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## *Dzieci Ojczyzny*, a Collection of Short Stories by Maria Dąbrowska in 1918, and its Reflection in the *Noce i dnie* Novel Published in 1932-1934

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### ABSTRACT

The entire collection of 1918 stories, especially the last one, entitled *My, polskie dzieci!* [*We, the Polish children!*], describing the school strike in Kalisz of 1905, opens Maria Dąbrowska's many years of reflection on what the future Polish independence should be like. Therefore, 1905 is an important moment in her work, and the description of the school strike in Kalisz exists in her output in three versions. When political independence became reality, the writer took the tedious work of writing her great novel, *Noce i dnie* [*Nights and Days*] to describe not only the background of the 1918 independence, as she did in her collection published the same year, but also in order to better explore the concept of social independence. The novel is intended to transform the reader from a passive recipient of the political independence into a conscious and active participant of their personal and social independence.

**KEYWORDS:** school strike, independence, para-documentary aspect

## STRESZCZENIE

*Zbiór opowiadań Marii Dąbrowskiej Dzieci Ojczyzny z 1918 r. oraz jego odbicie w powieści Noce i dnie, wydanej w latach 1932-1934*

Cały zbiór opowiadań z roku 1918, a szczególnie ostatnie opowiadanie *My, polskie dzieci!*, opisujące strajk szkolny w Kaliszu w 1905 r., jest początkiem wielkiej refleksji Dąbrowskiej na temat tego, czym ma być przyszła niepodległość w Polsce. Dlatego rok 1905 jest ważnym elementem jej twórczości, a opis strajku szkolnego w Kaliszu istnieje aż w trzech wersjach. W momencie zaś, kiedy niepodległość polityczna staje się rzeczywistością, pisarka podejmuje żmudną pracę napisania wielkiej powieści *Noce i dnie* nie tylko w celu przedstawienia rodowodu niepodległościowego z 1918 r., jak to zrobiła w zbiorze wydanym w tym samym roku, ale też aby pogłębić społeczne pojęcie o niepodległości. Powieść ma przeobrazić czytelnika z biernego odbiorcy politycznej niepodległości w świadomego i aktywnego uczestnika biorącego udział w osobistej i społecznej niepodległości.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: strajk szkolny, wątek niepodległościowy, wymiar paradokmentalny

The collection of short stories from 1918 is an important step on Dąbrowska's way to write her masterpiece *Noce i dnie*. As proof, let us demonstrate the importance of the school strike in Kalisz in 1905 in the author's literary output, as she mentions this event three times: for the first time in the 1918, in her collection entitled *My, polskie dzieci!* [*We, the Polish children!*], for the second time in the 1928 text *Strajk szkolny* [*School strike*], and for the third time in 1932-1934 in the third volume of *Noce i dnie* entitled *Miłość* [*Love*], which is found at the end of the first part and in the first chapter of the second part of the book.

### *Dzieci ojczyzny*<sup>1</sup>: genesis and outline

In 1916, during the First World War, Kazimierz Prauss entrusted Dąbrowska with the task of writing a collection of patriotic stories for

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1 M. Dąbrowska, *Dzieci ojczyzny*, Poznań 2014.

children, as well as a school textbook entitled *Dzieje naszej ojczyzny* [*History of our homeland*], as Polish society after 123 years of partitions needed a simple historical and patriotic message. Dąbrowska, through this patriotic series for children and adolescents, joined the educational mainstream of the inter war-period. The collection provides a background for the long struggle for independence in Poland. It begins with a story about the Constitution of 3 May 1791, four more concern the Kościuszko Uprising from its 1794 outbreak to the erection of its leader's monument in the Free City of Krakow in 1820, through the Polish Legions in Italy and the Napoleonic Wars. Writing about the Kościuszko Uprising, Dąbrowska deals with the peasant problem as well, which continues until the penultimate story: *O Jantosiu-Powstańcu i ziemi chłopom oddanej* [*Of Anthony the insurgent and the land donated to peasants*] which concerns the January Uprising [od 1863 – KSD]. The last short story, *My, polskie dzieci*, is the writer's semi-fictional memory of the school strike in Kalisz in 1905. The novel *Noce i dni* covers the period between the January Uprising and the outbreak of World War I, with the turning point being 1905 and the same time, this very school strike, albeit in a different biographical approach. The 1918 collection and the 1930s novel complement each other, as the whole includes the period of the Partitions of Poland. The subject matter of history, patriotism and the nation is one of the main themes of these two works. The 1918 collection shows that the times of the partitions were, above all, the times of continuous struggle for liberation and that Poland, which did not exist in terms of international politics, during these 123 years transformed into a modern nation, including the bourgeoisie and peasants.

