The project Archiwum Kobiet: Piszące (Archives of Women: Writing) has been carried out since 2013 at the Institute of Literary Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences under the leadership of Monika Rudaś-Grodzka. The project, which is financed by a grant from the Narodowy Program Rozwoju Humanistyki (NPRH, National Program for the Development of the Humanities), aims to create a database and launch a digital archive of unpublished manuscripts written by women who lived in the territories of historic Poland from the sixteenth century to the present. The database resulting from the project will include manuscripts tracked down on the basis of research in various archives in contemporary Poland and other European countries, with a particular emphasis on the areas associated with Polish culture through their status as its former territories (parts of Lithuania, the Ukraine, Belarus and Russia).

The manuscripts in the online catalog are indexed according to criteria essential for future analysis of their content, such as authorship, place and time of origin, literary genre, plus a number of keywords that primarily come from gender studies and are related to such disciplines as the history of customs, anthropology, sociology, political science, pedagogy, and cultural and literary studies. The catalog, which is now available only to the members of the project team, will serve as the basis for a digital archive, which will be developed in the future as a website open to the public. Some of the most interesting manuscripts discovered within the project will be included in the database as scans, becoming the first step toward a digital archive of women’s writings. In this way, materials difficult to access will become easily available on the Internet, which, in addition to the opportunities to develop edited collections and enhance literary studies, is valuable from the point of view of the protection of national heritage and the popularization of Polish culture. The “Archives of Women: Writing” project team includes the following scholars: Anna Nasiłowska, Joanna Partyka, Iwona Wiśniewska, Katarzyna Nadana-Sokołowska, Agnieszka Mrozik, Katarzyna Czeczot, Ewa Serafin (project secretary), Monika Rynkowska, and Barbara Smoleń (documentalist). Dominik Purchała coordinates the online database. Some of these scholars are currently members of the research group “Literature and Gender,” led by Monika Rudaś-Grodzka and Katarzyna Nadana-Sokołowska.
Rudaś-Grodzka at the Institute of Literary Research, and some began their cooperation with the group when they jointly prepared the grant application for the “Archives of Women.” The scholars working on the project specialize in gender studies, in particular in the study of women’s writing from various historical periods (Joanna Partyka—early modernity, Monika Rudaś-Grodzka—romanticism, Iwona Wiśniewska—second half of the nineteenth century or so-called “positivism,” Anna Nasiłowska—modernism); in various genres and aspects of women’s writing, including diaries and letters (Katarzyna Nadana-Sokołowska), autobiographies, family chronicles, and sagas (Agnieszka Mrozik), *silva rerum* or convent writings (Joanna Partyka); or in links between Polish and Eastern European cultures (Anna Sobieska).

Women’s diaries, memoirs, letters, and unpublished literary manuscripts, especially from the nineteenth century, are a previously almost unknown part of Polish culture. These writings contain secrets of women’s identity, based in relationships and activities other than those conventionally considered significant for women’s biography (women’s roles within marriage and the family, and public ones as the patriot and “the Polish mother”). These women’s private friendships, loves, and professional relationships, which often went in unexpected directions, transcended borders set by ethnicity, religious affiliation, social status, and moral standards and values. The authors of the project hope that the knowledge of women’s writings as a practice of everyday life will help in the long term in understanding the intellectual genealogies of Polish female writers and other women involved in creative work and social life. According to contemporary literary criticism, women’s writing is like an island: outstanding female writers do not have their place in the history of women’s writing but instead function as “exceptions” in a history of literature dominated by men.

Our research focuses on the relationships of women with women, which are marginalized in the official culture: the identity of these women was usually primarily shaped through strong emotional bonds in the family (relationships with the mother and grandmother, aunts, sisters, cousins), and bonds with women around them (especially with governesses and teachers) who might become their mentors for life, or their friends. This so-called “women’s continuum” has been virtually erased from the collective memory by the official historiographical and national discourse, separating current generations from a full knowledge of the customs and culture of women of earlier times. This archive will make it possible for scholars to assess the actual scale and nature of women’s contribution to Polish history and society. The description of literary, social, and political relationships among women in earlier times will also enable adequate and in-depth analysis of the contemporary image of the Eastern European female intellectual, her relationships with other women, and the construction of her own gender and cultural identity.

