

# Epistolography of the Repressed: Writer/Iwaszkiewicz, Reader/Karpowicz

Iwaszkiewicz Örneğinde Yazın Türü Olarak Mektup ve Bastırılmış Kimlik

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## Abstract

This article focuses on the epistolography as a space of free expression for the repressed queer identities. Through the example of Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz's letters to Jerzy Błeszyński, the paper renders affects, emotions and facts that could not have been said in the officially published works of Iwaszkiewicz. After the interpretation of the letters in the optics of minority writing, this study leads to the importance of modern affective lectures for literary interpretation. The author analyzes similar motives in Iwaszkiewicz's letters and contemporary Ignacy Karpowicz's *Miłość*, and shows the results of this reparative reading's attempt, using the tools and methods provided by minority studies, queer critic, and works on historical and contemporary epistolography. By using these texts and discourses, the paper aims to give the answer to the role of reading epistolography as a changing process in literary history.

**Keywords:** Iwaszkiewicz, Karpowicz, epistolography, repression, queer.

## Öz

Bu makale baskılanmış eşcinsel kimliklerin özgür ifade alanı olarak epistolografiye odaklanmakta; Jerzy Błeszyński'ye yazdığı mektuplardan yola çıkılarak, Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz'in yayımlanmış eserlerinde ifadesini bulamayan duyguları ve duygusal gerçekliği irdelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu mektupların azınlık yazını çerçevesinde yorumlanması, çalışmayı etkin ve modern edebi metin yorumlama için önemli bir izlenim kılmaktadır. Makale, Iwaszkiewicz'in mektuplarında ve Ignacy Karpowicz'in *Miłość* adlı romanında benzer motifleri analiz eder, azınlık ve cinsiyet çalışmalarıyla birlikte tarih ve epistolografi üzerine yapılan araçları ve yöntemleri kullanarak çeşitli okuma yöntemlerini önerir. Farklı metinlerden ve söylemlerden yararlanan makale, epistografinin edebiyat tarihindeki değişken rolüne göndermede bulunmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Iwaszkiewicz, Karpowicz, epistolografi, baskı, eşcinsellik.

## Introduction

Epistolography is an unusual genre. It exists on many borders, or places in-between, of literary typologies. Are letters part of literature, or some utility writing?<sup>1</sup> Should we qualify them as a non-fiction genre, or put them into the

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<sup>1</sup> This question about categorizing epistolography has been posed since the beginning of the letter's existence. According to Gabor Almasi, "Letter was an extremely broad category, including practically anything that had a salutation and a signature" (Gabor Almasi, "Humanistic Letter-Writing"). Later, epistolography was divided into two types: official,

box of “private documents”? Then, if it is “private,” why do editors decide to publish whole collections of it? And maybe the last question should be posed in the beginning: if writing a letter requires a moment of intimacy, where is the time to think about editing the message?<sup>2</sup> The above-mentioned doubts and questions are strongly connected with our (readers' and academic interpreters') urge to formalize literary genres and somehow classify a text in a gradable manner. But structural descriptions can often diminish the role of writing itself. Epistolography – just because of being a fossil in the genology system – is sometimes able to offer many more values than the “classical” literary genres. The reason is simple: private (or “non-private”) letters contain facts, emotions and effects that would not have been published anywhere else. This “fossil” can hide many repressed stories, personalities and identities. Simply put, epistolography – as a “literary outsider” that hardly fits into any literary classification – tells stories of “real outsiders,” sealed by time and social silence. According to Anna Pekaniec, letters are treated as autobiographical texts

offer not only space for self-discovery, searching for flickering identifications, whose greatest advantage is instability, separateness defending against being seized by the dominant discourse, seeking certainty of independence of existence lost by contact with the colonizer. Autobiographical texts are archives gathering the voices of subaltern, negotiating idiomatic languages, thanks to which it is easier to grasp the subject – an identity hybrid, an intimistic nomad. (256)

While writing about epistolography, Pekaniec incorporates the word “subaltern” in connection to the statement made by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (15). The term – in her opinion, described in the essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?* – illustrates all the subjects that have been reduced to the position of an object of discussion (objects are voiceless). Their message, if not expressed by the channels of patriarchal communication, is neither understood nor supported by the society. This leads Spivak to the idea of “subaltern” who “cannot speak,” who is not just “oppressed” (like in Antonio Gramsci’s theory, where the word “subaltern,” according to Spivak, is used similarly to “proletariat”), but disqualified from taking part in the discourse. In the opinion of Pekaniec, thanks to epistolography – and other autobiographical texts – voiceless objects find their way of expression, of existing independently. Combining this with Spivak’s theory, one can say that letters would be a place

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laconic letters (with the tradition derived from the ancient rhetoric) and conversational (developed on 16th century French social lounges). Both types of letters shortly started to interfere, combining format of ancient official letters (apostrophe, salutation at the end) and emotional, private matters (like love letters). Such a connection is used more often in literature (case of *Julie; or, the New Eloise* by Jean-Jacques Rousseau or *Dangerous Liaisons* by Pierre Choderlos de Laclos).