It should be noted that the collection goes back to contemporary times: to the winter of 1917-1918 and Piłsudski's Legions, in the prologue of the short story *Krzyżyk spod Frydlandu* [*The cross from Frydland*], entitled *Matka opowiada* [*Mother tells the story*]:

We all sat by the fireplace, dun November twilight peering in the window. We all hear flurries of leaves dancing in the wind in the garden. And again and again, they hurl themselves against the glass, like a swarm of these fairy tale creatures that populate the nearby woods. The Lancers just rode off. As we listen harder, we still hear cavalry sabers and spurs jingling in our ears, dying out in the November night. The terrible, fourth winter of the great war is coming;<sup>2</sup>

and the final lines of the same story (*Pod Frydland!*): "This was the modest Duchy of Warsaw. But no one despaired. A Second Polish war was

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2 Ibidem, p. 93.

expected. Expected, armed for and building a future power.”<sup>3</sup> With this short story, the reader is brought back to the time when the book was being published, 1918, so the narrative updates the story which is not closed in the past, but is open to the present day, just before regaining independence. The educational quality of the collection is to make the reader feel directly affected by the long struggle for Poland’s independence.

### *My, polskie dzieci!:* the school strike in Kalisz, 1905

In a sketch written in 1928, *Piewca niedojrzałości duchowej* [*The eulogist of spiritual immaturity*]<sup>4</sup> about [Stanisław] Przybyszewski, Maria Dąbrowska accuses Przybyszewski of “turning away from real life” and “the noble legacy of 1904-1906.” The revolutionary experience of those years was a preparation for the fight for the independence of Poland. The experience allowed the author, who was 16 at the time and a school student in Kalisz, to open her eyes to the political conditions in Poland at that time, i.e. to the lack of freedom. The event, as her personal and subjective entry into the political life of Poland, entered into the collection of 1918. The last story consists of three parts:

1. *Wyrok na Julę* [*Julia condemned*]
2. *Ciężkie doświadczenie* [*Harsh experience*]
3. *Bunt* [*Rebellion*]

The first part shows Julia’s family, who decide to send the girl to a Russian grammar school, the second part focuses on the Russian language entrance exam, and the third part on the school strike caused by the rebellion of the young people against the Russian authorities. The story is an allegory of the situation throughout the country under the partitions. The school strike brings hope for liberation, which will take place in 1918. The first section, “the judgment,” is based on a sort of a proverb which as though could bring refreshment to despairing hearts: “A Pole is a Pole, in a Polish or a Russian school” [“Polka wszędzie zostanie Polką, w polskiej czy rosyjskiej szkole”].<sup>5</sup> Julia takes the “condemnation” lightly: “Julia burst in silvery laughter. She, as her mother did, looked at everything from the bright side.”<sup>6</sup>

