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/ THE BODY AND THE ARCHIVE

The Bioarchive

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This article presents the history of the acquaintance between Irena Solska and Stanisław Eliasz Radzikowski seen through the lens of their correspondence (held in the collections of the National Museum in Kraków, the Czartoryski Library). These documents not only record a relationship, but – through the personal items, intimate keepsakes, and single-sentence letters enclosed in the envelopes – they are an example of an archive that transcends traditional frameworks and classifications. The author suggests using the term "bioarchive" to describe the existential, material, and performative dimension of the biographical documentation.

Keywords: archive; Polish theatre; Irena Solska; Stanisław Eliasz Radzikowski

Between January and March 1902, Irena Solska contracted a severe kidney disease and found herself in the care of Stanisław Eliasz Radzikowski, an assistant at the University Clinic of Internal Medicine in Lviv (see Kuchtówna, 1980, p. 51). A theatre buff, the doctor knew the Solskis from the stage, soon became friends with them, and, in the summer of 1903 (or possibly somewhat earlier), began an affair with the patient. The liaison did not last long and ultimately had a much more disastrous impact on Radzikowski's life than on Solska's. Legend and biography studies link his

subsequent mental breakdown and gradual degeneration to the effects of disappointed love. But Radzikowski continued to be the artist's confidante and advisor on different matters, even when she focused now on her career, now on her maternal duties; nor did Solska forget about the doctor so quickly: there is evidence that she tried to rescue him from alcoholism. Radzikowski's last (unsent) letter to the artist is from 1920 (see Reychman, 1971, p. 198), and the last words in his notebook are also about her. It was a complicated, occasionally dramatic relationship of long standing which, rather than by the clichéd word "affair", would be better described by other terms: friendship, care (it is not without reason that the doctor used the abbreviated pseudonym STER [the word "ster" means "helm" in Polish]), exchange of artistic impressions, but also manipulation, struggle, emotional dependency, fascination, private cult.

Just six years Solska's senior, Stanisław Eliasz Radzikowski proved himself to be a friend and physician of artists as well as an original personality. He inherited from his father both artistic talent and passion for the Tatra Mountains[1]. Prescription forms were interspersed about tour notes, drawings, rolls of film and photographic equipment on the doctor's table. It was Radzikowski who photographed Solska in her seven incarnations as Psyche in Jerzy Żuławski's *Eros i Psyche* (the pictures adorned the play when it was published in Lviv in 1904). Between 1908 and 1910 he also painted a series of then fashionable "silhouettes", or Art Nouveau illustrations, in which forty-three depictions of the artist's profile were framed by an ivy-like, decorative line and an alphabet of erotic symbols. Regardless of the romantic basis of their acquaintance, it should be noted that they were both people of diverse artistic and literary interests. Solska not only had a talent for the visual arts, but also a certain preparation in this area thanks to her mother, Bronisława Poświkowa, a pioneer of women's decorative art and the

founder of an art school for girls. Though ultimately the daughter did not follow in the mother's professional footsteps, she continued to paint and draw portraits, expertly designed her costumes and, above all, astonished her partners with the ingenuity of her stage makeup. She also maintained active contact with the literary world and must have been curious about Stanisław Radzikowski's stories. After all, he was a charismatic lover of mountains and had various ambitions, such as climbing Matterhorn. In July 1903 a discussion on the subject ensued between them, which the artist concluded as follows:

> If you want to spend 100 francs on a guide, give it to charity, and stick to seeing Matterhorn on the map. Or some day, some distant day, when I'm great and famous, and old, and you an old man with fifty important positions, we will go there, you know, and look from the foot of the mountain into its maw, which will have by then devoured many good-for-nothings, but not such needed people like you. Shame on you, Stach. I will disown you if you don't stop thinking about it …. When are you going to come over and oil an old machine, that is me, with good advice. (*Listy Ireny Solskiej*, pp. 26-27)

The extant correspondence includes the doctor's accounts of his mountain escapades, which sometimes resembled hunting, and at other times philosophical retreats. I cite three fragments as proof that we are dealing not only with an amorous discourse, but with common interests, a thirst for impressions and aesthetic pursuits:

