

Palmy and *Stryga* by Tadeusz Miciński
— a poetic transposition of the cultural
experience of men's anxiety towards
pre-expansive femininity

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Palmy and *Stryga*¹ are known as two adjacent poems (put together in the form of sonnets, what is not without relevance to the semantic sphere) by Tadeusz Miciński are published in the volume entitled *w mroku gwiazd* (*In the Shadow of the Stars*) and belong to the cycle *Wpółśród raju* (*In the Midst of Paradise*). These poems may constitute as a whole for the sake of compositional and interpretive reasons.

The multitude of similarities in the way of constructing a poetic transfer tends to identify them as a diptych. The element which connects these two texts is the presence of a lyric narrator — a man who is looking into the eyes of a woman and making a thorough but — out of necessity — a subjective psychological study. Everything which he manages to see cannot be subjected to explicit characteristics. The Woman's inner personality landscapes designed and described by the man are proving to be extremely dynamic — balancing on the edge of admiration and fear.

It should be noted at the beginning that the statements of the entity lyrical speaker — the man — are evoking the issue of misogyny which was very popular in the second half of the nineteenth century. Maria Podraza-Kwiatkowska in her sketch *Salome i Androgyne. Mizoginizm a emancypacja*²

1 Miciński T., *Wybór poezji*, introduction and ed. Gutowski W., Cracow 1999, p. 173. All quotes from poems I give according to this edition. The numbering of the verses I note in the main text for a specific quote. In a footnote pointing out the page numbers from which the passages quoted.

2 Podraza-Kwiatkowska M., *Salome i Androgyne. Mizoginizm a emancypacja*, [in:] *Symbolizm i symbolika w poezji Młodej Polski*, Cracow 2001, p. 366. Maria Podraza-Kwiatkowska, in addition to the reasons signaled here misogynist attitudes, indicated other: the impact study of the field of psychiatry (research on hysteria of women), a large number of publications devoted to mental deviations

(*Salome Salome and Androgyne. Misogyny and Emancipation*) states that the intensification of this phenomenon, which is visible on the pages of literature and art of the late nineteenth century, came under the influence of anti-feminist³ philosophical views.

There remained without significance also booming at that time emancipation and feminist movement of women which is considered by researchers to be one of the main causes of misogynist⁴ attitudes, whose presence in the culture was reflected in the works of poetry, prose, drama, journalistic texts and theatrical performances.

Thanks to the feminist movement a convenient and safe social order based on multidimensional dominance of men over women has been marred. The signals of upcoming changes in traditional relationships between women and men aroused in the latter the feeling of fear primarily to the evolution of a new type of softer sex which was guided by clear goals and decisive actions. Men feared, therefore, of everything that was announced by women: their own restructuring program aimed in improving their current fate⁵.

The desire to loosen the tight corset of customs for contemporary women, the need to abolish or at least to mitigate the effect of moral 'double standards'⁶ and what goes with it — the desire of women to treat them

sexual dynamic in the second half of the nineteenth century spiritualist movement (satanic rituals, practicing black magic), sociological causes. See: Tytkowska A., *O modernistycznej demonizacji miłości i kobiecości*, [in:] *Kobieta i rewolucja obyczajowa. Społeczno-kulturowe aspekty seksualności. Wieki XIX i XX. Zbiór studiów*, ed. Żarnowska A. and Szwarz A., Warsaw 2006, pp. 149–161.

3 A large role in shaping the attitudes of a misogynist played anti-feminist theories of philosophers: Arthur Schopenhauer, Edward Hartmann, Friedrich Nietzsche and Otto Weininger. See: Ardens [Koterbski J.], *Wrogowie kobiety (Nietzsche – Przybyszewski – Strinberg – Weininger)*, 'Biblioteka Warszawska' 1905, vol. 4, part 1, pp. 61–86; Majewska G., *Nietzsche i kobiety*, 'Strumień' 1900, no. 11, pp. 170–171. See also: Kornatowska M., *Zmysłowe opętanie i mizoginia*, [in:] *Eros i film*, Lodz 1986. See: Gilmore D.D., *Mizoginia, czyli męska choroba*, transl. Margański J., Cracow 2003.

