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Paulina Kuczalska-Reinschmit and *Ster* (1895–97, 1907–14): Editing at the Service of Polish Women’s Rights

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ABSTRACT

In this article, I focus on the Polish editor, publisher, and women’s rights activist Paulina Kuczalska-Reinschmit (1859–1921) and *Ster* [*Helm*] (1895–97, 1907–14). I first discusses the major elements of Kuczalska-Reinschmit’s biography and her motivation to establish her own magazine. In the second part, I move on to a discussion of her progressive ideas about women’s educational and economic emancipation and an analysis of selected articles in the first series of *Ster*, which was published in Lviv from 1895 to 1897. Editing *Ster* enabled Kuczalska-Reinschmit to gathered prominent intellectual figures in the fight for gender equality and women’s rights. Among the successes of her editorial project was the reform of female gymnasiums, which was strongly supported by *Ster*’s circle.

KEYWORDS

Women editors, Paulina Kuczalska-Reinschmit, *Ster*, women’s rights, feminism, Poland

The contribution to Polish culture and to the consolidation of the Polish feminist movement made by the Polish editor, publisher, and women's rights activist Paulina Kuczalska-Reinschmit (1859–1921) is a major topic of interest for researchers specializing in Polish feminism. Among these, Agata Zawiszewska's 2018 study of Kuczalska-Reinschmit's feminist periodical *Ster* [*Helm*] (1895–97, 1907–14) constitutes the most exhaustive work to date dedicated to Kuczalska-Reinschmit's biography and to the first series of her periodical.¹ Still, Kuczalska-Reinschmit's tireless work as a women's rights activist remains little known in Poland and even less known outside the country. This is also the case for a great number of her co-activists, such as Justyna Budzińska-Tylicka (1867–1936), Kazimiera Bujwidowa (1867–1932), Cecylia Walewska (1859–1940), and many others.

This article contributes to the ongoing scholarship on Paulina Kuczalska-Reinschmit and Polish feminism by discussing *Ster* in the context of Kuczalska-Reinschmit's biography. The article's particular focus is on two topics frequently addressed in the periodical: women's education and work. The title of the periodical, *Ster*, meaning 'helm' or 'leadership' in Polish, was aptly chosen: with Kuczalska-Reinschmit at the helm as editor, *Ster's* mission was to steer the direction and set the priorities of the burgeoning Polish feminist movement.

Polish Feminist Activists from the First Half of the Twentieth Century

Kuczalska-Reinschmit was one of the major figures of the Polish feminist movement at the beginning of the twentieth century. She was also known as 'Hetmanka', meaning 'Female Commander in Chief'.² However, despite her immense work and important position in the feminist movement at a national level, many details about her life remain incomplete. In particular, what remains rather obscure is her life before she became publisher and editor of *Ster*. Researchers have pointed out that there exist only a few documents that can help to reconstruct Kuczalska-Reinschmit's biography. As the Polish historian Jan Hulewicz explains, the majority of the most important Polish feminists of the turn of the twentieth century, such as Paulina Kuczalska-Reinschmit, Justyna Budzińska-Tylicka (1867–1936), and Kazimiera Bujwidowa (1867–1932), did not leave any diaries or memoirs.³

The Polish feminist circles at the turn of twentieth century gathered women educated in various fields, such as medicine, journalism, and art. However, the main written legacy they left behind is similar for all of them. They all focused on writing press articles, guides, or practical books on hygiene and motherhood, which were very different from what novelists or playwrights of the time produced. Naturally, there were also some important exceptions. For example, Kuczalska-Reinschmit wrote a single play entitled *Siostry. Sztuka psychologiczna* [*Sisters. A Psychological Play*], which was published in 1908.⁴ This choice illustrates her desire to use or to experiment with other written forms that were considered much more artistic and demanding. Nevertheless,

1 Aneta Górnicka-Boratyńska, 'Ster i Nowe Słowo — projekt polskich sufrażystek', in *Staliśmy się sobą: Cztery projekty emancypacji (1863–1939)*, 2nd edn (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Czarna Owca, 2018), pp. 73–125; Magdalena Gawin, 'Równość i płeć. Paulina Kuczalska-Reinschmit i pierwsza fala feminizmu', in *Spór o równouprawnienie kobiet (1864–1919)* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Neriton, 2015), pp. 130–69; Agata Zawiszewska, *Ster pod redakcją Pauliny Kuczalskiej-Reinschmit. Lwów 1895–1897* (Szczecin: Uniwersytet Szczeciński, 2018).

