Enchanted Imagination. Witches in Polish Women's Poetry of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s

Katarzyna Szopa

University of Silesia in Katowice
ORCID: 0000-0002-5880-092X
peer-reviewed article

"WITCH is an all-women Everything. It's theater, revolution, magic, terror, joy, garlic flowers, spells, It's an awareness that witches and gypsies were the original guerrillas and resistance fighters against oppression – particularly the oppression of women – down through the ages. Witches have always been women who dared to be: groovy, courageous, aggressive, intelligent, nonconformist, explorative, curious, independent, sexually liberated, revolutionary. [...] They bowed to no man, being the liv-

ing remnants of the oldest culture of all – one in which men and women were equal sharers in a truly cooperative society, before the death-dealing, sexual, economic, and spiritual repression of the Imperialist Phallic Society took over and began to destroy nature and human society.

> *WITCH lives and laughs in every woman. […] There is no «joining» WITCH. If you are a woman and dare to look within yourself, you are a Witch. You make your own rules. You are free and beautiful… […]"*
> *["W.I.T.C.H. Manifesto"]*[1]

Introduction

In one of the poems from the posthumously published volume *Jeszcze jedno wspomnienie* [One More Recollection] (1968), Halina Poświatowska described in a moving way the violence and rape inflicted on a woman burned at the stake: "they said: this woman is a witch / so we will tear off her dress / taste the shape of dark flesh // [...] they tore it off and led her naked / so her thighs trembled / aware / of their oval beauty // [...] and as she grew in flame / reaching the clouds with an elongated scream / the nails of their gaze / sank into her breasts" [392]. Stories of violence perpetrated on the female body recurred periodically not only in the works of Poświatowska, but also in those of many other Polish women poets who published in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, such as Anna Świrszczyńska, Teresa Ferenc, as well as poets of the younger generation:

1 W.I.T.C.H. stands for the socialist feminist organization The Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell.

Anna Czekanowicz, Urszula Benka and Krystyna Lars.[2] In the works of women poets, witches appear less frequently as a catchy motif drawn from images processed by popular culture. Much more often, they are evoked as nameless victims of grueling murders and as testimony to a long history of female oppression. Their stories – pushed out of the collective imagination – return whenever oppressed social groups begin to ask questions about their own fate.

In their projects, the women poets draw from what has passed to create a vision of a new world. This vision is fed not by the emancipated daughters of the future, but by images of burned and tortured ancestresses.[3] The emancipation of women is not presented here as a horizontal path to the future or a linear, evolutionary chain of cause and effect. On the contrary, what is at stake here is the interruption of the course of History, which Świrszczyńska presents in her poem Rok 1941 [Year 1941] as "an electric-eyed giantess / of dazzlingly cruel and powerful shapes" [79]. The poet does not refer to history as such, but to a very concrete history of technological progress and totalitarian destruction, which brought about the Enlightenment, on the one hand, and fascism on the other; a history that gives us a new language ("and teaches us new speech"), while depriving us of the ability to communicate with the past, condemning us to the eternal return of what we already know. It is a history that claims to be universal; one

2 Due to formal constraints, I forego a more detailed analysis of the works of the poets mentioned.

3 I refer here to the concept of history by Benjamin, who argues that the revolutions of the working class "are nourished by the image of enslaved ancestors rather than by the ideal of liberated grandchildren" ["On the Concept" 394]

that will make modernity and capitalism fetishize progress while simultaneously updating past forms of violence and oppression used to subjugate societies.

Witches resurfacing in women's poetry is tantamount to tearing life out of the frame of an era that is locked in the homogeneous course of history. What is at stake is stopping the course of history, which runs in a circle, perpetually updating old forms of oppression, as in Świrszczyńska's poetry: "I am a circle, / I cannot break the circle. / This is the hell of perfection" [165]. Benka's cycle of poems about the watchmaker Joachim Krantz and Lucybah is also about shaking time out of its frame and breaking the sequence of events: "you lie in the street, red-haired Lucybah // […] and your eyes burn fiercely in death / like razor blades with which you do not part / your eyes burn defiantly / like a numeral // you have stopped Lucybah / and nothing will ever happen in the world again" [17]. In this gesture of pausing history, Walter Benjamin saw "the sign of a messianic arrest of happening, or (to put it differently) a revolutionary chance in the fight for the oppressed past" ["On the Concept" 396].