4 See: Matuszek G., *Kultura contra natura? o mizoginizmie mintonego fin de siècle'u*, [in:] *w kręgu Młodej Polski. Prace ofiarowane Marii Podrazie-Kwiatkowskiej*, ed. Stala M., Ziejka F., Cracow 2001, p. 50.

5 One expression of this fear was the creation of the myth of demonic feminine, which is a contradiction of romantic pattern. In modernism the image of a woman seducing a man was constructed. A similar phenomenon occurred earlier, during the Middle Ages. In modernism medieval stereotypes and prejudices against women were willingly used. See: Bechtel G., *Cztery kobiety Boga: ladacznicza, czarownica, święta i głupia geś*, transl. Pachniak K., Warsaw 2001.

6 The nineteenth century is a time of prudery, but also so-called 'double standards'. Moral principles relating to women and men did not have a single character this period. The standards imposed on women that were very strict, often quite difficult to implement in daily life. Double standard was evident above all in the sphere of sexual life. Men (both bachelors and married) could afford a lot of flexibility, while women are required to maintain absolute fidelity [see S. Walczewska, *Damy, rycerze i feministki. Kobiety dyskurs emancypacyjny w Polsce*, Cracow 2000, pp. 130–139]. 'Double standard' — a term which expresses the fact that the same trait or behavior is evaluated using different criteria (standards) for women and men. See: M. Humm, *Słownik teorii feminizmu*, transl. Umińska B., Mikos J., Warsaw 1993, p. 169; I. Moszczeńska, *Podwójna moralność. Kobiety upadłe*, 'Krytyka' 1905,

on an equal footing with men manifested with increasing courage and determination provoked the opposition of male part society. Moreover, the nature was mentally positioned closer to women constituting its personification and in the same time sequestered them from the sphere of culture of which the representatives could be according to the unwritten social contract only men. This, in turn, became the reason for the hyperbolic perception of women who unscrupulously subdue and subordinate all the representatives of the male gender to them.

According to men, women operate under the dictation of the voice of nature of which is the imperative to achieve motherhood or physical pleasure⁷.

Newly shaping type of daring, ready to change, modern women revived deeply hidden men's fears towards the emerging need to compete with the opposite sex. The defenders of the patriarchal world order created symbols of these concerns in the form of sensual women, dangerous and alluring, mysterious and tempting, allied with natural or dark forces, angelic-demonic, intractable to male authorities, thus affecting the imagination of men and causing obsessions⁸.

Writers of Young Poland literary period, therefore possessed a rich palette of misogynist symbols: figures of scary-fascinating women whose creation became a peculiar form of self-therapy not only for artists but for all other men who were concerned about their former strong social position. The creators of art devoted much attention to women's eyes and hair which were recognised by them as the unique attributes of woman's beauty and sexuality. They gave them both features of alluring-annihilating objects which was associated with the approaching symbol of liberated womanhood⁹. These creative treatments allowed men to release repressed emotions and to reel

no. 7, vol. 2, p. 121; also: *Podwójna moralność. Kobiety mądre*, 'Krytyka' 1905, no. 7, vol. 2, p. 262. See: Moszczeńska I., *Podwójna moralność*, 'Nowe Słowo' 1903, no. 5, p. 97.

7 Similar views preached Otto Weininger who distinguished two extreme types of women. The first group consists of mothers whose sole purpose in life was give the birth to the child and the bestowal of his mother's love, resulting from instinct. In this case, the desire to have a child was aimed at extending the continuity of the species. The second type was a female courtesan who sought only to achieve pleasure. Male for both types of women was a tool for the fulfillment of their desires. More on this see: Ardens [Koterbski J.], *Wrogowie kobiety...*, p. 82.