2 Cecylia Walewska, *W walce o równe prawa: Nasze bojownice* (Warsaw: Kobieta współczesna, 1930), p. 16.

3 Jan Hulewicz, 'Preface', in Romana Pachucka, *Pamiętniki z lat 1886–1914*, rev. by J. Hulewicz (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1958), p. vi.

4 Górnicka-Boratyńska, p. 83.

while the names of great novelists engaged in the women's cause like those of Narcyza Żmichowska (1819–76) and Eliza Orzeszkowa (1841–1910) entered the Polish literary canon thanks to their literary legacy, those of prominent social activists like Kuczalska-Reinschmit or Budzińska-Tylicka remained in the shadows.

One source that can shed light on the attitudes and personalities of the first Polish feminist activists are the memoirs written by the youngest generation of early feminists after Poland had regained its independence. Among these memoirists we can find Romana Pachucka (1886–1964) and Teodora Męczkowska (1870–1954). The latter provides us with valuable information and paints the portrait of Kuczalska-Reinschmit as follows:

I would like to add here the figure of Paulina, a greatly deserving individual who for several decades has given direction and paved the way for the Polish feminist movement.

But it turns out that this is not an easy thing, because I and all of us who worked with Paulina for many years did not know her well: there was a kind of a wall between us that could not be crossed.

Her circle did not know anything about her, her personal life, her husband, and son. Paulina was introverted, focused, balanced, it seemed that she cared more about women's *affaires* than about people themselves; that she was completely deprived of her personal passions, that she was completely devoted to her work for progress and the women's cause.⁵

In her memoirs, Romana Pachucka also mentions that 'Kuczalska was not of an effusive nature'.⁶ Unlike Teodora Męczkowska, she gives a sketch of Kuczalska-Reinschmit's personal life and includes information about her origin, childhood, and husband. Both Męczkowska and Pachucka provide insight into how Kuczalska-Reinschmit was perceived by her entourage but, as Zawiszewska points out, 'we owe the most information about *Ster's* editor to Pachucka's memoirs'.⁷

Paulina Kuczalska-Reinschmit's Biographical and Journalistic Activities

Paulina Kuczalska was born on 15 January 1859 in Warsaw but grew up in Volhynia, where her family owned land.⁸ She received a good education and was fluent in several languages, including French and German.⁹ Her mother, Ewelina Poraczyńska, *née* Jastrzębiec, was a member of Entuzjastki [The Enthusiasts], led by the novelist and poet Narcyza Żmichowska (1819–76). Entuzjastki was the first feminist group in Poland and had a great impact on the creation of self-awareness in Polish women, serving as a model for successive generations of feminists. Thus, it can be assumed that it was Kuczalska's mother who cultivated the importance of education and self-sufficiency in her daughter.¹⁰

5 Teodora Męczkowska, *Pięćdziesiąt lat pracy w organizacjach kobiecych w Warszawie — Wspomnienia osobiste*, Biblioteka Narodowa in Warsaw, rkps (manuscript) 10302 II (box format), k. (paper) 15–16, in Zawiszewska, p. 48. All translations from Polish sources are the author's.

6 Pachucka, p. 150.

7 Zawiszewska, p. 48.

8 Grzegorz Krzywiec, 'Kuczalska-Reinschmit Paulina', in *Biographical Dictionary of Women's Movements and Feminisms in Central, Eastern, and South Eastern Europe: 19th and 20th Centuries*, ed. by Franciska de Haan, Krasimira Daskalova, and Anna Loutfi (New York: Central European University Press, 2008), pp. 274–77.

9 Pachucka, p. 151.

10 Gawin, p. 131.

Paulina Kuczalska married Stanisław Reinschmit in Warsaw in 1879, and likely had two sons.¹¹ According to Pachucka, Reinschmit infected her with a venereal disease, causing her to lose an eye.¹² After the couple's separation, Kuczalska-Reinschmit became interested in the position of women in society. Like many feminists from well-to-do families, she moved abroad, to Switzerland (1885–87) and then to Belgium (1887–89), to gain access to higher education in natural sciences, as at that time women were not allowed to attend universities in Poland.¹³ Poland was partitioned between Russia, Germany, and Austria-Hungary until 1918, and the educational situation of women differed depending on the partitions. Thanks to the staunch action of Kazimiera Bujwidowa (1867–1932) in Kraków, the first women, Jadwiga Sikorska (1871–1963), Stanisława Dowgiałło (1890–1967), and Janina Kosmowska (1864–1951), began their studies as auditors at the Jagiellonian University in 1894.¹⁴ Three years later, the Faculty of Philology officially admitted female students, followed by the Faculty of Medicine in 1900.¹⁵ Increasing numbers of Polish women pursued scientific careers at Polish universities, overcoming the dislike of their male colleagues and moving into new fields.