3 Ibidem, p. 105.

4 M. Dąbrowska, *Pisma rozproszone*, ed. E. Korzeniewska, Kraków 1964, p. 469.

5 Maria Dąbrowska, *Dzieci ojczyzny*, op. cit., p.197.

6 Ibidem, p. 198.

The second part, *Harsh experience*, is based on quotations from romantic and patriotic literature, and it contrasts Polish literature with Russian grammar from the exam. The first quote is from *Pan Tadeusz*, Book 11, 1812, concerning the war with Russia in Lithuania. The second quote comes from Maria Konopnicka's *Kartka z raptularza 1887* [*Diary card 1887*]. The third, longer quotation is from the poem *Pieśń o ziemi naszej* [*Song of Our Land*] by Wincenty Pol of 1843. The quotations are inserted in the story while Julia is learning Russian grammar. The first one is spoken by her brother Tadzio, after his announcement that he received "a notice" for bad behavior: "I spoke in Polish with Żeleński. That beast, Torskyi, jumped on me. «A vy gde, Bratkovskiy», he asks. «At home, in Poland», I said."<sup>7</sup> The second quote is Julia's dream, when she falls asleep over Russian and dreams of her former Polish headmistress in a private primary school. The third one is an utterance by Julia's friend, Alina. This is what they are learning now at the Polish school, after "an inspector was to come, and there was a great hiding of books about the history of Poland."<sup>8</sup> Julia's mother speaks of her daughter's efforts towards passing the Russian examination: "Everything will pass, and we shall be Poles," while her father "leaning" over her shows "his eyes looking with a deep hatred on the Russian grammar."<sup>9</sup> The Russian exam is thus an allegory of the situation throughout the oppressed country. The third part, entitled "Rebellion," concerns the school strike at the Russian gymnasium in Kalisz, an episode from the actual revolution of 1905, and an allegory of the liberation of 1918. On this day, the depressed Julia first enters a church and she realizes that everything here is only done "for the Tsar's good fortune," while it was through him that the Russian school was built,

(...) where they teach you how to lie, how to slowly deny the homeland and honor. It is by his will that people come to this church to listen with their mouths clenched as the organ plays for his glory. ...God, how ugly this all is! Through tears, she looks at a saint painted on the wall. The holy woman suddenly assumes the form of the bad-tempered and caustic headmistress. Julia jumps up and runs out of the church.<sup>10</sup>

Next comes revolt against the war in Japan, because Poles will be killed there, fighting for the Russians. "Children, pray for victory for the Japanese!" "God, give the Japanese victory over the Muscovites!" But,

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7 Ibidem, p. 200.

8 Ibidem, p. 203.

9 Ibidem, pp. 201-202.

10 Ibidem, p. 206.

“The Japanese have to kill them to win. They have killed thousands of Poles to win against the Muscovites.” The road to victory for Poland comes not so much through the war with Japan, but through social revolution: “The world has not yet seen such a revolution that will happen here; the world has to change, because the working man is suffering, and a Pole especially.”<sup>11</sup>

Thus, the next quote, appearing already in the rebellion phase, is a revolutionary song. At this point of the narrative, “dangerous groups of workers” join the students and a “sign of the workers, the red flag” is seen,<sup>12</sup> which is a reference to the Paris Commune.<sup>13</sup> The narrator associates the revolutionary song with the glorious historical past of Poland, namely, [king] Bolesław Wrymouth: “Here we are, children of the Polish land! We, the knights of little Bolesław Wrymouth, we followed him to fight for our country. ...And now we want a Polish school. We, the Polish children.”<sup>14</sup>

The three parts of the literary piece tell the story of Julia, who, for financial reasons, has to enroll in a Russian school and torment herself with Russian grammar. She fails the exam and finally takes part in a strike against the school, which is combined with the workers’ strike. Three moments in Julia’s story correspond to three moments in Polish history from the partition era: incorporation into Russia, hardships of living under the partitions, and finally rebellion and liberation, since 1918 is a deepening of the experience of 1905.

### *Strajk szkolny: a 1928 article*

Ten years after publishing the collection of short stories, Dąbrowska provides another account of the school strike in Kalisz:<sup>15</sup>

The editorial board of *Contemporary Woman* asked me to write an article about the school strike. I cannot write it, because the objective side of these momentous events is too little known to me. So, I will try to at least tell shortly what I personally experienced there.<sup>16</sup>

11 Ibidem, p. 207.

12 Ibidem, p. 210.

13 Cf. M. Dąbrowska, *Noce i dnie*, ed. E. Głębińska, vol. 2, Warszawa 2013, p. 302.

14 Maria Dąbrowska, *Dzieci ojczyzny*, op. cit., p. 210.

15 Maria Dąbrowska, *Pisma rozproszone*, op. cit., pp. 135-139.

16 Ibidem, p. 135.

What follows is autobiographical. It is written in the first person, and one can extract some interesting passages that will hint to *Noce i dnie* which was not the case in the previous version of the story:

