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## THE UNEXPECTED DISCOVERY OF A NOVEL WRITTEN BY STEFANIA SIENKIEWICZ, MOTHER OF HENRYK SIENKIEWICZ

Searching through old newspapers, and hunting for lost works, can bring unexpected results. That was the case with the discovery of a previously unknown novel written by Stefania Sienkiewicz, mother of Henryk Sienkiewicz – the Polish Nobel Prize winner for literature in 1905, who was awarded the Prize “because of his outstanding merits as an epic writer”.<sup>1</sup>

In Poland, 2016 was proclaimed The Year of Henryk Sienkiewicz as it was the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the author’s death. Barbara Wachowicz, a writer, publicist, screenwriter and biographer of famous Poles, was working on her next book presenting the mothers of ten prominent Polish historical figures, entitled *Matki wielkich Polaków* [The Mothers of Great Poles].<sup>2</sup> One of the mothers featured in this book was Stefania Sienkiewicz, the mother of Henryk. Barbara Wachowicz, as she often did, turned to the National Library’s reference librarians for help, hoping we would be able to find some more information on the life and work of Stefania Sienkiewicz.

Very little is known about Stefania Sienkiewicz. Even her portraits have not survived the passage of time. We know of only a few letters written

1 Stefania Sienkiewicz (1814–1873); Henryk Sienkiewicz (1846–1916) journalist, novelist, short story writer, the most popular Polish writer of historical fiction, social and political activist. His most popular, world-acclaimed novel was *Quo Vadis?*, set in Nero’s Rome, translated into 57 languages, published in over 70 countries and adapted into numerous films.

2 B. Wachowicz, *Matki wielkich Polaków* : „serce mojej ojczyzny – mamol!”, Warszawa 2016.

by her, which testify to her sensitiveness, attentiveness, permissiveness and soft-heartedness. According to the family's oral tradition, she used to write poems that were well received by her acquaintances and friends. She was perceived as possessing a literary talent, with many distinguished men of letters and notable humanists among her ancestors. Stefania Sienkiewicz was a well-educated woman of wide reading. She could make rhymes effortlessly and naturally.<sup>3</sup> Her son Henryk admitted in a newspaper interview that he had inherited his “liking for literature” from his mother, but he underestimated her talent somewhat, saying rather mockingly: “My mother used to play with the pen and with writing poetry”.<sup>4</sup> Was it possible that he did not know about his mother's other literary achievements?

Karol Estreicher, the famous Polish bibliographer and librarian, and the “father of Polish bibliography”, noted two of Stefania Sienkiewicz's folk tales in his bibliography.<sup>5</sup> They had been published in *Tygodnik Ilustrowany*, a renowned and widely-read weekly cultural and social newspaper that appeared in Warsaw in the years 1859–1939.<sup>6</sup>



FIG. 1. The masthead of “Tygodnik Ilustrowany” [Illustrated Weekly] of October 8<sup>th</sup>, 1864 – <http://polona.pl/item/7993865/0/>

- 3 F. Hoesick, “U Henryka Sienkiewicza” [At Henryk Sienkiewicz's house], *Tygodnik Ilustrowany*, 10 March 1900, no. 10, p. 189; *Henryk Sienkiewicz i ród jego. Studium Heraldyczno-Genealogiczne* [Henryk Sienkiewicz and his family. A Heraldic and Genealogical Study], ed. by St. A. Boleścic-Kozłowski, Warszawa, 1917, p. 29.
- 4 “Z życia Sienkiewicza (Sienkiewicz o sobie)” [From the life of Henryk Sienkiewicz (Sienkiewicz about himself)], *Nowa Gazeta*, 17 November 1916, no. 528, p. 2.
- 5 K. Estreicher, *Zestawienie przedmiotów i autorów w 32 tomach Tygodnika Ilustrowanego z lat 1859–1875* [Index to the authors and subjects of 32 volumes of *Tygodnik Ilustrowany* from the years 1859–1875], Warszawa, 1877, pp. 146–147.
- 6 In 1867, this same *Tygodnik Ilustrowany* did not accept for publication Henryk Sienkiewicz's debut rhyming work *Sielanka Młodości* [The Idyll of Youth]. Its editors were very careful when selecting texts, and they reviewed them very severely.

Stefania Sienkiewicz's stories, entitled *Maszerdon* and *Nietoperz*, had appeared in issues no. 246 and 263 from 1864. They were vivid folk morality tales based on folk stories and legends, in which the author also used the language of people from the countryside. These tales testified to Stefania Sienkiewicz's literary culture and artistic taste.<sup>7</sup>

Discovering new facts and uncovering unknown literary works has now been made easier thanks to the growing number of information sources, as well as new search tools and their advanced functionalities. The National Library's reference librarians, besides using traditional print sources, also use digital libraries (there are over a hundred of them in Poland), repositories, various publication platforms, subject-specific databases and academic search engines. The National Library's digital lending library *Academica* is also very helpful when looking for information. With over 1.9 million digitized items and its optical character recognition system, as well as the option of filtering search results, for example by date, *Academica* serves as an excellent search tool. It also holds a vast collection of old newspapers that can be easily searched through.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, with the help of *Academica*, it was possible to find a brief notice in *Kurjer Warszawski*<sup>9</sup> from 1865 announcing the publication of a novel entitled *Jedynaczka* [The Only Daughter], written by a certain S. Sienkiewicz, the initial "S" plausibly pointing to Stefania Sienkiewicz.