8 The frequent occurrence in the literature and culture of the second half of the nineteenth century women's demonic incarnations also noted by Maria Bogucka in the book devoted to the evolution of space and the social position of women through the ages (see also: *Gorsza pleć. Kobieta w dziejach Europy od antyku po wiek XXI*, Warsaw 2005).

9 Particular attention was paid to the eyes in the context of the evil eye, which was associated with the expansiveness of a new type of womanhood. Invoked figures of mantis, bringing destruction to those in which she looked at. More about the functions of the figure of mantis in modernism see: Caillois R., *Modliszka*, [in:] *Odpowiedzialność i styl*, introduction by Błoński J., Warsaw 1967.

off reflections on the upcoming new image of femininity which was against the patriarchal and convenient arrangement for them.

As analysed in this sketch, there is a double image of a woman¹⁰ in the sonnets — the holy one and *femme-fatale*¹¹ — as it emerges from a two-dimensional landscape perceived by the man. Gabriela Matuszek states that both the demonization of a woman and her idealisation are only two sides of the same process: the need to increase the deepest feelings and desires. The apotheosis of representatives of the fair sex therefore sublimates the need for transcendence while demonizing sublimates — carnality¹². Thus, ambivalence is a kind of focus around which concentrates a contradictory image of a woman.

Initial situation that occurs in these two poems with clearly delineated spatial accent and vivisection of the face of female soul is closely connected with the notion of alienating the erotic of the Young Poland literary period which is an important issue here. Modernists in their texts very frequently refer to different, distant cultures and mysterious uncharted spaces¹³.

The fascination of what is distant to human cognition was inextricably associated with the desire to assimilate the knowledge of this 'other' world. In addition, the penetration of cultures combined with the absorption of wealth of the different area of civilization had its consequences in the form of bridging the gap between cultures and what is more 'taming' the problem of exoticism. Bridging the contrast between 'familiarity' and 'alienation'¹⁴ the modernists achieved through the promotion of the idea of crossing inaccessible borders and heading for mysterious spaces¹⁵.

In this context the aspect of eroticism was also considered which in the sphere of morality was treated as a phenomenon well beyond the generally accepted norms of behavior and thus moral judgments. Through this it constituted some 'foreign' experience, even exotic. Content of a sexual nature were often identified as immoral attitudes and were criticized every

10 See also: Łebkowska U.M., 'Tak się w mej duszy mienia Twoje oczy...', [in:] *Poezja Tadeusza Micińskiego. Interpretacje*, ed. Czabanowska-Wróbel A., Próchniak P., Stala M., Cracow 2004.

11 *Femme-fatale* — woman who brings destruction, misery, breaks hearts and destroys a man's life (see: Kopaliński W., *Słownik mitów i tradycji kultury*, Warsaw 2003, p. 549).

12 Matuszek G., *Kultura contra natura...*, p. 60.

13 Podraza-Kwiatkowska M., *Inspiracje japońskie w literaturze Młodej Polski. Rekonansans*, [in:] *Somnambulicy – dekadenci – herosi. Studia i eseje o literaturze Młodej Polski*, Cracow 1985, pp. 175 i 176. In the Young Poland literary period what was also popular were: Indians and pre-slavic culture. It was described by: Tuczyński J., *Motywy indyjskie w literaturze polskiej*, Warsaw 1981; Ziejka F., *Motywy prasłowiańskie*, [in:] *Młodopolski świat nyobrażni. Studia i eseje*, ed. Podraza-Kwiatkowska M., Cracow 1977.

14 Kuźma E., *Semiologia egzotyki*, [in:] *Miejsca wspólne. Szkice o komunikacji literackiej i artystycznej*, ed. Balcerzan E. and Wyslouch S., Warsaw 1985, p. 306.

15 Gutowski W., *Egzotyzyzm młodopolskiej erotyki. Próba typologicznej i topologicznej*, [in:] *Mit – Eros – Sacrum. Sytuacje młodopolskie*, Bydgoszcz 1999, p. 31.

now and then¹⁶. Erotic of Young Poland literary period, according to many critics, in a rather radical way demolished the religious order and strongly denied the fundamental assumptions of Victorian civilization¹⁷.