Diaries, letters, and other personal documents in manuscript form are not only documents of intellectual life and customs, but also a specific, very important and popular, often forgotten genre from the past, especially when they were written by women. Feminist scholars’ rethinking of the categories of “literary quality” of texts and their emphasis on the study of writing practices allow us to see these kinds of records as literary work—informal, private, not intended for publication, but functioning in reading circles (of family, friends, etc.). From this perspective, women’s writing,
and the circulation of their letters and diaries among them, appear to be a “second circulation” (in Polish, *samizdat*) of intellectual culture; one without access to the public sphere through printing, but most valuable for understanding the intellectual life of women in the past.

Next to letters, diaries were the most common form of women’s writing. Both of these practices may be associated with women’s desire to pursue their creative instincts, but could also be compensatory in character; for women they constituted one of the few available forms, however partial, of self-affirmation, expression of self-respect, and expression of interest in oneself. Still, as Harriet Blodget, a scholar of women’s diaries, has noted, keeping a diary by women was often a form of silence: on the level of thematization the authorial “I” is absent from these diaries. Unlike the male authors of some of the most famous intimate diaries, women do not describe their internal life; the poetics of confession is often foreign to them. The form of women’s diaries is often akin to a *silva rerum*, an herbarium, a collection, or a catalog. Similarly, letters by women are often a fascinating source for studying their customs, including the nature of the ties among them and the role they played in each other’s lives. Official culture and historiography have neglected and marginalized such cultural moments, and generally refer to women only in relation to men: as fathers, husbands, or sons. In women’s letters the writer’s “I” is often open, remaining in a dialogic relationship that shapes the identity of the people involved in this dialogue. The dialogic character of these letters can be a starting point for the analysis of what process psychology calls group processes: the ties that women mutually created among themselves. These relationships between women were far from unimportant and indeed often seem to have determined the actual character of their lives. Women’s letters sometimes reveal entire female communities, based in family or friendship, which were in hiding from and unnoticed by the patriarchal society; communities of women disillusioned by marriage, unmarried, or widows, who at a certain point of their lives began to find satisfaction and emotional self-sufficiency in relationships with other women.

The importance of the project “Archives of Women: Writing” cannot be overstated. A database, searchable by multiple criteria, including thematic criteria, and including information on existing manuscripts by women, will be helpful to all scholars interested in the history of literature, cultural history, cultural anthropology, as well as gender issues in Poland and related territories. We hope that in the future the database and the digitized collections will help to initiate research projects about the work of individual female authors, the study of such forms of literature as diaries, letters, memoirs, and heritage books, as well as research projects focusing on the study of customs, social structures and dynamics, collective psychology, and so on. The scholarly dynamics such a database can enable are unpredictable: during the search for manuscripts, unknown and unexplored materials can be discovered, as exemplified by the recent discoveries of the diaries of the composer Grażyna Bacewicz (1900–1969) and the sculptor Hanna Nałkowska (1888–1970). In addition, the database will be useful for researching women’s customs in past centuries, and it can be instrumental in productively questioning many theses on the situation of women in a patriarchal culture developed within gender studies and based on relatively recent materials—usually from the nineteenth and the early twentieth century.
Similar archives of women’s writings have existed in Western countries since the 1980s. Our project will be open to establishing international contacts and sharing experiences with similar projects. People interested in the “Archives of Women: Writing” project can contact the authors at the Institute of Literary Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences, or at monikarudasgrodzka@gmail.com or katarzyna.nadanaskolowska@ibl.waw.pl respectively.

Notes

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3. Ibid.


Labrisz Lesbian Association and the Lesbian Herstory Archives Hungary

_Ana Borgos and Dorottya Réda_

Labrisz Lesbian Association, the first and so far only lesbian NGO in Hungary, founded in 1999, is proud to announce the establishing of the Lesbian Herstory Archives Hungary (LHAH). Labrisz has been collecting written and audio-visual materials related to Hungarian lesbians in the present and past since its foundation. Our earlier Labrisz-book, *Előhívott önarcképek* (Developed self-portraits), presents excerpts of canonized historical and contemporary Western memoirs, diaries and letters, and also included some autobiographical stories of Eastern European lesbian women. Besides the archival documentation activities of Labrisz, the creative group called the Budapest Lesbian Film Committee, made up of Labrisz members and existing from
2000 to 2005, made ten films (both fiction and documentary) that chronicle the life of the lesbian community in Budapest in the early 2000s. Some of these films will be available in the online Archives.