Examining the work of women poets, so different not only formally and aesthetically, but also generationally, I do not follow the traditional historical literary classifications. I also avoid a reading that focuses on a thematological approach. Referring to feminist analyses of social reproduction, I assume that the feminine is always a product of some ideological construct. As Sheila Rowbotham argues

in *Woman's Consciousness, Man's World* (1973), "Oppression is not an abstract moral condition but a social and historical experience. Its forms and expressions change as the mode of production and the relationships between men and women, men and men, women and women change in society" [xi]. Hence, in my selection of texts, I seek those poetic strategies that I believe have an emancipatory dimension, that is, one that leads to the production of new forms of life. That is why I am much more interested in this gesture, which I find in the work of women poets and associate with what Silvia Federici has described as "re-enchanting the world", that is, "discover[ing] the reasons and logics other than those of capitalist development ["Re-Enchanting" 188]. Świrszczyńska expressed this point even more emphatically: "I would like today's poetry to have a function that the folk song or magical ritual once had" ["Pod prąd" 9]. In female poets' work, the revival of magical thinking is not limited to the linguistic and formal layer of the poems. I consider this device as a manifestation of utopian imagination, focused on creating a new vision of communal life.

Therefore, the starting point for my considerations is the turbulent moment at the turn of the 1970s, not only in the PRL (Polish People's Republic) but also across the world. I believe that the images of witches and sorceresses evoked by female poets were, on the one hand, a harbinger of the emerging international feminist movement,[4] and on the

4 The motif of the witch as an allegory of female power was resurrected in the 1970s by feminist movements that revived the history of witch-hunting in order to use it in the struggle for reproductive rights. I am referring to the wave of women's strikes in 1970s Italy, organized under the banner of Wages for Housework. During one such strike for the legalization of abortion, organized in Naples on May 1, 1976, three thousand women chanted: "Tremate! Tremate! Le

other, a reaction to the policy of equality in the PRL, and especially, to the crises it faced in the area of reproduction.[5] I do not treat the themes that surfaced in the works of these female poets, such as motherhood, carnality, domesticity, spirituality, magic, and witchcraft as ahistorical and universal experiences of femininity, but as manifestations of the postulates that have characterized all social revolts and struggles for living conditions throughout history. I believe that in their projects, women poets revive not so much the vision of a liberated future as the unfulfilled dreams of an egalitarian world in which there would be no more room for the injustice and exploitation of women.

Women's poetry and the specter of Caliban

In her now classic work *Caliban and the Witch* (1998), Silvia Federici analyzed the history of witch hunts in terms of the history of class struggle: "if «femininity» has been constituted in capitalist societies as a work-function masking the production of the work-force under the cover of biological destiny, then «women's history» is «class history» […]" [14]. The author has demonstrated that the persecution of witches, along with slave trade and enclosures, was central to the accumulation and formation process of the modern proletariat in Europe and the New World [14]. The fact that the nascent capitalist system was founded on mass femicide becomes a key question about the status of women and the possibility of their emancipation under capitalism.

streghe son tornate, et non per essere bruciate ma per essere pagate!" which translates to: Tremble! Tremble! The witches have returned, but not to be burned, but to be paid! [Toupin 148].

5 Specifically, it was about expecting women to work two jobs. I write about this in the text *Praca miłości. Poezja kobiet wobec reprodukcji życia codziennego* [Labor of Love. Women's Poetry in the Face of the Reproduction of Everyday Life] [Szopa]; see also [Ghodsee 53-57].

It gave rise to new and more restrictive systems of the patriarchal regime: it resulted in the devaluation of women's work, the control of women's reproductive rights, the transformation of social relations and, importantly, the perpetuation of the gender-based division of labor, resulting in the exploitation of women's work and their exclusion from the public sphere. It was on the basis of these developments that the relationship between men and women was radically redefined, assigning them corresponding productive and reproductive roles.