Zawiszewska's research has revealed that Kuczalska-Reinschmit did not finish her studies with a diploma.¹⁶ She was by no means an exception. Higher education abroad often turned out to be a very costly investment, impossible to cover with part-time work or savings. That is why most students who could not count on financial support from their family or, as in the case of Marie Skłodowska Curie (1867–1934), a scholarship returned to their home country or lived in difficult financial circumstances. Still, whether they obtained a degree or not, many returned to Poland richer with foreign experience, ready to build a better future, and to engage in emancipatory and social issues, such as Anna Tomaszewicz-Dobrska (1854–1918), the first female doctor practicing in Poland, or Zofia Daszyńska-Golińska (1860–1934), an economist and one of the first Polish female senators.¹⁷

Abroad, Kuczalska-Reinschmit, for her part, became acquainted with the European feminist movements and established valuable contacts with local feminists, such as Maria Szeliga-Loevy (1854–1927), a writer, founder of the *Théâtre féministe*, and active Polish feminist, who spent a major part of her life in France.¹⁸ In 1885–86, Kuczalska-Reinschmit contributed to the progressive women's periodical *Świt* [*Dawn*], writing articles on the German, French, and Swiss emancipation movements for Polish readers.¹⁹ In these articles she discussed the activities of, among others, the French feminist and editor of *La Citoyenne*, Hubertine Auclert (1848–1914), the German suffragist and editor of *Neue Bahnen*, Louise Otto-Peters (1819–95), and men such as the French novelist Victor Hugo, who participated in the feminist struggle. As

11 Zawiszewska, p. 58. Most other sources mention only one son.

12 Pachucka, p. 146.

13 Krzywiec, p. 274.

14 Jolanta Kolbuszewska, 'Polki na uniwersytetach — trudne początki', *Sensus Historiae*, 26.1 (2017), 35–53 (p. 35).

15 Mariola Kondracka, 'Kobiety na uniwersytetach', in *Równe prawa i nierówne szanse. Kobiety w Polsce międzywojennej*, ed. by Anna Żarnowska and Andrzej Szwarz (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo DiG, 2000), pp. 271–86 (p. 273).

16 Zawiszewska, p. 25.

17 Daria Anna Domarańczyk, "'Ster' — pierwsze w Polsce radykalne czasopismo feministyczne przełomu XIX i XX wieku', *Acta Universitatis Lodzianis Folia Litteraria Polonica*, 1.23 (2014), 187–209 (pp. 200, 206).

18 Lena Magnone, 'Maria Szeliga, polska pionierka ruchu feministycznego we Francji', in *Wiek po Marii Skłodowskiej-Curie: emancypacja kobiet w Polsce i we Francji*, ed. by Monika Rudaś-Grodzka and Katarzyna Nadana-Sokołowska (Warsaw: Lupa Obscura, 2012), pp. 41–58.

19 Zawiszewska, pp. 91, 108.

Zawiszewska neatly puts it: ‘Clues on how to unite were provided to Polish women and also to Paulina Kuczalska’s community by foreign women.’²⁰

Upon her return to Poland, Kuczalska-Reinschmit created the Unia [Union], the Polish section of the Alliance Universelle des femmes [International Alliance of Women] founded by Maria Szeliga-Loevy in 1889. Connecting with various European feminist associations gave her valuable knowledge about the activist methods adopted by foreign feminists and enabled Kuczalska-Reinschmit to put the Polish women’s cause in a European context.²¹ In Warsaw, she organized a salon that served as a meeting place for the major figures of the Polish feminist movement, including Eliza Orzeszkowa, Anna Tomaszewicz-Dobrska, author and journalist Maria Konopnicka (1842–1910), writer and literary critic Waleria Marrenowa (1832–1903), and artist Maria Dulębianka (1861–1919).²² It also presented opportunities to discuss the achievements of well-known European feminists and members of the Alliance Universelle des femmes, such as the French author and suffragist Maria Deraismes (1828–94), German jurist Anita Augspurg (1857–1943), German author and educator Lina Morgenstern (1830–1909), and Czech author Eliška Krásnohorská (1847–1926).²³ This attention to women activists from different countries shows that Kuczalska-Reinschmit’s mind remained open to the feminist struggle in Europe. Her activities in Poland, as a journalist and later also as an editor, not only contributed to the emancipation of Polish women but also to the European feminist and suffrage movements, which, depending on the country, were more or less successful.