> I haven't been in the Tatras yet, either I didn't feel like it or the

weather was bad, or there was some other obstacle, at any rate this week I will probably go further to adapt and then climb higher above the clouds to the dizzying peaks. I want to spend a few days in Ciemne Smreczyny, in that primeval forest you know from photographs, and to renew my relationship with nature and the Tatras. I pass whole days in conversation with myself or with people, lots of different thoughts, life so much unlike the rest of the year, I soak it up, I rid myself of the city, and there are moments when I scrape through to my inner self, for the third day in a row I feel in touch with myself at least now and then, but even that's something. (letter of 31 August 1903, Radzikowski, ms, p. 77)

The weather's clearing up – I will go in the Tatras for a few days when the fog lifts. Zakop.[ane] has emptied, but it's nicer, less noisy, the landscape is changing for the autumn, and then the place is filled with this great intense delight – burnt mountain pines smell, sunsets glow fierily, rocks sparkle with colours of the rainbow, damselflies – demoiselles – buzz in the air, and lindens are in bloom! At night stars glow in the satin depths of the sky. I hug your dear little bones. STER (letter of 8 September 1904, Radzikowski, ms, p. 39)

The night of 28 September 1904.

Here's what happened: I got hold of two magnificent painted chests, one must be about 250, the other 100 years old – I brought them home and started to clean the painted decoration at night.

> The chests were redolent of the old world of highlanders and highland robbers, those long-forgotten times, and I wrote the words I sent to you. Yesterday I went hunting again in Kościeliska – and I struck it lucky. I brought another old painted chest and, most interestingly, a very old painting from a demolished church in Kościeliska Valley to which Kościeliska owes its name (kept in the home of a Bar confederate). I finally removed the layer of dirt and ancient soot from a pietà, i.e. the Virgin Mary with Christ in her lap, surrounded by the instruments of the Passion; everything painted very naively, fabulous, even a crowing cock, and, near the cross, the sun and the moon with eyes, nose and mouth! An incredible find. Today I varnished the painting and chests, and I am very rich. The Japanese Manggha [Feliks Jasieński] howled when he saw it, and Wyczół[kowski], kept nodding his head and could have passed for a Chinese if he had pinned a braid to his pate. (Radzikowski, ms, pp. 45-47)

Radzikowski's turbulent life is material worthy of a separate study, suffice it to say here that shortly after Poland had regained independence, his energy inspired some of Podhale and a large group of military dignitaries, leading to the establishment of the so-called Chochołów Confederacy, whose aim was armed struggle for the liberation of the Tatras.Even at the time the effort was announced, it was a semi-fantastical project. The whole affair ended in an embarrassment and compounded the doctor's alienation.

Radzikowski spent his final years (until his death in 1935) in Krakow, where he lived in a squalid and furnitureless room, supported himself by selling his collections, and his former activities were probably remembered only by such enthusiasts as the mountaineer Witold Henryk Paryski. The latter

looked after his legacy, which he then deposited at the Tatra Museum in Zakopane.[2] Radzikowski also left a "trunk with which he never parted and which held his dearest keepsakes" (Kuchtówna, 1984, p. 8). It was an intimate shrine to Solska:

> It's an incredible thing: everything that is in any way related to you has an extraordinary charm.
>
> Is it fetishism? No, upon my word, no – I don't suffer from any perversions. But can you believe that from the very beginning – a long time ago – I would keep everything, every scrap of paper, every note – this one, for instance: "One lies like Lazarus in that sickness."
>
> And whenever I received a letter from you – no matter what it said – it also had an air of something utterly mysterious to me – and I kept it. (letter of 13 December 1906, Radzikowski, ms, p. 9)

The trunk with the keepsakes went, as Lidia Kuchtówna established, directly to the National Museum in Krakow and its contents were catalogued as "Correspondence with Irena and Ludwik Solski" (ref. no. MN 903) and in two other collections.[3]

When I visited the Czartoryski Library (a branch of the National Museum) a few years ago, I knew what to expect: an assortment of papers of different sizes, painstakingly sorted, in line with the institutional *modus operandi*, by date, name and basic type (letters and postcards separately, as well as telegrams, bills, calling cards, small keepsakes, notes). In fact, that's what

this collection looks like, but only at first glance. On closer examination, in addition to the traditional “archive of words”, we get something unexpected: half-legible scraps of undated letters and three-dimensional objects which are rather difficult in the material and cognitive sense. They are more of a fetishistic collection than a neutral conglomerate of documents expanding historical and biographical knowledge. Viewed as a whole, they disrupt the picture of Solska and Radzikowski’s relations that can be found in *Listy Ireny Solskiej*, where he is a silent listener and she a capricious and egocentric star, and the very writings blend graphically with hundreds of the artist’s letters to other addressees.