Federici argues that the foundations of the new social order rise on the mutilated, burned, tortured, and degraded female body, which is simultaneously the body of the proletariat. The symbol of this body becomes Caliban, the enslaved and debased son of the rebellious witch Sycorax, and one of the protagonists of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. As Carolyn Merchant notes in her classic study *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution* (1976), the Copernican Revolution changed the perception of the world: the harmonious microcosm is replaced by a vision of "wild" nature that must be tamed. It is, therefore, necessary to implement a system of control over both the corporeal and spiritual aspects; the physical body and the sphere of the psyche; the visible and the invisible world. The wild and monstrous natural world requires the intervention of Prospero, a man who wields power over the forces of nature [130]. Taming the son of the dangerous witch, making him a slave and servant of the white man is, thus, a guarantor of a new order based on gender and racial hierarchy, colonial domination and property rights.

The specter of Caliban resurfaces in women's poetry in the late 1960s and early 1970s, where the theme of witches, hunts, trials and persecution of women becomes almost dominant. While it can be said that the witch motif had already been used by other female poets, writers, and artists, it was not always presented in the context of a history of struggle in the area of social reproduction. The works of Maria Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska, full of witches, ghosts, fairies, soothsayers and specters, are one example. However, the poet decides not to revive the emancipatory potential of these figures. In the poem *The Magicians of Paris*, this world of sorcery is in effect shown as a "carnal phantom" ready to attack at any moment [Jęcz 99]:

> *Deep in the courtyards, right, left, in the mansards*
> *and basements*
> *the magicians of Paris lurk like sleepy toads,*
> *like green snakes, fluffy owls, like quiet nocturnes,*
> *like jagged gargoyles in the galleries of*
> *Notre Dame de Paris.*
> *[Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska 294]*

The image of Paris that emerges from the poem reproduces the stereotype of the urban mob – an undifferentiated mass that poses a threat to social order. This fear, especially of the transgression of working-class women, is further compounded by the notion of their supernatural power, capable of bringing about another history, like the medium Sarah, who "can look in the crystal ball and see all your history. / With her painted eye she measures the future" [Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska 294].

Knowledge of the future and corporeal knowledge – this is the greatest power of witches, who are in the power of realizing and bringing to life forces that are not visible in everyday life. This ability, which in Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska's poetry elicits fear, gains new expression in the work of the aforementioned female poets. In their poetic projects, it is this leaning toward the future that stands behind the evoked stories and images of witches. Here, the witches are a harbinger of that change, a projection of a world free from the wrongs of the past. It suffices to look at several poems by Poświatowska, where the image of the city and its backstreets is full of dancing witch-prostitutes: "we do not believe in hell / in dancing fire / we ourselves are sparks" [13]. These women do not anticipate the coming change, like Sarah the medium; they themselves are the harbingers of it. Furthermore, here the witches are not, as in Jasnorzewska's work, abandoned "fledgling witches" whom the devil must protect. Poświatowska creates a completely different image of the witch, one that cannot be enclosed within the confines of an established order, as in the poem Fryne. The titular character does not make a pact with the devil; on the contrary, she simply leaves hell: "On a green flame she floated out of red hell/ and did not return. The devils cried huddled in the corners / and angry Beelzebub gnawed at his wrists" [73].

Especially in the later stages of her career, Świrszczyńska also turned to what is anachronistic in order to update the remnants of knowledge and strength accumulated in the past. Thus, she chose the folk wisdom of old women, and in Czarne słowa [Black Words] (1967) she draws heavi-

ly on African fables and legends. All her poetry, filled with the energy that springs from the guts of communal life, is a search for embodied knowledge; knowledge that we have been deprived of as a result of the long history of capitalist onslaught. As Federici notes, "this accumulated structure of needs and desires that has been the precondition of our social reproduction has been a powerful limit to the exploitation of labor" ["Re-Enchanting" 190]. Hence, Świrszczyńska focuses on the power of community, its rituals, beliefs and struggles, even if it were to be "the last fight": "They will eat our hearts, / they will find no fear in them" [133].