<sup>2</sup> All these questions and doubts are still in the on-going humanistic discourse about epistolography. See A. Całek, *Nowa teoria listu* (Kraków 2019, 53-83).

of object's free expression, where one can speak with its own voice and construct its own stories (as in the case of emancipated subjects). Yet, how does it look like from the interpretational point of view?

### Letters of Free Expression: Polish Examples

Let us think about epistolography as a place of freedom for repressed identities. By "repressed" I mean those who with their identity or style of living do not fit into the normative and strict systems (Foucault), like patriarchal and hegemonic ones.<sup>3</sup> If we look into the history of Polish modernist literature, to support my path of deduction, the more characteristic letter-writers would be Maria Dąbrowska, Maria Komornicka and Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz.

Maria Dąbrowska, the author of the monumental prose *Noce i dnie* ["Days and Nights"] and many more shaping Polish historical and social outlook, had never mentioned any queer (sub)text in her works (Kienzler 20). For her entire life, Maria Dąbrowska had been redacting and editing her private diary, in case it would be read by someone else (first – by soldiers during World War II, second – while thinking about publishing them). Her letters (apart from further parts of her diary) were the only place where Dąbrowska could express herself freely. Her epistolography is a great archive of self-discovering female bisexuality. Also, her correspondence disclosed the fact that she had a complicated relationship with another famous writer, Anna Kowalska (Głębińska 155-179). However, those letters are public nowadays, it seems like Dąbrowska has nothing to do with queer receptions. In popular opinion, she is still known as a flawless, heteronormative and conservative writer. There is not much practice on reading her works with her letters, which still preserve the influence of her heritage, bearing in mind such interesting, autobiographical content about the writer – and not using it while interpreting – weakens factographically new receptions of her prose.

There is also a different example of the repressed personality shown in letters. Writing in the same period as Dąbrowska, there was another writer with an interesting message: Maria Komornicka, *via* letters known as Piotr Włast Odmieniec. Transgender motives had not been recognized in his "official" works (besides his desire to be called by the male name "Piotr" and sign his works as such). Only in his epistolography from psychiatric hospital could Włast write to his mother about his repressed transsexual identity. At the beginning of the 20th century, when transgenderism in Poland was still being treated as a mental disease,<sup>4</sup> in his letters the poet was shaping his personality,

<sup>3</sup> By using the words "patriarchal" and "hegemonic" I signalize the presence of Pierre Bourdieu's thought from "Masculine domination" (about symbolic violence against women and minorities, *casus* homosexuals).

<sup>4</sup> Although I have to add that Poland was not the only country with medicalized reception of transgenderism. The problem of transgenderism and mental health was a topic of controversy, concerning social exclusion; nowadays in Poland there are still complications concerning legal issues of transgender people, but – due to the decision of WHO, planning to

identity and performativity as a man. Paradoxically, epistolography – a free place of the expression for the repressed – had become a proof that Włast was insane (in elder terms) and this made him locked up in the hospital.<sup>5</sup> This lasted until the outbreak of World War I in 1914, when he came back home – tired, unmotivated and misunderstood. Due to such scandalous story, Włast is not often mentioned in the history of Polish literature. Even though his works were very recognizable (poems, essays, opinion pieces), after the psychiatric lockdown there were not many literary discussions about him. Critics commented on his works and life with a pity (Janion 197). His family was ashamed that their daughter was extracting her teeth and wearing men's suits to appear more manly (Tomasik 31-35). Włast's epistolography is a testimony of social incomprehension, lack of tolerance and struggling with one's self. In the end, he did not write anything as valuable as when he was young – the therapy took his hope and will to create a work of art.