Before establishing her own periodical, Kuczalska-Reinschmit contributed to other Polish magazines, including *Echo*, where her first article appeared in 1881, *Świt*, which was the first Polish magazine dedicated to women’s right to education and waged work, and the feminist periodical *Przegląd Tygodniowy* [Weekly Review], where she had her own column, ‘E pur si muove’ [‘And Yet It Moves’], from 1893 to 1895.²⁴ As Zawiszewska remarks, the collaboration with *Świt* and *Przegląd Tygodniowy* in particular gave her the opportunity to gain the journalistic experience needed to create her own magazine.²⁵ *Ster* was first published as a biweekly in Lviv from 1895 to 1897. As its subtitle *Dwutygodnik dla spraw wychowania i pracy kobiet* [Biweekly Dedicated to Women’s Education and Work] indicates, it was mostly devoted to the problems of education and economic independence for women, particularly those from the lower classes. *Ster* was resurrected in Warsaw in 1907 as the organ of the Związek Równouprawnienia Kobiet Polskich [Union of Equal Rights for Polish Women] founded by Kuczalska-Reinschmit. Under the new subtitle *Organ Równouprawnienia Kobiet* [Organ of Equal Rights for Women] it appeared as a monthly until 1912 and again as a biweekly from 1912 to 1914.²⁶ In the years between the two series, *Nowe Słowo* [New Word] (1902–07), a magazine founded and edited by Maria Turzyna (1860–1922) in Kraków, continued the journalistic feminist fight in Poland, gathering, like *Ster*, many prominent feminist activists in its pages.²⁷

Issuing a feminist periodical demanded skilful management from Kuczalska-Reinschmit. She was sensitive to the quality of the published texts and for this she invited renowned specialists in different disciplines to contribute.²⁸ In addition to publishing a

20 Ibid., p. 108.

21 Ibid., pp. 124–27.

22 Walewska, p. 17.

23 Ibid.

24 Krzywiec, p. 275; Zawiszewska, pp. 77–85, 154–56.

25 Zawiszewska, p. 154.

26 Górnicka-Boratyńska, p. 74.

27 Ibid.

28 Zawiszewska, p. 208.

wide range of articles on literature, art, and current reforms, *Ster* called on experts who offered help to readers seeking advice on specific topics.²⁹ Kuczalska-Reinschmit's level of commitment may be illustrated by the fact that the publishing house of the second series of *Ster* was located in her Warsaw home, as were the library of the magazine and the office providing free information about education and work for women.³⁰ A key role was also played by Józefa Bojanowska (1873–1945), Kuczalska-Reinschmit's partner and collaborator, who, as Krzywiec writes, 'would take care of her in the later years of her life'.³¹

Kuczalska-Reinschmit continued to edit and publish *Ster* until the periodical ceased publication in 1914. She lived long enough to see the implementation of many reforms in favour of Polish women, such as access to universities and voting rights won in 1918, a fight to which she had dedicated her whole life. On 13 September 1921, Paulina Kuczalska-Reinschmit died, aged sixty-two, after years of struggling with health problems.

The Fight for Educational and Economic Equality in *Ster*

While the second series of *Ster* was overtly activist in tone and strictly related to the activities of the *Związek Równouprawnienia Kobiet Polskich*, the first series had a more moderate character. In her articles for this first series, Kuczalska-Reinschmit adopted a balanced style, using few emotional verbs and basing her arguments on statistics, interviews, specialist opinions, laws, and other informative texts. In order to defend the cause of Polish women, she also described the situation of women in other European countries. Kuczalska-Reinschmit was an observant witness of her time, keeping track of the struggle for women's rights in all social classes and reporting on different events, organizations, and enterprises that aimed to promote women's independence. In doing so, she made sure that *Ster* served not only as a source of information on different initiatives, but also as an intermediary between women and institutions such as schools or factories.

Kuczalska-Reinschmit's articles reveal her insight into the political and economic situation, which enabled her to advocate for social change. She realized quite early that women needed to gain access to education, arguing that society was evolving and required the work of educated and experienced female workers. In her article 'Wznowiony projekt' ['Resumed Project'], published in 1896, she supported the campaign for opening the first college in Kraków, which would allow women to attend classes and obtain a secondary school certificate.³² The initiative would benefit both women as a group and the whole of society:

A female gymnasium is [...] necessary for us not only to deepen the minds and characters of women with systematic and complete knowledge. Not only to provide them with the opportunity to earn more money in numerous occupations, but perhaps most importantly, so that a woman could, in this new condition of living and with the same level of basic knowledge [as a man's], become the model of an old matron. A friend of her husband and in the whole sense of the word, a teacher to her children.³³