Public discourse relating to customs and human erotic and sexuality launched at the end of the nineteenth century and developed in the twentieth century could not ignore specific cultural behavior of the above signaled spheres of life usually condemned as a threat to the patterns recognized by the public as the proper ones. Sexuality of women seemed to be (mostly from the point of view of representatives of the Church) difficult to accept, therefore, the most convenient solution to the problem was getting dispose of her by discipline, silencing or elimination.

Gradually progressing revolution in the moral sphere has led to changes in standards and styles of behavior which were previously unquestionable. The universal model of social roles of women — wives and mothers had also been disturbed. What emerged was an alternative way of thinking about a woman as a complete equal social entity with a man and who has the right to pursue her own aspirations in every sphere of life including sexual one¹⁸.

Courage and honesty in expressing new erotic customs contributed to the clarification of open views at the issues concerning sensual love¹⁹. Voices of desire for unfettered imagination gradually began to occupy more and more space in the art.

For these reasons writers often introduced alienating signals into the poetic scenery images which in conjunction with erotic motifs played an important role — they revealed a new way of perceiving the world. In this context the sense of sight, eyes and their perception seemed to be a much more ambiguous and mysterious²⁰.

The action of staring into woman's eyes by the man and the attempt to extract the whole female inner world from them fills both of Miciński's sonnets indicated earlier which — as much because of the numerous oppositions between them as convergence — constitute a compositional and thus the interpretative whole.

16 Banach A., *Erotyzm po polsku*, Warsaw 1974, p. 52.

17 Gutowski W., *Chuć przeciw duszy narodu. O kompleksach polskich i erotyce modernizmu*, [in:] *Nagie dusze i maski (O młodopolskich mitach miłości)*, Cracow 1997, p. 383.

18 *Preface*, [in:] *Kobieta i rewolucja obyczajowa...*, op. cit., p. 10.

19 Podraza-Kwiatkowska M., *Schopenhauer i chuć*, "Teksty" 1974, no. 2, p. 34.

20 Gutowski W., *Mit – Eros – Sacrum, Sytuacje młodopolskie*, Bydgoszcz 1999, p. 35.

In the first poem — *Palmy*²¹ the man draws a some sort of a description — he states at the same time that he notices in woman's gaze both darkness of the sea depths and the blueness of the sky for which the surface of the water creates a point of reflection. Bottomless abyss²² is very intriguing for the lyrical narrator. He is more and more affected by the risk of death and therefore more interested:

Widzę w Twych oczach²³ ciemne morza tonie
i szafir nieba, co się w nich przegląda —
rozkosz otchłani²⁴, która śmiercią zionie —
ciszę bezmiarów — których się pożąda.
(*Palmy*, w. 1–4)²⁵

These spaces evoke anxiety, emotional vagaries that can be transferred to the characteristic portrait of a woman — the lyrical heroine of the sonnet — and considered as her constitutive features. The abyss can symbolise vastness but also it can be a herald of the arrival of something final — the end of life.

It is very often the case that — as noted in Anna Tytkowska's sketch *O modernistycznej demonizacji miłości i kobiecości* (*About Modernist Demonization of Love and Femininity*) — in the era of Young Poland literary period the most prevailing image of a woman is the image of her pulling the man down into the abyss and also leading him towards the symbolic (and real) death²⁶. The similar conclusion was drawn by Jan Białostocki who claimed that in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century an alluring woman became a symbol of death²⁷.

Despite of the fact that the addressee of the poem is a woman in fact the foreground is occupied by expanded imaginative landscape built by the

21 Palm trees have rich associations: among other things, they symbolise the tree of life, so that their meaning is combined with love and fertility; they are also associated with heaven. They express the ability to combine opposites (see: Kopaliński W., *Słownik symboli*, Warsaw 1990, p. 299. See also: Chenel A.P., *Słownik symboli*, transl. Boberska M., Warsaw 2008, p. 176).