In the works of younger female poets, witches appear in yet another guise: they are predatory and full of anger. However, women poets do not fall into the trap of the modernist femme fatale stereotype. On the contrary, redemption becomes a condition for a new order based on social justice. In Czekanowicz's work, the witch is almost always a woman full of anger, seeking revenge for the wrongs done to herself and her children: "there will be no forgetting / of yesterday and of vengeance / quite cruel for the people who until the end / will call you a witch's spawn / and scare me with your non-existence" [25]. From Lars's poetry, full of aquatic motifs drawn from the Romantic tradition, emerges the image of the drowned woman from folk legends, who also seeks redress: "For, after all, there is that song /of pain in you / that burns in me" [58]. In Teresa Ferenc's work, witches will appear wherever the bond with the forces of nature is regained: "Wild madonnas – / the dance burning under the open sky // the dance of the hips / of the clay ribs / the dance of the hungry palates / of fires" [40].

The images of witches evoked by the poets are not filled with defeatism; we are not dealing here with a crisis of imagination, but rather with a sense of peculiar nostalgia. As Enzo Traverso writes, "history is made of missed encounters, of lost opportunities that leave the bitter taste of melancholia" [177]. This way of making women's stories is lined, to use Benjamin's term, with a melancholy not devoid of critical potential. It is a historical and allegorical insight into history that tries to grasp the sources of collective and individual suffering; a collection of images and objects of the past waiting for redemption. Traverso has referred to this state of affairs as "left-wing melancholia," understood in terms of lack rather than loss. It is not a state of longing for a lost regime or a particular form of ideology, but a need to revive the images and histories of emancipatory struggles, that is, "a historical experience that deserves recollection and attention in spite of its fragile, precarious, and ephemeral duration. In this perspective, melancholy means memory and awareness of the potentialities of the past: a fidelity to the emancipatory promises of revolution, not to its consequences" [Traverso 52].

In the work of female poets, the witches have an allegorical function: they are not so much an expression of longing for the lost world of women's creative powers as an attempt to actualize them. Poetry plays a special role here because it becomes not only the voice of the suffering and wronged, but also the voice of groups and minorities struggling for social justice. Aside from writing about the most victimized, Świrszczyńska also created a few texts dedicated to the he-

roes of the revolution, such as the poem *Pamięci "Che" Guevary* [In Memory of "Che" Guevara]: "They cannot speak, they have no / face. I am / their face, the burning tongue / of their throat // [...] My Legend / will lead the dead and the living / further than I will" [141]. In Poświatowska's work, the melancholy of revolution is revealed in the figures of Berenika, a burned Jewish woman, a tortured witch, in anti-war poems about Vietnam, or in the story of the persecution of women in Bremen. It is not just about commemoration, but about changing the course of history: taking a different path that might enable us to redefine our present [Tomba 6]: "Sulamita / whenever the fire burns / under a good pot / my hands glow pink / and I look // [...] for I would like to redeem / your Jewish body / from the Christian flames / return to you the Jewish meadow / sun-drenched / sacred – under the rain / and your youth [Poświatowska 58–59]. In Krystyna Lars's poetry, the witch returns in the form of a woman locked beneath the surface of the water, visited by the spirits of other women, her ancestresses: "They / live in me – / on the other side of my heart / [...] I open my mouth, I call out / but my mouth opens / like red eyelids / in the body of the other woman" [20]. In Czekanowicz's work, this is the memory of a witch burned at a "stake of hatred", embodying the fate of all persecuted women: "with the wind that scatters my dust / and brings my high-pitched cry / to give you dark delight // there I always abide" [19]. In Ferenc's poetry, a woman's body is inhabited by a specter of the past – a nine-year-old girl who witnessed the mass murder of the residents of the village of Sochy: "That one / behind the skin like a splinter / must have ingrown too deeply / this pupil of mine / still nine-years-old / still incurably / alive" [62].

Revolution and melancholy are most clearly highlighted in the poetry of Urszula Benka and Krystyna Lars. In the case of both poets, the key role is played by the motif of sleep, which functions here – as Benjamin would say – as a reminder of the past, not a prophecy of the future [Sny 167]. Sleep activates the forgotten; "dreaming is part in history" [83]. For Benka, dream is an opportunity to stop time, break it out of its frame and disrupt the synchronicity of history. When the zero hour of the revolution strikes, time stands still: clocks – the instruments of labor discipline – are annihilated.[6] However, everything that resists the violence of synchronization, as in the poem *Histeria zegarmistrza Wolfganga Fryderyka Krantza* [Hysteria of Watchmaker Wolfgang Frederick Krantz], must be buried in the oblivion of the homogeneous course of history:

> *I will tell you about this dream:*
> *it happened in the midst of oblivion [...]*
> *along a dusty road in the middle of the fields*
> *the crowd was creeping*
> *with identical and simultaneous movements*
> *and all were carrying clocks [...]*
> *the faces*
> *of the people were stiff and white and doubtful*
> *and black were their coats and bowler hats and canes*
> *which squeaked like jackdaws*
> *in the empty sun –*
> *they stopped at the cemetery which in the sun*

6 Benka's poem clearly brings to mind the story of firing at clocks during the July Revolution in France, recalled by Benjamin in his essay *On the Concept of History* [395]. See also [Pospiszyl 195].

seemed to be feverish in agony
and the delicate interiors of the clocks were dripping
with red
withering before my eyes
when the entwined mechanisms were torn apart and
laid
in layers and rows in the pits
and their hands were folded on their faces
and covered with top hats of noir [...] [6].

Benka's dream tells of the violence of synchronization that takes place on the "entwined mechanisms" of differentiated temporalities. The quest for the universalization of history means plunging the richness of social life into the impasse of an age obsessed with linear temporality and the efficiency of production [Tomba 9]; an age of "top hats of noir" and "the empty sun," without recollections and without the memory of other traditions, other models of communal life. Consequently, the synchronization of the clock hands splashed with red inaugurates a homogeneous course of history. However, using the metaphor of lights proposed by Massimiliano Tomba, the "stiff," "white" and "doubtful" faces of the marching procession will continuously reflect the glows of many different temporalities [7].

In Lars's *Chirurga mistyczna* [Mystic Surgery], surreal visions from the edge of dream and reality, interwoven with Romantic themes, also create tension between various forms of temporality. In a subversive way, Lars uses

the Romantic topicality, lined with an oneiric atmosphere, to create the figure of a woman plunged into lethargy,[7] trapped under the surface of the water, in order to reveal the mechanism underlying the phallocentric order. Its foundations are built on the suppression of what is feminine from the sphere of visibility and recognition. This is accompanied not only by the exclusion of women from politics and the devaluation of their work, but also by their confinement to the sphere of myth, in the guise of ominous sirens, nymphs, drowned women, medusas, etc. Lars aims to awaken femininity from this lethargy, and this gesture will herald a social revolt: "The sun went out for a moment / your faces suddenly darkened / a slow shadow moved across the ground / [...] It was my shadow / It is I who stand before you again" [38]. The awakening of femininity from the eternal age of sleep will not only be an anticipation of the future, but also a reminiscence of the many shades of formerness, as Benjamin would say, that have been unified in the process of synchronization.

The recurring specters of witches, on the one hand, lock these images in the past, evoking a history of suffering and harm, and on the other, become a requisite for feminist politics. The clash of other, displaced temporalities with universal history not only disrupts its uniform rhythm but also allows for new, unexpected configura-

7 The image of a woman plunged into water brings to mind the "Opheliac" revolutionary imagination. As Katarzyna Czeczot notes, "Ophelicism is the language of the sentimental revolution in feelings, which turns the existing gender divisions upside down. It is also a constellation of tropes coding social upheaval. In Polish Romantic literature, Opheliac heroines are, after all, peasant women, who in 1846 went to set fire to lords' manors, demanding the abolition of serfdom" [41].

tions to emerge. In Benka's work, witches appear to resist Oedipalization: "this strange name was given to me on a platter of rain / [...] my name: Chronomea / it seemed to sink / in this tangle of reality and inspiration // I wear this strange name like a blindfold: / it has the power / to blast destinies" [24]. Breaking time out of its framework opens us up to what is possible in the future, blasts destiny that encloses us in Oedipal systems and ready-made structures. It is like the "black uniform" from Lars's poem: "Now I will have a live skin / unlike / my two enemies, sitting sleepily / at the right hand of my father motionless like / a dormant sea" [30].

The specter of a past full of suffering and injustice haunts women's poetry, but it becomes a condition for the advent of a new, more just world. "To know our history", Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English note, "is to begin to see how to take up the struggle again" [30].