The last case would be about probably one of the most popular Polish writers and poets of the 20th century – the politician and essayist Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz. Although his homosexual relations were widely known (as much as the love for his wife and kids), Iwaszkiewicz's prose and poetry represent queerness only in subtexts, using – as German Ritz would say – “the poetics of sublimation” (Ritz 15-25). As a diligent reader of André Gide and Oscar Wilde, in his works the Polish writer was only suggesting that there might be some homoerotic tension between characters, usually by using the figure of triangle (in the meaning of René Girard's theory of temptation) (20). Commonly known as a reserved and moderate professional, Iwaszkiewicz was using his private letters as a means to openly express his fears, obsessions and intimate reflections. It is necessary to mention that the epistologist was living under a big social pressure – he worked not only as a writer and poet, but also as a politician in the communist government (Romaniuk 201). His letters to his lover Jerzy Błeszyński were regularly read by the PRL's political police, containing plenty of comments about his social life and views (Król 411). It is a different case from Dąbrowska and Włast's. In the first example, Dąbrowska was trying to express her queerness only in private letters, just to avoid being known as queer (which would probably happen, as she was a famous writer and a known patriot). When considering Włast, his letters to his mother become the only place where he could be himself and talk under his preferred name. As for Iwaszkiewicz, his problem was different. His sexuality did not fully affect his living conditions, but it had a strong impact on his literary works

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cross the transgenderism out of the mental disorder list in January 2022 – the awareness about legal and social status (with possible health care included) about this group is raising.

<sup>5</sup> Włast's family had decided to legally incapacitate him due to his transsexual behavior and suspicion of insanity; the poet claimed that he is not only a man, going by the name of “Piotr,” but he also incarnates himself the former founder of his family – who died long ago – Piotr Włast. Apart from his mental problems, Włast was considered as a very sociable and interesting interlocutor, as long as he was called by the male form (Tomasik 35).

(yet being never openly expressed). In his letters, Iwaszkiewicz not only mentioned his true emotions, but also made liaisons between his literature and characters from private life he kept as a mystery for years. The writers mentioned above had in common an interesting trait: they had the ability to let their voice be heard. They used letters as a means to share their opinions in public (all of them were essayists). But they would never speak openly – in their literary works – about their hidden feelings and desires. This would make them, as it were, a paradoxical Spivak’s “object” – they could be a speaking “subject” only in their private works like letters. Due to this repression (the writer who could not “truly” write), Iwaszkiewicz and Dąbrowska decided to divide their personalities as “the writer” and “the private person”. As soon as he wanted to combine the two, Włast was committed to a psychiatric hospital. These cases prove how exceptional epistolography is: it is a testimony of deep, personal division, almost schizophrenic; it involves unsaid dramas and happiness, which are barely echoed in the writers’ “official” works.

Based on all that has been mentioned so far, I am going to discuss Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz’s letters to Jerzy Błeszyński. In his letters to his lover, the writer presents an intimate portrait of an elderly artist with a desperate love for a young man. Their passionate story not only bears testimony to a repressed identity, but also provides an example of reading epistolography in an effective way, to which I will refer later.

### **“Everything as You Want”: Intimate Letters**

Jerzy Błeszyński is not a completely unknown character in the history of Polish literature. Although he was not an artist (but a physical worker from the writer’s neighborhood), Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz had dedicated to him a prose (*Choinki* [“The Chonifers”] 1957), a cycle of poems (*Droga* [“The Way”] 1957) and a play (*Wesele Pana Balzaka* [“Mr Balzac’s Wedding”] 1959). Literary critics recognize in his popular works, *Kochankowie z Marony* [“Lovers from Marona”] (1961) and *Tatarak* [“The Calamus”] (1958) traits of Błeszyński’s personality, transferred to certain characters. In 2017, there was a new opportunity to read more about “the last and the most important love of Iwaszkiewicz’s life,” as Anna Król, a journalist, published a series of letters from the writer to his lover called *Wszystko jak chcesz... O miłości Jarosława Iwaszkiewicza do Jerzeg oBłeszyńskiego* [“Everything as You Want. About the Love of Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz and Jerzy Błeszyński”].<sup>6</sup> Previously, letters were sold on the auction to the King’s Castle in Warsaw, but only in one part – of Iwaszkiewicz (the second piece of correspondence, which means: the voice of Jerzy, had never been found). This fact has had a great influence on the letters’ reception.

Due to the absence of Błeszyński’s text, it is only Iwaszkiewicz’s thoughts and feelings that the reader can know about. This – in addition – has a lot to do

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<sup>6</sup> All quotes from this book have been translated from Polish to English by the author of this article.

with the credibility of letters. We know only one side of this love affair; but it is the side of an artist who cannot separate his personality from the writer's talents. As Robert Papiński says:

As an epistologist, Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz had a protean ability to adapt to the person with whom he corresponded. Therefore, each of his correspondence is specific, in some aspects unlike others. It is no different with letters to Jerzy Błeszyński. Certainly, Iwaszkiewicz's tragic love for Błeszyński influenced him, tragic because for both it was clear that as a result of Błeszyński's fatal illness their relationship was doomed to a dramatic end. Hence, in Iwaszkiewicz's letters to Błeszyński, there is a lot of affection marked by suffering, lyricism and love confessions – in Iwaszkiewicz's other correspondence not found in such intensity; hence the elegant, farewell tone dominates.<sup>7</sup>

Błeszyński's "fatal illness" turned out to be tuberculosis – a disease, which ended their relationship in 1959. Iwaszkiewicz outlived his lover for more than twenty-one years.