Physical contact with these documents provokes a closer look at three issues: the materiality of the letters and keepsakes (their material, form and visual and typographic qualities), the inner logic and function of the collection (what purpose did it serve for the collection’s original owner, and how is it interpreted and used now by more or less skeptical scholars?). The most disturbing of these archive materials go far beyond the sphere of the word and the image, opening up an area of physical and mental presence, hence the suggestion that I will discuss last: to regard the remainder of the contents of Dr. Radzikowski’s famous trunk as an example of a “bioarchive”.

The first reaction on seeing an autograph is often disbelief that this is what the document “really” looks like. The same goes for Solska’s letters. They are remarkable not for their content, but for their handwriting, difficult to reflect in a traditional book edition: the unique ductus, type of paper and writing implements. The actress’s autographs do not, to put it mildly, make for easy reading. Using almost everything she could lay her hands on as stationery, from expensive embossed paper to pieces of envelopes, from A5 size to the calling card format, Solska wrote unnaturally large, sharp, right-

leaning letters in ink or blurry pencil or crayon. Single words sometimes take up an entire verse, and two sentences fill a page 15 by 10 centimetres in size. The more the author was in a hurry, the bigger characters she wrote. They should actually be read with a reducing glass. More graphically disciplined documents seem, in turn, to have been rewritten from an earlier notebook, and so subject to a greater degree of authorial control by Solska. But the undated letters, decidedly unpolished, are nothing of the kind. These notes reflect a constant rush, the pressure of the moment.[4] The shaky handwriting may be a symptom of a future neurological disorder. As early as 1906, the actress complained to Radzikowski: “My hands shake terribly, what to do about it? Is “Ferment” [medicament] good for me?” (*Listy…*, p. 79)

Eliasz referred to Solska’s handwriting fondly as “scribbling”, and a graphologist identified in the autographs a number of features indicative of strong character (Kuchtówna, 1980, p. 138).

Lidia Kuchtówna, the distinguished biographer of Solska, selected 31 out of her 127 letters to Radzikowski for a collected edition of the actress’s correspondence. The editor’s decision is justified by her premise: the volume included all of the actress’s most important addressees from 1894 to 1958. But as a result, the publication did not reflect the most characteristic aspect of the era’s mania for letter-writing, which could be observed in Solska and Radzikowski’s relations. During the intense stage of the affair, Radzikowski demanded a letter at least every other day, if not daily, and counted every missive with a miser’s passion: “The letter was supposed to come yesterday. It should have, but it didn’t. To make me wait three days, 72 hours, 4,320 minutes, 259,200 seconds – it’s a scandal!” (undated letter, Radzikowski, ms, p. 107). The addressee replied in a similar tone: “Friday evening. Oh, such a

great friend, but really no friend at all. I thought I'd find a lengthy letter, at least a card, but I got nothing. You have my address. I don't know if my letter will find you and that is why I write briefly." (August 1902, Solska, p. 41). Sometimes to confirm that the letter had been sent it was followed by a telegram. Some of the correspondence was passed directly from hand to hand. Even when the two correspondents were no longer more than friends, they kept exchanging various "little letters", incomplete sentences, requests, undated brief messages written in the theatre's dressing-room, during rehearsal breaks and intermissions or in a doctor's office, after duty hours, with no regard for aesthetics. They must be of little factual value, though they say a good deal about their continued contact and varied social relations, supported through the use of messengers and the railway delivery service. Here are some of those fleeting notes:

> [1] Good morning to you,
>
> Come over for black coffee today. Please do. Ir Sol (undated, Solska, p. 141)

> [2] Dear Stanisław,
>
> I don't want, do you hear, I don't want you to be so sad if I feel bad. (undated, Solska, p. 165)

> [3] Dear Doctor, join us for dinner today (a better one than yesterday). Good-bye (undated, Solska, p. 5)

[4] Mr. Stanisław,

I am sending another poor thing, very ill, to you, and I entrust her to your kind heart. How are you – is the pain gone?