22 See: Koplński W., *Słownik symboli*, op. cit., p. 339.

23 In the era of Young Poland literary period popular interest in the human face was due to the overlapping processes and embodying process. Eyes combined with the disembodiment function and epiphany. See: Stala M., *Między 'zamięciem duszy' a 'domkiem mego ciała'. Doświadczenie ciała i cielesności jako problem i temat poezji młodopolskiej*, 'Pamiętnik Literacki' 1989, part 1, p. 23.

24 More information about the function and importance of the abyss in the poetry of Young Poland literary period may be found in Podraza-Kwiatkowska M., *Pustka – Otchłań – Pełnia*, [in:] *Sommambulicy – dekadenci – herosi. Studia i eseje o literaturze Młodej Polski*, Cracow 1985.

25 Cit. from: Miciński T., *Wybór poezji*, op. cit., p. 173.

26 See: Tytkowska A., *O modernistycznej demonizacji miłości i kobiecości*, [in:] *Kobieta i rewolucja obyczajowa...*, op. cit., p. 160.

27 Białostocki J., *Pleć śmierci*, Gdańsk 1999, p. 40.

lyrical narrator and which constitutes the image of the woman's interior created by the man.

In this highly subjective designed vision of a woman darkness of the landscape combined is with the brightness and the abyss with death. All these components are connected to the sphere of desire, fascination of ambiguous images and perversion which is accompanied by an attempt to characterize the addressee of the poem.

The tool which enables the man to know and to create a psychological portrait of the woman are her eyes²⁸ which in the poem play the role of the center that braces and becomes a source of fascination which provokes to plunge into the soul of representative of the opposite sex. At the same time they are a mirror that reflects the world and from which emerge images marked by mystery and duality.

The whole is based on the coexistence of a contrast of dark, murky colors with bright but cold tones. In the eyes of the woman, as on the screen, the man sees a vertical line which extreme points create the opposition up-down²⁹. The up was always symbolically associated with the sky and was valued positively whereas the down would send us to the night, darkness of hell, to the power of evil and sin. That opposition is a reflection of mythological-religious outline of the structure of the world and, at the same time, the concept of movement between zones of the *sacrum* and *profanum*. It is also noticeable that there are smooth transitions between heaven, earth and underworld in the poems.

The sight³⁰ of the woman appears to the man as a huge space of wild nature based on opposites. The above feelings are heightened and confirmed by the 'wild forests' bathed in subtropical sun and combined with a piercing cold interior:

28 Eyes are an important attribute of femininity, particularly appreciated by writers of Young Poland literary period who treated them as attributes of female sexuality devoted much attention to them in the lyrical communications.

29 Vertical axis of the world is the backbone of the cosmos, bonding all its levels (underground, earth and sky). The transition between levels followed by the path traced by the axis of the world. It rose above the symbolic center and stimulate interaction between the divine and the earthly (see Chenel A.P., op. cit., p. 173). Vertical symbols therefore oppose the sky and the stars what is the 'bottom', i.e. land and the underground world. Heaven is the model for the world, is a place where persons are ideal for people who are worthy of emulation, is also a goal, as it is a land of happiness and fulfillment. While hell represents negative values and symbolizes a place where there are elements which are the source of evil and its personifications. See: Jacko J.F., *Struktura symboli wertykalnych a ich rola w komunikacji międzykulturowej i w zarządzaniu*, [in:] *Religion in the Time of Changes*, ed. Klima E., Lodz 2005, p. 176.

30 About the function of peryphrase see: Loewe J., *Konstrukcje analityczne w poezji Młodej Polski*, Katowice 2000, p. 99.

Lub mi się zdaje, że to leśne glusze
w podzwrotnikowym słońcu gorejące
a w głębi zimne; strojne w pióropusze
tęczowych kwiatów, a od lian ginące.
(*Palmy*, w. 5–8)³¹

In the eyes of the described woman we can see the power to enslave. Such potential is presented in 'liana' which constrain the freedom of action.