In Iwaszkiewicz's works, the topic of homosexuality was never openly developed mainly because of social stigmatization. Although his greatest pieces had a strong amount of homoerotic subtext, contemporary critics avoided using the term "homosexual literature" when commenting on Iwaszkiewicz's texts. The writer avoided expressing any element of queerness in his poetry or prose: "my publisher would never print it," he once expressed (Śmieja 87). The writer was aware of the homophobia in Poland during the 20th century. In a letter he wrote in 1957, he explained to his lover:

No, son, it is not unfortunate that we met - and we consciously strove for it. [...] Of course, people see it as gross, just gross, but you know what we see – deep friendship, deep love between two men, which has tremendous value, by the very fact that it exists. And you should take care of your health to save this feeling, this male friendship, this is a great treasure. (Król 83)

While others were having an affair, Jerzy had been struggling with his infectious disease. Iwaszkiewicz wanted him to take responsibility for his actions and stay sane, but Błeszyński (in his twenties) was living his life courageously; the elder writer barely stood the situation, when his lover cheated on him with women, used him financially, lied to him several times and declined the medical treatment. This provoked Iwaszkiewicz's jealousy. In the letter we read:

And you write to me: 'Yours, Cinderella'. Yours, Cinderella. Although it sheds light on your character, your crazy ambitions. Indeed, like

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<sup>7</sup> My interview with Robert Papiński, an editor of Iwaszkiewicz's diaries and letters and an archivist at the Museum of Jarosław and Anna Iwaszkiewicz in Stawisko. Stawisko, Podkova Leśna, 2.01.2019.

Cinderella, you were picking up poppy seeds from the ashes to go to the ball. You wanted to use me for it, and it turned out that I was completely different from what you thought based on what they say in Bryjawa. [...] I'm afraid that you got into some very cheerful company. My child, after all, these babies will not give you peace, with your height, with your dick, with your beauty, which, as Olimpia says, is choking in the throat and in an empty apartment. You will be having sex, drink vodka, wave your hand at everything – I already know you. (Król 115-116)

As much as Iwaszkiewicz was jealous about his partner, his letters give the reader a hint of constant worrying about Błeszyński's health, love life, loyalty and care. These traits can also be found in the following letter:

You didn't call today as you said. Does this mean that you spent the night in Brwinów? Somehow I'm afraid of your nights ... oh, my dear, how I get tired – I still have the impression of some complicated game on your part. I tire yourself with it and myself too – forgive me, my dear, how many times you have forgiven [...]. I write nonsense, eh, it's like I'm talking to you. I kiss you many times. (Król 140-141)

In their correspondence the writer is vulnerable, demanding, greedy and lonely. Iwaszkiewicz shows both the best aspects of his prose (bright metaphors, irony, rich artistic imagination) and the worst ones, when the lover disappoints him. During critical moments of their relationship, the writer had been literally begging for the attention of his younger beloved. In 1958, he writes "I am begging you, call me back, write," "My gold, my wonderful, I miss you, you are beautiful, I press you to my heart" (Król 152). The intensity of his letters increases when Iwaszkiewicz realizes that there is not much time left for his lover: Błeszyński's health is deteriorating. The writer sends him notorious letters about the need of being in contact with him, but – on the contrary – the more he writes, the less they meet. Epistolography becomes a place of free expression, but starts to limit other ways of contact. As time passes by, Iwaszkiewicz writes longer letters, just to feel closer to his reserved lover. But shortly the artist painfully realizes that their "real" meeting is impossible. Letters and phone calls are full of Błeszyński's lies (about his health condition, other affairs and way of life). How is it possible that despite writing so many letters in nearly three years of relationship, Błeszyński has become more and more detached from his lover?