Poetry and re-enchanting the world

Witches appear wherever there is an assault on life, specifically, on the conditions of its reproduction. The term witches is applied primarily to the creators of the world, whose reproductive abilities and magical knowledge are in opposition to the existing discipline of work. The expulsion of women from the public sphere, the control over their reproduction, the perpetuation of the gender-based division of work, and the devaluation of reproductive work all render the processes of producing life invisible. Moreover, relegated to the private sphere, they become natural female activities. Eleanor Penny has described this mech-

anism of the disappearance of reproductive work using the metaphor of witchcraft, as a result of which life comes about by itself and the reared, fed and educated worker magically appears at the gates of the free market, ready to sell his labor.

> *[These are the] worlds […] [r]uled by laws of infinite motion and spontaneous generation. Children spring up from nowhere, grow untended, learn unbidden. Food cooks itself, dirty laundry disappears, and reappears only once white again. The production of life is, in the true sense of the world, occult. And women–whether or not they can give birth– seem reliably associated with this mysterious process. One can only wonder what […] happens [behind] closed doors [Penny].*

Thus, the reproduction of life is, on the one hand, an effect of invisible forces, and on the other, a kind of black magic: secret knowledge and dark power, as in Lars's poem entitled *Gotowanie ryżu* [Cooking Rice]:

> *They ran in by avalanche*
> *They shuffled with a white flutter.*
> *The aluminum sea*
> *overtaken by a gritty reef.*
> *With a wand the flame was summoned*
> *begins the hocus-pocus*
> *for the miraculous*
> *multiplication of rice [9].*

This knowledge had to be exorcised at all costs: eradicated from public space, degraded, weakened and tamed; in a word, subjected to control and a new rigor of work. As Federici concludes, "[m]agic was also an obstacle to the rationalization of the work process, and a threat to the establishment of the principle of individual responsibility. Above all, magic seemed a form of insubordination, a refusal of work, and an instrument of grassroots resistance to power. The world had to be «disenchanted» in order to be dominated" [Caliban 174]. It is important in this context to recall the original meaning of *sabbaths*, whose etymology refers back to the Latin *sabbatum*, Greek *sabbaton*, and Hebrew *shabbath*, meaning "day of rest". The fear the witch sabbaths aroused in the propertied classes was, in fact, the fear of organizing resistance and rebellion against work, as "[a]ll organizing is a plan for a future that doesn't yet exist, a way to envision things you've never seen and to bring them to life. It is also true in this way that *all organizing is magic*" [Jaffe].

This is best exemplified by Anna Czekanowicz's poem-spell Czarownica [The Witch], dedicated to women who resist the exploitation of reproductive labor:

> *slender pine black oak*
> *dark cavern on the moor*
> *I beseech you*
> *where countless crowds*
> *of damned women not crammed*
> *into all the blackness of the world*
> *burned pots scrubbed floors*

the stench of boiling underwear and other laundry
of monthly blood and postpartum screams
the man bull-king lord of pleasure
there you will find me [...] [18–19].

In the works of the female poets I have mentioned above, the mechanisms of resistance become apparent wherever reproductive work is brought to the fore. Activities that refer to a different economy, such as motherhood, carnality, care, cultivation of a garden, or convening with nature, are brought back to the language of poetry to gain a new expression: they are the material basis of the world, the condition of its existence, the manifestation of female agency. The world does not create itself spontaneously, like hocus-pocus, but through the invisible work of women. What Federici calls "re-enchanting the world" is making the fruits of that labor visible and freeing reproductive labor from the yoke of patriarchal-capitalist economics, which imposed new forms of exploitation and enslavement on women's bodies.

In various ways, female poets redefine the boundaries along which societies have been divided. Most often, they begin by re-evaluating female corporeality. A recurring motif is honoring a woman's maternal abilities, which go beyond the reproductive function and symbolize the power of giving birth to a new world. In Poświatowska's work, giving birth to oneself is presented as a continuous cycle of life: "one must be born / forever born" [53]; in Ferenc's work, childbirth is shown as a ritual, a practice of black magic: "In my fingers a captured fire / in my

hair the hiss of snakes / […] Let me off the fire – / I will burn myself all the way" [13–14]. In Świrszczyńska's poetry, giving birth to oneself symbolizes the dawn of a new temporality: "I must give birth to myself / anew. I must / give birth to my own new time" [366]. For Lars, birth is synonymous with a woman's awakening from sleep: "May the sleeplessness never end [...] // When I live in it, I start to believe / that love connects us beyond the embrace of muscle" [22]. This is why awakening bodily consciousness, building a relationship with oneself and one's body, regaining bonds with nature, with other women, and predicting the future is what functions in this poetry, like knowledge cultivated by past generations, accumulated in collective memory and capable of making another world a reality.

