffering and trauma after the loss of a child remain.

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MATKA POLKA WSPÓŁCZESNA. KOBIECE CIERPNIENIE I TRAUMA PO STRACIE DZIECKA (*OBSOLETKI* JUSTYNY BARGIELSKIEJ)

Autorka ukazuje „przebrane macierzyństwo”, co do tej pory w literaturze było pomijane, odsuwane na margines prywatności. Justyna Bargielska nie ucieka od codzienności i problemów świata współczesnego, które wywołują ogromne cierpienie w środowisku kobiet, lecz w sposób poetycki, z ironią, w formie krótkich opowiadań, niepowiązanych ze sobą chronologicznie, lecz tematem ciągłego zmęczenia codziennością, utratą dziecka poprzez poronienie, cierpieniem i niezrozumieniem podkreśla odwieczny problem kobiet.

Słowa kluczowe: poronienie, matka, cierpienie, dziecko, codzienność, problemy współczesnego świata, państwo, samotność, problemy kobiet, macierzyństwo, Matka Boska

СУЧАСНА ПОЛЬСЬКА МАТИ. ЖІНОЧІ СТРАЖДАННЯ І ТРАВМА ПІСЛЯ ВТРАТИ ДИТИНИ («OBSOLETKI» ЮСТИНИ БАРГІЄЛЬСЬКОЇ)

Авторка показує «втрачене материнство», яке досі було поза увагою літератури, відсунуте на маргінес приватного життя. Юстина Баргільська не тікає від повсякденності та проблем сучасного світу, які завдають великих страждань жіночому середовищу, але поетично, з іронією, у формі новел, не пов'язаних хронологічно, але темою постійної втоми від повсякденності, втрати дитини через викидень, стражданням і незрозумінням підкреслює одвічну проблему жінки.

Ключові слова: викидень, мати, страждання, дитина, повсякденне життя, проблеми сучасного світу, держава, самотність, жіночі проблеми, материнство, Богоматір

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