### ***Impossible Meetings***

Absence – next to love – seems to be the main topic of their love letters. While reading, page by page, Błeszyński becomes the absent *persona* of the epistolary contact. This is not only because the reader cannot read his letters (literally). Eventually, in almost every message Iwaszkiewicz starts complaining that his lover is not answering most of his questions, and that he is stubbornly silent. As readers, we experience even some kind of paradox: once the writer says that he is in regular contact with Błeszyński, the second time he claims that he

saw him weeks ago. It turns out that only through epistolography can they become connected, because they meet only from time to time, and in their letters they keep constantly recalling it (and daydreaming about its alternate endings). As time passed by, Iwaszkiewicz was afraid of being abandoned. In 1958, he wrote:

After all, I miss you very much, my love, and I feel the worst fear that when I come back you will be different than when I was leaving. The more that you have been different recently. I am terribly afraid of our meeting and I experience great emotions because of it – I'm afraid of your indifference - your apathy. (Król 162)

Similarly, in a different letter, he wrote:

Why are you always in this damn iron armor? Don't you understand that it's much harder for you and me? I got the impression of dissatisfaction, something incomplete and unreal from our meeting, because you didn't tell me anything important, nothing of what you really relive in your sleepless nights and barren days? Of course, I know what you will answer me: that you still know what I think and feel. (Król 215)

Epistolography of this love affair is full of emotions, both ecstatic and depressing. After the first two years of the relationship, Iwaszkiewicz discovers that he had never really known his lover. Aware of this fact, he continued writing letters, hoping that it would make Błeszyński write about himself, which would allow the writer to learn about his lover's life. Even though his messages were regularly read by the political police (for possible blackmailing him), Iwaszkiewicz had been writing him love letters to him, and even after his death.

### ***Letters of Elegy***

The most dramatic part of their correspondence is probably the one after Jerzy Błeszyński's death. Iwaszkiewicz could not accept his loss, so he kept on writing letters. In relation to their past conversation, where lovers were talking about a future travel to Surabaya in Indonesia (Błeszyński's brother lived there as a contract worker), as an act of grieving Jarosław was writing to Jerzy like he was living far away, in dreamed Indonesia. The artist wrote this letter several days after his lover's death:

Just now have I analyzed [poems]. But what conclusions have I come to, I will tell you in the next letter. In the meantime goodbye. Why don't you let me know you? Is the beautiful weather, where you are now? Give me a sign –  
Or:  
Write a lot, I don't know what sea rocks you: Mediterranean, Red? Don't send letters, hide them, we'll read them together when I come to Surabaya. I kiss your eyelids the way you like,



Yours. (Król 455)

Then he comes to think about everything that happened before Błeszyński's death. Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz talks with his friends and family, discusses every life decision he made, reads their letters many times, just to feel that he knew the person he loved. In the next stages of grieving, he lets himself decide to finish his private investigation. The artist accepts his loss and starts to compile his quotes and stories from the letters.

From the reader's perspective, this part of correspondence is the most emotional one. It is full of affects (according to Brian Massumi, "affect" is an impulse, intensive feeling, later transmitted and called as a specific emotion (Massumi 83-109)), and the most touching – from both sides of the epistolography, to the writer and the reader. If previously Iwaszkiewicz was complaining about rare dates with his beloved and finding reasons to fight (and become reconciled), in these last letters he seems to be passing through all stages of mourning.

Apart from experiencing their affective character, the letters of grief can be read – from a theoretical point of view – as imprinted into the epistolography's tradition. When defining epistolography, Cicero said it is "conversing with the absent" (Ceccarelli, Doering, Fögen, Gildenhard 330). Comparing this with Iwaszkiewicz's situation, this could not be truer. Even though Cicero was not talking about sending letters to those, who had passed away, his words are gaining an interesting accuracy: readers do not know the letters of Błeszyński (because they are not found), but *via* Iwaszkiewicz's epistolography, they suspect what could have been said by the absent lover. But at the end of letters' cycle, there is only mourning. And here is the real "absence," of which Iwaszkiewicz was accusing his beloved.

Letters to Błeszyński are exceptional, when it comes to Iwaszkiewicz's heritage. Bearing in mind the fact that he was a really "active" epistologist (writing every day to his family and friends), only with his lover could he be truly sincere and vulnerable. This example underlines the liberating role of epistolography: in this strange, unfitting genre, "unfitting" people can finally speak up what lies in their minds.

### **Reading from What Remained: "Love" of Ignacy Karpowicz**

As I previously pointed out, fragments from letters to Jerzy Błeszyński had become part of many Iwaszkiewicz's works (prose, poem, drama). In fact, their content attracted the biggest part of the audience by that time when Agnieszka and Robert Papiński published the writer's diaries (three parts in 2011). The circumstance provoked young, contemporary Polish writers (Szczepan Twardoch, Jacek Dehnel), literary critics and reviewers (Justyna Sobolewska, Krzysztof Tomasiak) and filmmakers (Izabella Cywińska) to make a commentary – through making art or review – about Iwaszkiewicz's life and his influence on their work. All of these artists, and their connection to *Wszystko jak chcesz...* are potentially interesting materials for different kinds of

research (maybe in the field of Harold Bloom's theory of influence). But for a longer review and interpretation, I chose one of the most interesting "effects" of reading Iwaszkiewicz's letters: the book of the modern Polish writer, Ignacy Karpowicz.