The man is not quite sure what he sees in the eyes of the woman. The lack of decisive judgments on this subject is contained in the form of verbal — 'zdawać się' ('seem to'). He can only assume, and his assumptions are also based on the opposition which this time concerns not only the opposition between light and dark but also the difference in temperature. The heat of the subtropical sun is clashed with internal coldness³².

In the outlined oxymoronic poetic reality a spatial contrast comes into view: subtropical forest gains the characteristics of the Arctic. The opposition between 'familiarity' and 'alienation' in the construction of the lyrical landscape becomes particularly expressive.

In the internal landscape of the woman there is no sign of stability which constitutes a great unsolved riddle and a space of deceptive images:

Tak się w mej duszy mienia Twoje oczy,
Że nic trwałego w nich, prócz tajemnicy.
I próżno pytam, czy mnie do świątynicy
Ten sfinks prowadzi, czy pustych roztoczy,
Gdzie palmy wędną na słonecznym skwarze
I tak do rajów podobne — miraże.
(*Palmy*, w. 9–14)³³

The Eyesight of the woman is reflected in the soul of the man. It brings mystery, impermanence and ambiguity. What is more, it introduces confusion and brings chaos of thought.

An animal 'meaningful symbol' appearing in this passage which is devoid of monstrous features — sphinx — expresses erotic emotions to a lesser extent. It conveys more idealist-mystical content and brings us into the world of puzzles.

Ambivalence of the addressee's image highlights a two-pronged way on she, according to the man, tries to lead him. On the one hand, there is

31 Cit. from: Miciński T., *Wybór poezji*, op. cit., p. 173.

32 Exotic forest, as internal landscape, expressed undifferentiated *sacrum-demonicum* of the soul and inseparable in the mind of the attributes of life and (see Gutowski W., *Tajemnice młodo polskich lasów. O kluczowym symbolu poetyckim*, [in:] Martuszevska A., *Literacka symbolika roślin*, Gdansk 1997, p. 127).

33 Cit. from: Miciński T., *Wybór poezji*, op. cit., p. 173.

a reference to the 'sanctuary'³⁴ the temple) and thus to the *sacrum* zone and suggestion of the angelic side of femininity. On the other — on the contrary — an indication of nothingness which determines the unpredictability and demonic nature of the fair sex that is her dark temper. In this situation the narrator spins a variety of reflections on what the glance of the described person might express hypothetically. From these considerations a clear description of the lyrical heroine does not follow. What is visible is only an extreme mix of personality traits that intrigues the man and it is rather difficult to understand.

The woman is visually displayed in the multitude of personifications and complicated, ambiguous landscapes. They build diverse, surprising mutual schemes which fast rotation makes the reader able to register changes and expect the next scene³⁵.

In the poem *Stryga* the initial situation is the same as in the poem *Palmy*. The man makes careful observations of the interior of the addressee of the sonnet through the analysis and description of her gaze emphasizing his own subjectivity at the same time.

The very title of the poem introduces us to the circle of Slavic folk beliefs. Proper term — 'stryga' — describes a witch, vampiric hag who feeds on human blood. From the descriptions of individual elements of the characteristics of the witch her dark image emerges from its depths. Epithets used by the poet defining the character reflect perfectly her dangerous nature:

Widzę w Twych oczach zdradliwe sadzawki,
kożuchem zgnilych lśniące nenufarów,
potworne śmigi kręcących się żarów,
roślin krwiożerczych węzowate drgawki.
(*Stryga*, w. 1–4)³⁶

In the description of the woman absorption, even devouring, process has been highlighted which emphasized the drastic and ghastly nature of her face.

What we have here is a popular and frequently used measure by the creators of the Young Poland literary period to show erotic landscape and flowery symbols that refer to the conventionalised 'language of flowers'³⁷ — here

34 *Świątynia* (other form: *świątynia*) — house of prayers of pagans and christians. Definition after: *Słownik języka polskiego: podług Lindego i innych nonsznych źródeł*, vol. 3, ed. Rykaczewski E., Warsaw 1812, p. 855.