A few years after the dissolution of the Budapest Lesbian Film Committee, its former member, film director Mária Takács, launched the project *Secret Years*, which set out to record the lives of middle-aged and elderly women who lived as lesbians during state socialism. Eleven women were interviewed, and the documentary *Secret Years* was released in cinemas in 2009 and on DVD with subtitles in eleven languages in 2011.

Labrisz members conducted five more interviews in 2009-2010, and the altogether sixteen interviews were edited and published in the book volume *Secret Years: Sixteen Lesbian Life Stories* in 2011. We decided to have the interviews translated into English, so as to make them available for a broader international audience. The reason is that we believe that, in addition to the intrinsic value of the stories about the women’s personal lives and communities, the interviews reveal a great deal about recent Hungarian social history: the Kádár era of the 1960s to 1980s and the period of democratic transition in Central Eastern Europe. The focus of this book is an era that has been little explored until now. While gay and lesbian archives with outstanding and remarkable collections can be found in Western countries, access to such stories in Hungary (and the whole Central and Eastern European region) is limited. The translation of the sixteen interviews was completed in 2015, with support from the Open Meadows Foundation and the Erste Foundation.

The English *Secret Years* interviews will be our first online “exhibit” in the Lesbian Herstory Archives Hungary, but we are also seeking funding for organizing, cataloguing, and digitizing the already collected archival materials. In addition, we continue to collect written and visual documents of twentieth-century Hungarian lesbian herstory, as well as trying to find more elderly lesbians to interview about their lives and the recent past. There are very few remnant traces and sources of lesbian existence from the past; one can find sporadic information on individual characters, communities and texts, but due to the lack of systematic research there is no comprehensive lesbian historiography in Hungary. There have obviously existed women who loved or even lived with women in this region too, even if they did not identify as lesbians. However, until the 1970s-1980s, a lesbian identity and way of life were completely inconceivable and invisible.

The main focus of the Lesbian Herstory Archives Hungary is to collect autobiographical writings, correspondence, and other personal documents of women attracted to women from around 1900 onwards in Hungary. LHAH also aim to collect published articles and books in lesbian herstory and related issues and to explore the representation of women loving women in literature, in the press, and in medical literature, including psychiatry. We try to reveal all the different forms and shades of same-sex attractions in the past from cross-dressing and butch-femme relationships to intimate friendships, secret loves and out lesbians. We intend to create files for the primary and secondary documents of those more well-known Hungarian women whose stories have been more or less reconstructed, such as turn-of-the-century journalist passing woman Sándor/Sarolta Vay (1859–1918), and writers Minka Czóbel (1855–
1947)\(^8\) and Cécile Tormay (1875–1937).\(^9\) For the post-World War II years, the heritage of such figures as the writer Erzsébet Galgóczi\(^10\) and the actress Hilda Gobbi is still waiting to be uncovered and is currently only partly accessible. Besides materials about the few “representative” lesbian figures we know of already, we intend to collect archival materials about “everyday” women as well. The purpose of the archives is also to collect documents of the Hungarian lesbian movement that started in the 1990s, including flyers, leaflets, official papers, letters, as well as photo and video materials.

The long-term aim of the Lesbian Herstory Archives Hungary is to serve as a resource for scholars, activists, and the wider public and to organize cultural events related to lesbian culture and history. The space of the archives could thus combine the functions of research as well as movement- and community building (similar to the mission of the Lesbian Herstory Archives in New York, the oldest of their kind). We are also interested in cooperating with other lesbian/women’s/LGBT archives in the region and in Western countries. The English translation of the sixteen Secret Years interviews will soon be available on www.labrisz.hu, and we will be gradually adding digitized versions of pieces of the archival material of the Lesbian Herstory Archives Hungary.

\section*{Notes}

8. See Anna Menyhért, “A másság kánontalansága, a boszorkány (Czóbel Minka)” [The canonless other, the witch (Minka Czóbel)], in Anna Menyhért, \textit{Női irodalmi hagyomány} [Women’s literary tradition] (Budapest: Napvilág, 2013), 99–147.
10. See Beáta Sándor, “‘Constantly Rewriting Herself’: Lesbian Representations and Representations of Lesbians in Hungary from the 1980s to the Present” (MA thesis, Central European University, 1999).