As a prose writer and reporter, Ignacy Karpowicz published his work *Miłość* ["Love"] in 2017. It was a prose work paying tribute to his biggest artistic inspirations – Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz and his wife, Anna Iwaszkiewicz (also connected to the matter of literature, as the interpreter of Marcel Proust's works). The dedication part of *Miłość* reads as follows:

Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz accompanied me since my first, conscious readings. His dark entanglement in himself and his bright side, the one that organizes and simultaneously hides, have been with me for years, along with the figure of Anna Iwaszkiewicz. I feel honored by such company. (Karpowicz 289)

The interesting designation of "accompany" shows up in Karpowicz's text. While reading his book, the reader receives the impression that the author is using a writing style similar to Iwaszkiewicz's; Karpowicz makes configurations of the same clues and motives. As a matter of fact, the younger writer openly expresses the affinity between his own writing and his precursor's style: "I had the idea to start with short stories modeled on Iwaszkiewicz's sublimations" (Karpowicz 289). This is a good point to pose a question: how is the factual relationship between the elder writer's letters and the younger writer's prose reflected in Karpowicz's case?

*Miłość* is thought of as an echo of Iwaszkiewicz and Błeszyński's relationship. Moreover, the most remarkable fact is that Karpowicz, while writing the story, did not have access to the original letters between the two men (Anna Król published them few months later, entitled as *Wszystko jak chcesz...*). The writer was excerpting information about the men's affair from the letter's fragments in the writer's diaries, his prose, poetry, drama and biographies. The whole epistolography to Błeszyński was not available back then, so Karpowicz had been constructing in his prose his own vision of that romance. As he says in the interview promoting the book: "I wrote this part before Iwaszkiewicz's letters to his beloved. [...] I write something, and then it turns out to coincide with reality. In addition, the part that opens the book was the last one" (Karpowicz 1). A composition of the stories, which Karpowicz mentions, contains three parts: *Piękno* ["Beauty"], *Prawda* ["Truth"], *Dobro* ["Good"] (in relation to the Greek ethic's canon). This was commented altogether: "Beauty? Truth? Good? Without love, they dwarfed, becoming their own opposite, disconnecting into the dark ground" (52).

In the first part of *Miłość*, Karpowicz presents the story of Jarosław and Anna Iwaszkiewicz, hosting in Stokroć (the prototype of this place, as in another Jarosław's novel, *Panny z Wilka*, is Stawisko – writer's actual home) Irena and

Jerzy Siwicki (in real life, Jerzy Błeszyński and his lover, Lilka Pietraszak). Karpowicz constructs the story on three main themes: the loneliness of women – Anna and Irena (writer’s wife and guest’s lover), the latent, homoerotic relationship between Jarosław and Jerzy, and the awareness of death accompanying all characters. It is not without reason that the reader recognizes in the plot a reflection of the correspondence published later by Anna Król.

As with the letters, the relationship described here recreates the figures of “Eros” and “Sublimation,” recognized by German Ritz in Iwaszkiewicz’s prose. According to Ritz, writing about the death of potentially homosexual characters is a way of describing their inability to gain satisfaction: “Sensual perception of a man’s body is only possible as a borderline experience (death experience)” (Ritz 15-25). Iwaszkiewicz and Błeszyński in Karpowicz’s novel experience the same phenomenon during their drinking meetings and hourly disappearance from Stokroć. In *Miłość*, Iwaszkiewicz never openly admires the body of a young man, to whom he devotes every spare moment, eventually leading him to ignore his wife more and more. It is worth mentioning that without knowing about the letters, Karpowicz somehow caught the catchphrase used intimately between Iwaszkiewicz and Błeszyński: “Everything as you want”. In *Miłość* he writes: “A mutual friend gave sage and shisha tobacco. ‘I love you, you know?’ – ‘Everything as you want’. Inattentive, delightful young man suddenly emerges into the world” (68).