35 Balcerzan E., *Oprócz głosu. Szkice krytycznoliterackie*, Warsaw 1971, p. 73.

36 Cit. from: Miciński T., *Wybór poezji*, op. cit., p. 173.

37 About the symbols of plants see: I. Sikora, *Młodopolska florystyka poetycka*, Walbrzych 2007; *Przyroda i wyobraźnia. O symbolice roślinnej w poezji Młodej Polski*, Wrocław 1992.

the presence of water lilies and ‘bloodthirsty plants’ — which is demonstrating ambiguity of Eros using masks drawn from the world of flora³⁸.

Both in the first and in the second poem the poet introduces aquatic terminology to the interpretation in which the literary hyponym is water. In this context it may act as an intermediate element between the ‘fluid’ elements such as air and fire and the ‘constant’ element — earth.

In the symbolism water is considered as material pre-element of femininity. It symbolises decay, rebirth and the whole possibilities of life³⁹.

In the Miciński’s sonnets *Palmy* and *Stryga* which form a kind of diptych various ways of depicting water, however, differ from each other. In *Palmy* we are dealing with a huge space of the sea depths which coexist in some way with the sphere of air. However, in the poem *Stryga* the hyponym expressed in the plural (‘sadzawki’ ‘pools’) defined with the epithet (‘treacherous’ ‘zdradliwe’) introduces a negative valuation. Decay of plants on the surface of the water introduces the reader to the scenery of marshes and swamps which can provide an explanation for the object specified in the title of the sonnet.

Images of swamps and decaying plants often found in the poetry of Young Poland literary period symbolised the internal chaos, moral and ethical imbalance and ignorance⁴⁰.

In the poem *Stryga* the lyrical narrator (again) is not certain what he sees in the eyes of the woman. What we see here is the sphere of holiness which in a way has been disgraced. Indication towards the tower⁴¹ in accordance with her symbolism may be the proof of predomination of evil in woman’s character and her desire to exercise authority over the man:

Lub mi się zdaje, że to są wieżyce
pohańbionego kościoła, gdzie straszny —
i biją pięści w brązową grobnicę
i leży ksiądz martwy w blaskach złotej czaszy.
(*Stryga*, w. 5–8)⁴²

The image of the temple which is cited here is marked by the stigma of ethical and moral degradation. The woman presented in this description is so overwhelmed by the sinful forces that they affect the realm of the *sacrum*.

38 See: Gutowski W., *Bestiariusz młodopolskiej erotyki*, [in:] *Młoda Polska*, ed. Maciejewska I., Warsaw 2002, p. 483.

39 Gutowski W., *Nagie dusze i maski. O młodopolskich mitach miłości*, Cracow 2007, p. 29.

40 Ibidem, p. 48.

41 About this symbolism see: Kopański W., *Słownik symboli*, op. cit., p. 461.

42 Cit. from: Miciński T., *Wybór poezji*, op. cit., p. 174.

Last stanzas of the two sonnets are kind of a bracket in terms of composition — they are reflective in nature.

In the poem *Stryga* the lyrical narrator due to the ominous nature of the woman's eyes decides to destroy them:

Tak się mieniał Twe czary, że kindżalem⁴³ wydrę
Dwoje tych wieszczych, a złowrogich oczu —
(*Stryga*, w. 9–10)⁴⁴

Signaled above destructive man's action can be the incitement to release himself from the captivating impact of the woman.

The man looks at her and what he sees in her eyes fills him with horror. The area in which she is located connotes a dangerous realm and directs attention to the aggressive side of the female nature.

Centuries-old poetic tradition described the eyes⁴⁵ as unique windows through which we can reach into people's inner landscapes. However, the lyrical narrator stubbornly wants to eliminate them. I believe that this act can be explained by the tendency of the artists of Young Poland literary period (mostly men) to the fetishisation of the attributes of femininity, mostly the eyes which they described as alluring-annihilating objects.