I'll see you tonight, Mr. STER Ir Sol (17 April 1903, Solska, p. 21)

[5] Mr. Stanisław,

What's the point of it all, do come to my husband's dressing room tonight, there'll be room, you'll have a good laugh and enjoy yourself, and you need to take something for the nerves so that your friends don't worry about you; I'll see you in the evening. Ir Sol (24 April 1903, Solska, p. 33)

[6] Don't be angry at me, understand that I have only the concert on my mind now, I haven't learned anything yet, and I'm tired, I can barely catch a moment for myself, please try to understand, don't worry, see me more as an artist, a terribly overworked creature, forgive me everything (undated, Solska, p. 121)

The documents quoted are a trace of everyday life, in the most literal and mundane sense of the phrase: meals, advice, prescriptions, arguments, shopping, banter, business, medical consultations… It seems that these undated short letters, which will never make it into any epistolary anthology, are first and foremost a record of a very faithful and serviceable friendship, and only secondarily, and more secretly, of love, one that was short-lived and

discreet on Solska's part anyway. Interestingly, the artist's letters to Radzikowski included two significant slips of paper, awkward in print:

> [1] I love (15 April 1903?, Solska, p. 17)

> [2] I love despite everything. Do as you please, and what you think is right. (undated, Solska, p. 255)

From the perspective of Solska's artistic biography, these two secret confessions are not very important; they resist classification or verification. Nevertheless, they must have been very valuable to the addressee, as was the entire meticulously preserved correspondence.

Radzikowski not only kept Solska's letters and notes to him (despite numerous appeals for their return), but added his own written communications, which the actress had at one point given back to him (for security reasons or to indicate that their intimate relationship was over).[5] Apart from the letters, the trunk contained other objects. e.g. dried flowers. Plants, especially tropical ones, exuding a strong aroma and intensely colourful, are known to have been among poetic instruments of the era. "In the afternoon I saw an exhibition of exotic flowers. […] And I spun a thread of dreams; the breath of flowers, the crackling of orchid buds, the language of grasses and leaves, the rustle of tropical creepers touching each other could be heard in the hothouse. Life throbbed …" (letter of 9 July 1903?, Radzikowski, ms, p. 53). Solska, like other stage artists of the period, was often excited about the "language of flowers": "Lviv welcomed me with a mass of white flowers – maybe I've lost the right to receive white ones, I don't know. [In Krakow] They gave me a multitude of blood-red

chrysanthemums, as blood-red as my tears were last year, and marvellously beautiful greenish-gray …" she wrote in December 1906 (*Listy*, p. 78). Men and women gave flowers to one another; they communicated mood, an intention that was not verbalised and therefore safe from the prying eyes of strangers. "Thank you for the flowers, and as I am not a selfish person, I share the warmest and palest note with you"– begins one of Solska's earliest dated letters to the doctor (22 July 1902, *Listy*, p. 13). Radzikowski sent the actress a red spirea, and interpreted her gift of roses as a declaration of love.

The amorous sacred merges with the religious sacred. Apart from the petals of dried flowers, the doctor also kept pieces of a Christmas wafer wrapped in paper with a date and a number of other items which are only known from references (e.g. the mysterious "links," probably an element of Solska's jewellery or stage costume).[6]

The trunk contained other souvenirs, e.g. a miniature envelope with pills, pulverised by time, perhaps some of those that Dr. Radzikowski prescribed for Solska: purgen, endowal or menthol pills. Then there is a bulging envelope with a crumpled fabric captioned … "2 handkerchiefs of Irena Solska". Perhaps it was about them that he wrote to the actress on 6 July 1903: "I showed you a bundle of letters from you, your letters to your mother, your bloodied handkerchief" (Radzikowski, ms, p. 39). To this should be added the portraits and photographs Radzikowski made of Solska. "A low relief hangs above the bed, opposite is a crayon drawing, with various photographs of mine on all sides. I carry your profile on me and always the latest letter. Isn't it dumb? Maybe. But it is what it is. I can't live otherwise." (as cited in Kuchtówna, 1984, p. 8).