The story, containing flashes of the man-loving-man relation, fatal illness, Anna’s insanity and dealing with Iwaszkiewicz’s friend’s death, evolves to the different parts of books and becomes a literary motive. In the second part of the prose work, there is the story of Albertyna, a young student of philology, in the time of the right wing’s regime. She falls in love with her friend, Mateusz, and starts shyly to realize her bisexuality. When it becomes visible, that Mateusz is having an affair with his male friend (which is forbidden in the homophobic country’s policy), she denounces him to the political police, believing that after the compulsory conversion therapy he would be able to make a family with her. Besides, Albertyna discovers while studying that it is impossible to borrow the book about Iwaszkiewicz and Błeszyński from the university’s library and her mysterious dissertation adviser tells her to avoid researching the topic of homosexuality. It turns out that all the people somehow connected to the queerness (and queer studies too) were endangered in the country. By this pessimistic vision – built on Iwaszkiewicz’s queer literary heritage – the author makes a bold allusion to the current Polish political situation (in the novel, the governing party’s name – *Prawo i Swoboda* [“Law and Freedom”] – is very similar to governing in Poland nowadays *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość* [“Law and Justice”]). Jarosław and Jerzy, as well as all the literary allusions in book (Proust, Mann, Wilde) become Karpowicz’s question: where do the neglecting minority’s stories lead? Into the strict right wing’s policy or straight into conversion therapies? Karpowicz grasps Michel Foucault’s theory and underlines the importance of subversiveness in queer life stories in the heteronormative society.

The third part of the book – next to the fairytale about two boys in love (one being a prince, the other a poor peasant) tells us about the inequalities in a homosexual relationship and the general exclusion (of women and the poor). The part is shared by quasi-autobiographical intermezzo. Although Karpowicz claims that it has nothing to do with his own biography, there are strong biographical bonds between him and the *persona* that he creates (which can be suspected from his open, personal queerness). In one of the interviews he says:

Of course, I wrote this book, it is my book. But I am in it only a medium through which something has to flow or speak. And my fate was different from that of the first-person narrator. [...] *Miłość*, as I said, was difficult to write, but this first-person narrative was particularly difficult because I had to create an impression of sincerity. And such an impression does not come directly from life. (Karpowicz 1)

This time the narrative changes from the third person, where the speaking man is a writer during his coming out. The character discusses his own struggles with self-acceptance as a homosexual person, giving extensive descriptions of internalized homophobia, quite accurately depicted, as well as secret meetings of homosexuals (silenced by sublimation as furtive, nocturnal and filled with shame). Moreover, the narrator reveals the place where his story meets the fate of Iwaszkiewicz. By describing the struggle with his own identity, sexuality, hatred for his own body (“sleeping with the enemy”), distrust of himself and feeling social fear, the narrator of *Miłość* in some way draws a connection with the story of the elder writer, who – in the first part of the story – has a problem with his orientation. While the previous story contains descriptions of Jerzy and Jarosław’s night meetings, the second one reads: “Sometimes this lie was repealed for the closest in the evening at supper or by itself was completely repealed by strangers in a darker alley, and in front of the world I was a completely lying person” (Karpowicz 82). The character, exposing himself emotionally and physically, presents a description of his heart disease and epistolary (or more: *via* e-mail) correspondence with his beloved.

What kind of conclusion can be drawn from these stories? And what is their exact link with Iwaszkiewicz’s letters? According to his vision of contemporary Polish political scene, Ignacy Karpowicz decided to write a different version of love stories based on the romance between Iwaszkiewicz and Błeszyński. Because the complete cycle of their (or his) letters was unavailable, Karpowicz searched through the elder writer’s archives, took fragments of their correspondence and used them in his own love story and political manifest, in the name of tolerance. Apart from the romance plot, there are a lot of sociological reflections about exclusions in Poland. Przemysław Czapliński, a literary critic, draws attention to what readers may fail to notice, guided by the interpretative path of the narrative. Homophobia, as an example of a touchstone for democracy, family relationships, memory of literature and history, is just one of the topics discussed in history. As the reviewer aptly

writes, “every dictatorship can be recognized by the misfits it appoints and fights, by offering illusory unity to the rest of society” (Czapliński). Therefore, in the world described by Karpowicz, discriminated groups are not only homosexuals, but also women and poor people. With such an interpretation, *Miłość* goes beyond being a colorful story based on the romance of an old writer. It becomes a triptych – a treaty on anti-feminist and classist society (because the theme of the class as a category is found in each part), whose representative group are discriminated homosexuals.

Ignacy Karpowicz used Iwaszkiewicz’s letters very responsibly. What Karpowicz did can be called a reparative reading (and writing), relating to Eve Kosofsky-Sedgwick (123-150). The younger writer relieves reading, absorbs it affectively, is under the feeling of some (unspoken) intensity. What did the reparative part suggest? If we interpreted the word “reparative” as a form of writing designed to repair one’s traumas by telling their own plots stories, then Karpowicz would be a good example of it. Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz’s prose and poetry helped him to understand himself as a person and the parts of his letters touched (Kosofsky-Sedgwick “Touching Feeling”) him and changed him as a writer. Those effects not only provoked his personal change, but also led him to express his social and political outlook. From the fragments, parts, and – sometimes – ashes of Iwaszkiewicz’s love letters, he created his own political manifest, shared an intimate story and provoked the next generation to think about freedom of expression (emotional, wordly and personal). Reading Iwaszkiewicz changed Karpowicz both as a person and as a writer, and provided him with the tool to express what they had in common: congruent imagination, shaped by queer-coded literature, similar experiences and traumas, and empathy for the repressed.