The short announcement that appeared in the "Literary News" column in *Kurjer Warszawski* said the novel was being published in instalments in *Bazar*, a women's weekly magazine that appeared in Warsaw in 1865 and 1866. This magazine had followed the example of another periodical, under the same title of *Bazar*, which was at that time being published in four European countries – Germany (*Der Bazar*), Great Britain, France and Spain. As many as a quarter of a million readers subscribed to this magazine in the four countries. In Poland, however, the magazine could not withstand the competition from other popular women's periodicals.

7 Z. Miszczak, *W familiarnym kręgu Henryka Sienkiewicza: nowe dokumenty, ustalenia, hipotezy*. [In Henryk Sienkiewicz's family circle: new documents, ascertainments, hypotheses.], Lublin 2010, pp. 67–81.

8 *Academica* provides online access to digitized copies of books, newspapers and periodicals from the NL's collection. It is only possible on dedicated computers. Website available at URL: <https://academica.edu.pl/> [Accessed: 2017-07-21].

9 *Kurjer Warszawski*, a popular Warsaw informational daily newspaper that appeared from 1821 until 1939, was one of the most widely-read newspapers of that time in Poland.



FIG. 2. The masthead of the first issue of "Bazar" from July 5<sup>th</sup>, 1865 – <http://ebuw.uw.edu.pl/dlibra/docmeta-data?id=120468&from=publication>

The sections featuring fashion and needlework were taken from the foreign editions. The literary illustrated part was to include novels and some light reading, and also the poetry of William Shakespeare, Heinrich Heine and Victor Hugo, the novels of Charles Dickens, as well as articles on painting, sculpture and music. The editors announced: "In this *Bazar*, not only will embellishment of the body be given attention to, but also the soul's dress will find its place here. (...) So everything that can be called luxury or affluence, everything that involves immoderate, unnecessary expenses, will be excluded."<sup>10</sup> It would later turn out that Stefania Sienkiewicz, in her novel, would follow the editors' declaration by condemning carelessness with money and living an affluent life.

The search to locate copies of *Bazar* in Polish libraries was made possible thanks to the Union Catalogue of Polish Newspapers and Periodicals (1661–1950) maintained by the National Library. Only two libraries in Poland hold the title. The Warsaw University Library has the complete set, while the Library of the Płock Scientific Society holds only the first year's issues of the periodical.

It is now possible to browse through the issues of *Bazar* thanks to modern digital tools; the digitized magazine is accessible in the Warsaw University digital library. As early as in the first issue, dated 5<sup>th</sup> July 1865, we can find the first chapter of a serialized novel entitled *The Only Daughter. An original novel by Mrs. S.S.* The second and third chapters say the

10 *Bazar: tygodnik mód i robót ręcznych* [Bazaar: a fashion and needlework weekly], 1865, no. 1, p. 1.

same: author unknown. However, more information is given in the following instalments when the by-line reads: “S. Sienkiewicz” and “S. z C. Sienkiewicz”, which makes the case clear. It meant the author could be identified as Stefania (née Cieciszowska) Sienkiewicz, mother of Henryk Sienkiewicz. In this way, the novel was unearthed and the identity of the author revealed.

*The Only Daughter*, a ten-part work of fiction, is a morality and didactic tale, the account of the short life of a young woman named Zosia. She was an only daughter, an orphan brought up by her grandparents, who loved her dearly. The tale is narrated by an old, patriarchal man and a family friend, Mr. S., who tells the story of Zosia’s life to some young girls. His goal is to warn them not to follow in Zosia’s footsteps, not to behave the way she did. He elucidates his role in guiding Zosia’s fate and points out her grandparents’ numerous mistakes when bringing her up (overindulgence, permissiveness, overpraising the girl, providing her with a comfortable, affluent life, spoiling her – all of which, according to him, made her vain, frivolous and wasteful). Mr. S. sees his mission as being to cure Zosia and prevent the evil that lies within her. He adopts a didactic, moralizing tone, assuming that since he is so old, he knows very well how to bring up young girls. In the end, however, it turns out that he was also the one to blame for Zosia’s death.

*The Only Daughter* is an epistolary novel that includes correspondence between Zosia and her friend Celina. This is to counterpose the views of both women on life, and on the role of women in the family. Zosia values independence and freedom (she says: “I will be the first one to give an example of emancipation”) while Celina is her opposite. She is a servant to her husband, submissive, obedient and fully devoted to him. The ideal wife, according to Mr. S.

In this novel, Stefania Sienkiewicz presented her opinion on the upbringing of girls. She showed extreme attitudes in order to prove that neither overindulgence nor rigorousness were good. What she believed was important was rationality and moderation.

Professor Lech Ludorowski, a renowned expert on Sienkiewicz and president of the Henryk Sienkiewicz Society, praised the author of *The Only Daughter* for her writing ability, the coherence in the novel’s composition, its language and the masterly control of phrase.<sup>11</sup> Professor Ludorowski will soon be publishing a print edition of the novel.

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11 An interview with the Polish Press Agency from January 18, 2017.

## SUMMARY

The 19<sup>th</sup>-century press still holds many mysteries for researchers, such as undiscovered serialized novels. This paper provides an account of how a previously unknown novel by Stefania Sienkiewicz, mother of the famous Polish writer and Nobel Prize-winner Henryk Sienkiewicz, was discovered 151 years after publication. The find was made possible thanks to digital tools and their new functionalities.