In another poem, using the same strategy, Poświatowska outlines her own historiographic project, giving voice to all those whose participation in the making of history has been erased:

> *it is we who give birth to men with strong hands*
> *not from smiles but from pain and earth […]*
> *in the deep ravines of our guts*
> *there are moss-covered nests and chicks*
> *and a mystery of existence unfolds that no one*
>
> *has seen through*
> *and layers of prehistory are forming that no one*
>
> *has commemorated [311].*

Poświatowska's embodied history is opposed to the "police historiography" which is supervised by the father's law and the universal vision of history written by the ruling class [Pospiszyl]. The crux of the "mystery of existence" is the process of producing life, capable of abolishing an order based on patriarchal power and capitalist exploitation of reproductive work. This nostalgia for the existence of primitive forms of life does not function here as a model of future social organizations, but as the presence of past experiences connected with the existence of classless societies in which there was no division into the spheres of production and reproduction, and the reproductive abilities of women were not subject to commodification.[8]

A similar attempt to update what is primordial can be seen in Świrszczyńska's poetry, especially in the stylized "Negro" poems from the volume *Czarne słowa*. Describing the world of magic, spells and beliefs, the poet creates a vision of communal life that does not fit into the economy of class societies. She does not, however, create an idyllic vision of community, but points to the very necessity for self-organizing. On the one hand, she offers a description of rituals that cement social ties, such as danc-

8 Feminist anthropologists have argued that gender relationships must be considered in much broader terms than simply through the prism of patriarchal relationships. In the introduction to her groundbreaking book, *Myths of Male Dominance* (1981), Eleanor Burke Leacock demonstrates, first, that the oppression of women is not a perennial phenomenon but the result of social transformations, specifically, the shift from societies with egalitarian genealogies to a class society. Second, she establishes that the gender division of work was originally much less restrictive and, therefore, does not determine the subordinate position of women in patriarchal societies. And finally, she shows that biology – specifically motherhood – is by no means the cause of women's exploitation and oppression, but rather the social and economic factors involved in the production, appropriation and distribution of the women's workforce and the surplus it produces [16].

ing and drumming ("Wake up. / A talking drum beats at night in the jungle. // Leave your house, / Don't look back. / Run. / Run to where they wait / for you" [121]). On the other hand, we have a world which is already divided into the satiated and the starving; those who have access to natural resources and those who die due to their lack, as in the poem *Głód* [Hunger] ("I gave birth to a child in a season of drought / when there is no milk in a woman's breasts" [132]) or in Modlitwa starego człowieka [The Old Man's Prayer]: "Moon, this is my belly. / Let there be food in it once more, / once more, moon, before I die" [125]. The poet reminds us that belief in magic was a means of survival for many communities: "A belief in magic [...] centered desires – and their fulfillment – communal and personal, for care and sustenance and protection" [Jaffe]. It is not for nothing that Świrszczyńska focuses on those members of given communities who are the weakest and most vulnerable to harm: women, children and the elderly. However, she does it in her own subversive way: it is in them that a magical force lies dormant that is able to break the chain of the process leading to the depreciation and fragmentation of communal life. Their knowledge, stored in rituals, dances and fights, is a force that disrupts the linear course of history, overwhelmed by the fetish of progress.

Ultimately, the sequence of synchronizations is broken by this "spawn of the witch", Shakespeare's Caliban, symbolizing the power of the proletariat, breaking the taboo of patricide, which – according to Sigmund Freud – lays the foundations of the patriarchal social order:

My mother the witch,
my father the jackal.
My mother gave birth to me,
my father ate me.
My mother gathered my bones,
My mother counted my bones.
[…]
Until I came to life and killed my father the jackal.
Mother danced [128–129].