### **Epistolography and the Expressed**

Are the letters of Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz part of literature, or are they too determined by their purposefulness? His letters definitely are poetic, with plenty of intertextual relations to different literary works, mainly French (Colette, André Gide, Thomas Mann, Françoise Sagan, Arthur Rimbaud). They are associated with various genres ranging from dedication, fairytales (about the ideal future of men that could not have been possible) to lamentations and elegies. Iwaszkiewicz’s epistolography has characters (Jarosław – the narrator, and Jerzy – the absent listener, instigator of communication), plot and climax, if one should describe it through categories of prose writing. But it is still impossible to figure out whether it falls under the category of non-fiction literature or private documents. When it comes to privacy, in *Wszystko jak chcesz...* Iwaszkiewicz once said to his lover: “And I won’t bother you unnecessarily. But do you read my letters? Do you read them until the end? Do you hide them? Remember that in a few years Piotruś will be able to sell them at a good price” (Król 153). Hence, the reader can assume that Iwaszkiewicz treated his letters as an investment for future generations – the abovementioned “Piotruś” was Jerzy Błeszyński’s son.

Epistolography hides many effects, unsaid stories, troubled biographies and feelings. Contrary to the artist's published works, letters contain intimate feelings of solitude and isolation, keeping a dialogue with someone trusted (or maybe a monolog with one's self on paper). This literary genre – often diminished by being unspecified and undefined – is a field full of artistic potential for future readers and writers, and specifically it is vulnerable because of both the subject-matter concerned and the means by which it is communicated (sheets of paper).

Until his last days Iwaszkiewicz kept an eye on epistolography. Even though he wrote many letters per day to plenty of his friends and co-workers, the letters to Błeszyński were kept in a special coffer. The writer's family never liked his younger lover. That was not because of the homosexual relation between them (for the closest of Iwaszkiewicz it was not anything surprising, since his wife and kids knew about Jarosław's orientation). Błeszyński was even called "the devil" by the family's friends, for they saw how much he abused Iwaszkiewicz's courtesy (and finances). Besides the social prejudices, unfriendliness and political system they were living in, the writer and his lover wrote in letters an impressive love story. Their epistolography, found after years, is now becoming a material belonging to the younger artists' work. Previous affective readers – like Karpowicz – are creating their own stories, writing their experiences and joining post-Iwaszkiewicz's heritage. All things considered, the meaning of letters is invaluable. So, what are the possible perspectives that can be taken when reading them? What can we expect for the future of epistolography? We can let the letters speak for themselves, just as Lucyna Marzec did:

What else do the letters desire? They desire to be read many times, strive to save, store and make them public (despite the writers' demands for their destruction), they want to evoke emotions and leave a trace (effect) of "life" in their readers (correspondents and the wider public). They want to shake the stable sense of presence/ of absence, the division into art (literature) and everyday practice. They strongly demand inter –and transdisciplinary work that would comprehensively create a satisfying theory for them. (10)

## **Conclusion**

Letters provide an opportunity to get to know the writer better, in terms of his/her biography, history and works (like it is for Dąbrowska, Włast and Iwaszkiewicz). To learn about a writer as a literary figure is especially important for readers. Thanks to "emotionality" contained in the epistolography, they are able to observe changes in the writer's professional atelier, perceive him as a person (emotional, vulnerable), instead of an institution (who provides literary text, without any inclination to his/her private life). Moreover, due to their complicated and undetermined genology,

letters can be read as a place full of affects, inspiring for subsequent writers. In fact, as the present study renders, this is the case for Ignacy Karpowicz: his example shows how epistolography encourages the repressed to speak and create their own places of polemics, creating manifests (about politics) and expressing their own emotions. Additional value of reading letters is the experience of reparative reading (which is also revealed in the analysis of Karpowicz's prose) – while reading Iwaszkiewicz's letters, the reader works through his own traumas of repression and finds his/her own traits in epistolography, where any otherness is not suppressed.

In conclusion, we deem it meaningful to ask what would be the importance of letters, read as a place of expression of the repressed. Based on the case of Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz, who writes the letters, and Ignacy Karpowicz, who reads them, it can be treated as a cross-generational process of interpretation, self-discovering and self-acceptance. Epistolography, read affectively, can shape writers, change literary tradition, and serve to re-discover what was already discovered (and sealed). This suggests the transforming power of letter's reading and – maybe even – re-shaping the way we think about the history of literature.

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