Clearly, the owner of the collection read the letters many times, annotated

them and engaged in dialogue with the past. 7 July 1903: “On returning home I uncover the portrait, I read the letters you’ve returned – and I think, dream and reminisce.” 14 September 1903: “I search my mind for various moments spent together, conversations and looks, and I feed on memories” (Radzikowski, ms, pp. 41, 87). Radzikowski created a private archive that was the scene of repeating, re-enacting situations from the past. The letters form the script of the drama, and the keepsakes function as props which, *pars pro toto*, replace the time, the place and, ultimately, the person. They allowed Radzikowski to relive the finished affair with Solska.[7]

All those bizarre “relics” and accompanying rituals seem to point to extreme fetishism and amorous cult. I don’t want to assess them from a psychopathological point of view (Radzikowski himself was aware that he was becoming obsessed, though he couldn’t really help it). However, since his personal effects have found their way into a museum (as “Correspondence”), I wonder what they are from a scientific and archival perspective? Was the library’s employee who handed me the envelope with the powdered pills so confused only out of concern for the delicate, easily damaged item?

The logic of the traditional archive would not have allowed for the inclusion of such objects: they have no special historical value for the community, don’t document important events or rights, are difficult to classify and definitely transcend the limits of a verbal description. The objects from Radzikowski’s trunk are, even more so than the letters, personal, intimate, extremely individual, not to mention the fact that they contain biological traces. They refer to fleeting moments and events which were clear to two people only, and may have been important to just one person. Looking at the objects in the envelopes, completely mute now, at once pathetic and

touching, I couldn't resist a few insistent thoughts. The value of these objects seems to consist as much in their sentimental association with specific moments as in the very gestures of the collection's owner, prolonging the life of these keepsakes. They thus bring to mind not death or loss, but, on the contrary, presence, a visualized action. It's hard not to think about Radzikowski's temperament and physique when you look at a page on which he traced his fist in crayon: "and my heart is big, like my right fist" (Radzikowski, ms, p. 67). Words disappear and give way to emotions, which are made evident by the handwriting smeared by falling drops (of tears?). Instead of reading a damaged letter, we first notice the gesture of tearing the page congealed in it. Someone touched and unfolded the handkerchiefs; they invite us to follow suit. The pieces of flowers are wrapped in paper neatly folded into a square, so before you get to them, you have to unwrap the contents patiently, really like a relic. What I mean to say is that if the peculiar collection of Solska memorabilia originated in some intimate ritual, then at the end there is also, inevitably, an interactive dimension to its archival use: these collections force one to act, not just read, and although the items in question are remnants, traces, they strongly suggest the existential reality of the man who left them.

The word "bioarchive" suggests itself to describe this kind of archival materials. Colloquially, a "bioarchive" is a place where genetic traces are gathered and this is, to some extent, the case here – the objects under analysis contain bodily particles: remnants of skin, hair and blood, from which modern pathology could glean a lot of information.[8]

Another meaning seems to be more important: the bioarchive reveals the dynamics of an individual life with its structure, complexity, drama and perspective of an end, in the sense the Greeks understood the

word *bios* (contrasting it with the concept of *zoe* – the momentum of infinite and supraindividual existence). The documentation of contacts between Solska and Radzikowski demands to be rearranged in a non-linear, rhizomatous, cobweblike or circular fashion, since their relationship followed a similarly ambiguous pattern.

The biographical archive, which includes letters and keepsakes, is virtually doomed to disorder and complexity, accompanying the trajectory of human existence. At the same time, *bios* is more than the very history of the body and the energy of the body's impact, irrespective of whether that body should be understood literally as a biological organism or as a metaphor for materialised and concretised memory (cf. Sajewska, 2015).

Finally, the bioarchive is the place of a dramatic encounter with something immaterial rather than paper or another material: with traces of a person or the resonance of the tension between people – it's a play of imagination where something is repeated at the level of gestures and feelings, in an emotional rather than purely intellectual transmission. In that chain of archival performance (viewing, unfolding, touching, but also being moved, bewildered and upset), first comes the letter's author, then its owner, and finally the researcher who, willingly or not, exposes old wounds of love.