And it is followed by another vision of a funeral, this time in Poświatowska's work. In the poem, which is in fact a record of the creative process, the creator-god is buried in the euphoric dance of revolution. The world is enchanted again:

Working class, I prayed, oh, class flying
the great red banner, the mighty class, class
of the brave, rallying lover, dark-feathered fowl, my
element, come, let us bury
god under the gooseberry
bush and on the fresh grave we shall dance green!
[377]

Translated from Polish by Katarzyna Szuster-Tardi
Article first appeared in: "Czas Kultury" no. 2, 2021, pp. 11-18

Works cited

Benjamin, Walter. “On the Concept of History”. *Selected Writings Volume 4, 1938–1940*. Trans. by Edmund Jephcott and others. Ed. by Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings. Cambridge, Mass: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003.

Benka, Urszula. *Chronomea*. Zarząd Główny SZSP, 1977.

---. *Sny*. Translated by Bogdan Baran, Wydawnictwo Aletheia, 2017.

Burke Leacock, Eleanor. *Myths of Male Dominance: Collected Articles on Women Cross-Culturally*. Monthly Review Press, 1981.

Czeczot, Katarzyna. *Ofelizm. Romantyczne zawłaszczenia, feministyczne interwencje*. Wydawnictwo Instytutu Badań Literackich, 2016.

Czekanowicz, Anna. *Najszczersze kłamstwo*. Pomorskie Wydawnictwo Prasowe, 1985.

Ehrenreich, Barbara, and Deirdre English. *Witches, Midwives & Nurses: A History of Women Healers*. Feminist Press, 2010.

Federici, Silvia. *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation*. Autonomedia, 2004.

Federici, Silvia. *Re-Enchanting the World: Feminism and the Politics of the Commons*. Oakland: PM Press, 2019.

Ferenc, Teresa. *Poezje wybrane i nowe 1958–1975*. Ossolineum, 1976.

Ghodsee, Kristen. *Second World, Second Sex: Socialist Women's Activism and Global Solidarity during the Cold Wa*r. Duke University Press, 2019.

Jaffe, Sarah. "All Organizing Is Magic". *Verso*, 10 Nov. 2020, https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/4465-all-organizing-is-magic?

Jęcz, Jadwiga. "Biała pani przeszła znów przez salon!… Duchy, czarownice i demony w twórczości poetyckiej Marii Pawlikowskiej-Jasnorzewskiej". *Pamiętnik Literacki*, vol. 1, 2018, pp. 95-103.

Lars, Krystyna. *Chirurgia mistyczna*. Pomorskie Wydawnictwo Prasowe, 1985.

Merchant, Carolyn. *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution*. Harper & Row, 1990.

Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska, Maria. *Poezje zebrane*. Vol. I, Wydawnictwo Algo, 1994.

Penny, Eleanor. "Burning witches and banning abortions made capitalism possible". 28 Oct. 2020, https://www.redpepper.org.uk/burning-witches-banning-abortions-controlling-womens-bodies/

"Pod prąd… Z Anną Świrszczyńską rozmawia Krystyna Nastulanka". *Polityka*, no. 15, 1979, p. 9.

Pospiszyl, Michał. *Zatrzymać historię. Walter Benjamin i mniejszościowy materializm*. Wydawnictwo Instytutu Badań Literackich, 2016.

Poświatowska, Halina. *Wiersze wszystkie*. Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2009.

Rowbotham, Sheila. *Woman's Consciousness, Man's World*. Verso, 2014.

Szopa, Katarzyna. "Praca miłości. Poezja kobiet wobec reprodukcji życia codziennego", *Teksty Drugie*, no. 5, 2020, pp. 217-237.

Świrszczyńska, Anna. *Poezje*. Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1997.

Tomba, Massimiliano. *Insurgent Universality: An Alternative Legacy of Modernity.* Oxford University Press, 2019.

Toupin, Louise. *Wages for Housework: A History of an International Feminist Movement, 1975-77.* PM Press & UBC Press, 2018.

Traverso, Enzo. Left-Wing Melancholia: Marxism, History, and Memory. Columbia University Press, 2016.

"W.I.T.C.H. Manifesto". B*urn it Down! Feminist Manifestos for the Revolution*, edited by Breanne Fahs, Verso, 2020, pp. 465-466.