29 Ibid., p. 213.

30 Pachucka, pp. 129–31.

31 Krzywiec, p. 276.

32 Paulina Kuczalska-Reinschmit, 'Wznowiony projekt', *Ster*, 4 (1896), 49–52, in Zawiszewska, pp. 455–59.

33 Ibid., pp. 458–59.

This quote shows Kuczalska-Reinschmit putting the need for women's education in a broader perspective, suggesting that educated women would make better company for their husbands and better teachers for their children. This argument about the benefits an educated woman brings to her family is very close to that of Eliza Orzeszkowa and, earlier, the novelist and teacher Klementyna Tanska Hoffmanowa (1798–1845).

Women's interest in receiving education spiked. According to the article 'Seminaria żeńskie' ['Female Gymnasiums'], two-thirds of women candidates were not admitted to Lviv University because of limited capacity.³⁴ As Kuczalska-Reinschmit remarked in 'W przeddzień' ['A Day Before'], the opening of the Jagiellonian University to female students, the first in the Polish territory where women could earn a bachelor's degree, started a new era for female members of Polish society.³⁵ However, *Ster's* chief editor was also aware of the responsibility that this project demanded, warning future students that their behaviour and final results would shape public opinion about women's intellectual capacities:

The first students must prepare themselves in advance to be in the audience. The smallest of their faults, recklessness, or disregard of duties will be judged with double severity and more painfully so because the responsibility for their offenses will fall not only on themselves but will also weigh heavily on their successors.³⁶

Kuczalska-Reinschmit's fight for women's education was closely related to her struggle for their economic independence. In many articles she stressed the importance of creating occupational opportunities for women and organizing courses to train female workers. She also promoted different initiatives helping women to earn additional money or find a job. For example, in her article 'Wakacje szwaczek' ['Holidays for Seamstresses'], published in 1896, she described the project of a Women's Work Committee that helped seamstresses find work on country estates, where their usual clients in the city spent their summers.³⁷

Ster also promoted new commercial methods developed to practically improve women's situation, such as time-saving practices of sewing and more durable and profitable practices of cultivation. In articles such as 'O praktycznym i zawodowym wykształceniu kobiet' ['About the Practical and Professional Education of Women'], Kuczalska-Reinschmit carefully monitored courses for women, analysing their programmes and comparing them with current market demands.³⁸ She emphasized that the education given to women had to serve real economic needs, making a clear distinction between courses preparing women for industrial work and those on household matters. Moreover, to give women the necessary time and space to work and to protect the best interests of children, Kuczalska-Reinschmit promoted the idea of opening shelters to children of working mothers. However, as she pointed out in her article 'Schroniska dla dzieci' ['Nurseries for Children'], all change needs time.³⁹

34 Paulina Kuczalska-Reinschmit, 'Seminaria żeńskie', *Ster*, 16 (1896), 241–43, in Zawiszewska, pp. 475–77 (p. 475)

35 Paulina Kuczalska-Reinschmit, 'W przeddzień', *Ster*, 18 (1896), 273–76, in Zawiszewska, pp. 480–82 (p. 480).

36 *Ibid.*, p. 481.

37 Paulina Kuczalska-Reinschmit, 'Wakacje szwaczek', *Ster*, 13 (1896), 193–95, in Zawiszewska, pp. 468–71.

38 Paulina Kuczalska-Reinschmit, 'O praktycznym i zawodowym wykształceniu kobiet', *Ster*, 15 (1896), 225–28, in Zawiszewska, pp. 471–75.

39 Paulina Kuczalska-Reinschmit, 'Schroniska dla dzieci', *Ster*, 8 (1896), 113–14 and *Ster* 9 (1896), 129–31, in Zawiszewska, pp. 459–63 (p. 463).

Conclusion

Paulina Kuczalska-Reinschmit's editorial enterprise was entirely devoted to the fight for women's rights in different fields. Her articles, written for magazines such as *Świt*, *Przegląd Tygodniowy*, and especially her own periodical *Ster*, show her commitment to her country and to the rights of Polish women. Her editorial ideas and skilful management made *Ster* a key organ of the Polish feminist movement before the First World War. The recent anthologies presenting selected articles authored by her and scholarly publications dedicated to her life and editorial enterprise will hopefully ensure a greater readership of her periodical oeuvre. This, in turn, may inspire other researchers to shed further light not only on Kuczalska-Reinschmit's activities but also on the undertakings of her co-activists.

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