The intention of destruction of the visual tool may be due to fear that men could feel at the prospect of imminent change in the traditional understanding of femininity. As it is noted by Anna Tytkowska the woman of the future 'in a man's world which cherish tradition woman was imagined and presented to the public as a woman who is incomplete, degenerated, stripped of her sexual attributes and therefore devoid of charm and attraction, power of magic and mesmeric fascination'⁴⁶. In this particular case the destruction of the eyes may have a defensive character or a response to gradual emancipation of women which is troubling men. It can also be an expression of understanding by the male representatives of the female part of society as imperfect beings and then it is important to emphasize the lack of an element essential for femininity.

43 *Kindżal* — short double-edged sword, pierce of Eastern origin.

44 Cit. from: Miciński T., *Wzbyór poezji*, op. cit., p. 174.

45 The symbolism of the eye is very complex. They symbolise the world, God and the light. Evil eye, however, according to folk belief, brought misery and cast charm. Especially dangerous were the eyes of old women, recognised by society as witches (see Kopański W., *Słownik symboli*, op. cit., p. 272). The eye is the image of the soul and a window to nature and human's emotions (see Kuleszewicz R., *Słownik symboli literackich*, Białystok 2001, p. 170). More about the symbolism the eyes see: *Symbolika oka w literaturze i sztuce. Od religii do popkultury*, ed. Borkowski A., Borkowska E., Sawicka-Jurek J., Siedlce 2009.

46 Cit. from: A. Tytkowska, *Kultura jako przestrzeń wspólnych leków i fascynacji. Casus Lilith*, [in:] *Aksjotyczne przestrzenie kultury*, Wrocław 2005, p. 374.

The lyrical narrator wants to pretend that he resurrected Hydra — the representative of cruel side of feminine nature at the same time:

I pod skronią Zbawcy oprawię w przezroczu,
aby się zdało, żem zmartwychwzniósł Hydrę.
I niech urzekną gwiazd⁴⁷ mroźnych ten szlak
zimowy, lżawiąc bezdźwięcznie: tik-tak-tik-tak...
(*Stryga*, w. 11–14)⁴⁸

From the analysed poems, which make up a diptych emerges a very sinister image of the woman: firstly, the lyrical narrator draws image of the sphinx woman characterised by pervasive of mystery and ambiguity having a dual personality, alluring and terrifying; then he proceeds to the witch woman descended from Slavic folk beliefs who is a clear announcement of the upcoming evil provoking his conflicting feelings: she intrigues him and fills with fear.

Although both lyrical utterances differ significantly from each other we can see many similarities in the construction of the poem. In sonnets mentioned here — *Palmy* and *Stryga* — the lyrical narrator, being a man, created a dual vision of the woman: on the one hand — the perfect but dangerous beauty on the other hand — the personification of dark forces. The direct tool for this purpose were her eyes which served as a mirror of feminine soul and constituted the object of fetishisation. That ambivalent image does not constitute a reliable assessment. It is merely a subjective, private vision of a man which he himself drew from her gaze.

In the sonnets presented by me the images created by the poet do not have an uniform character. They undergo continuous changes and transformations which seem as if they were in constant motion as well as they perfectly resonate with dual representation of the woman.

The projection of the created space in Miciński's poems resulted in accumulation of mystery and danger. Man's fascination, admiration and desire are interspersed with shades of horror within the lyrical heroine whose ambivalent image he has created. They are also associated with the aspect of alienation of erotic matters in the Young Poland literary period which is dominant in these sonnets.

Both of the lyrical texts evoke the issue of misogyny — a phenomenon popular in the second half of the nineteenth century which sources should be sought on the basis of the society — in contemporary emancipatory aspirations of women and intensified feminist movements.

47 Stars are a kind of emblem of the divine eye of some noble creature (see W. Kopaliński, *Słownik symboli*, op. cit., p. 105).

48 Cit. from: T. Miciński, *Wybór poezji*, op. cit., p. 174.

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