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Footnotes

1. Walery Eliasz (1840-1905) used, as did his son later, the alias Radzikowski; he was a painter, illustrator and populariser of the Tatras. Stanisław Eliasz (1869-1935), after completing his medical studies in Lviv and working at the city's university clinic, became a health resort doctor in Zakopane; he had a passion for mountain hiking as well as the folklore, onomastics and topography of the Tatras; he wrote guides and studies on the Tatras and took part in mediation in border disputes (the Polish-Hungarian conflict for Morskie Oko in 1902 and in the Polish-Slovakian dispute over Spisz in 1919), he was interested in alchemy and folk medicine. See Reychman, 1946, 1971.
2. In the winter of 1939, these materials were given to be arranged to the Orientalist Jan Reychman (see Reychman, 1971, p. 109).
3. 'Korespondencja' (Correspondence), ref. no. MN 904 and 'Wypisy z dzieł naukowych (luźne notaty oraz notatnik opr.)' (Excerpts from Scientific Works: loose notes and notebook), ref. no. MN 905.
4. The manuscripts bear various genetic traces of working on the letter, which usually disappear in the printed version: deletions and the location of notes (Solska didn't always place the postscript at the end of the letter, but often on the written page, in the margin or above the line, as though she were re-reading the letter and hastily correcting it); some of the corrections and slips of the tongue or repetitions are indicative of the spoken style. The jocular and chatty tone was supported by individualised punctuation. The actress overused certain symbols (dashes and exclamation marks) and omitted some others, e.g. question marks. Many of the notes don't have any introductory formulas (dates, places, apostrophes), although they certainly served as letters. In print, these out-of-context pages are provided with some commentary or are unfit for print at all.
5. Reading these documents from the perspective of one of the correspondents will always distort the meaning of statements taken out of the context of the entire conversation. Until now, this has been the usual approach to presenting the relationship between Solska and Radzikowski: we only hear the voice of the actress (*Listy Ireny Solskiej*), or that of the doctor, whose correspondence and notes were recently studied by Natalia Jakubowa (Jakubowa, 2008). Under the reference number 903, all those writings are collected in adjacent files and interlinked in a fateful way; the emotions pulsating in them are justified by some event, contagious and virtually incurable. The correspondents play a complicated game of alternating approaches and evasions, reconciliations and breakups, in which everything has a meaning: a flower sent, a note slipped into the pocket, a look or lack of a look. Most interestingly, in parallel with a relationship that can be described as a battle of Eros, the doctor remains in the letters a physician providing medical advice, a friend listening to confessions, a negotiator in Solska's marital issues, and finally, a friend of the artist's husband (*vide* his correspondence with Solski in the same collection).
6. Radzikowski, in turn, entrusted the artist with a great family relic: a cross from the November Uprising. He withdrew the gift after one of their breakups, and presented it to

Solska again in July 1904, asking her to wear that historical keepsake in a production of *Warszawianka*. '… I am so taken with your acting that I am giving you a cross worn at Olszynka, in deposit (not as a gift because it has been property of my family for generations) – do you accept?" (Radzikowski, ms, k. 35).
7. Although comparison to historical reconstructions and reenactments may be risky in this case, I would still call it a reconstruction, yet not a collective but a private practice of memory, in which a person 'examines the history' of his feeling, by „the recomposition of remains *in and as the live*" (Schneider, 2011, p. 98).
8. A hair found in one of the manuscripts at the Dutch National Archives was determined to be the only preserved fragment of the body of Johan De Witt, leader of the republican party and creator of Holland's economic independence, who was murdered with his brother in 1672 as a result of an international conspiracy. The discovery was all the more important because there was literally no trace left of the De Witt brothers; their bodies were deliberately annihilated, 'punished' by quartering and burned. The accidentally discovered hair thus became a political relic. The case was discussed by Ineke Huysman at the conference 'Creative Processes and Archives in Arts and Humanities', held in Helsinki in June 2017. Archives of World War I and II gather similar traces and various material souvenirs have become the object of multifaceted reflection on instruments for preserving the memory of traumatic events. Unlike those holdings, which appeal to collective memory, the shock of the war and the scandal of its inexpressibility, Radzikowski's collection has a unique, private and thus even more incommunicable character – it refers to the intimate world of two people.

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