I did not know patriotism understood as hatred and rebellion. These feelings existed for me only at the Polish history lessons. Besides, in our school, Poland seemed to already have been independent for a long time. Everything there breathed kindness to the world, to people, to life.<sup>17</sup>

In the Polish private school, before succeeding to the Russian high school, the young author does not know what struggle for independence is. In the children's school it is obvious that Poland is Polish, regardless of the political situation, and only during history classes the story of partitions is referred to, where one can experience the intellectual feeling of "hatred and rebellion." In this school, Poland "seemed to already have been independent:"

In these circumstances, there was no obstacle to the freedom to rave about what the Germans and the Russians seemed worthy of admiration for. Thus, German and Russian poetry aroused in me as much enthusiasm as Polish.<sup>18</sup>

Independent Poland is experienced by students at the cultural and intellectual levels, as the greatest enemies of the homeland also have their poets: "The first encounters with the oppressors of my country took place on the basis of direct contact between human beings on a selfless level of artistic beauty."<sup>19</sup> Sending the young author to the Russian high school, as in the previous cycle, is a "condemnation." The young protagonist begins to "frantically dream of liberation" there, not knowing that "liberation is fast approaching."<sup>20</sup> In the story, Dąbrowska juxtaposes Polish and Russian schools. In the first one, she learns to love people and nations; she acquires inner spiritual independence; in the second one she learns to hate Russia and learns what rebellion is. Due to these comprehensive feelings of independence, the writer, and "perhaps many amongst these who were just as young as I was at that time,"<sup>21</sup> prepares for full, political and moral independence, which is the main theme of *Noce i dnie*.

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17 Ibidem, p. 135.

18 Ibidem, p. 136.

19 Ibidem.

20 Ibidem, p. 137.

21 Ibidem, p. 135.

## *Noce i dnie*<sup>22</sup>: the theme of independence

In the novel, the theme of Russian high school and the school strike appear at the end of the first part of the volume, entitled *Miłość* [Love], and the beginning of the second part of the same volume (the first chapter of the second part of the volume tells of a school strike in Kaliniec). The importance of the school motif in the patriotic subject matter of the novel is easy to notice, because it is intertwined with reflections about enslavement and especially about the ways of fighting it:

In Mrs. Wenorden's [Polish private] school they did not teach patriotism understood as hatred, and hardly we felt the enslavement, for no oppression is able to penetrate all environments without exception. Taking advantage of this modest, short-lived freedom, it was rather a place where kindness and understanding for people, nations and worlds were cultivated. Direct combat or rebellion was probably never prepared for in this way, but a treasure of feelings was gathered, without which no fight would have anything to demolish, or make room for. In any case, however, the awareness of captivity permeated the hearts and minds from Tabaczka's lectures, Grottger's reproductions shown by her, Mrs. Wenordenowa's stories about the performance of Wyspiański's *The Wedding* in Krakow, and the history of their own families.<sup>23</sup>

The quoted paragraph is a clear extension of what is seen in Dąbrowska's autobiographical story of 1928. It is the way to fight for freedom: with kindness and understanding, so as to collect a "treasure of feelings" so that the struggle for independence becomes a constructive endeavor. One should also become aware of the enslavement thanks to the culture of independence: Grottger, Wyspiański, but also and above all, "the history of their own families". Thus, the subject matter of history and patriotism is one of the major literary stimuli to the novel's literary concept. [The protagonist] Agnieszka going to the Russian school gets an opportunity to reflect on the future independence. Just as in the story of 1918, the problem begins with preparations for a Russian exam.

In the novel, in contrast to the short story, the heroine gets acquainted with Russian literature, not only the grammar, which is an opportunity for enriching her literary and non-political speculation over the closeness of Russian culture, in the spirit of Wenorden's patriotic education:

22 M. Dąbrowska, *Noce i dnie*, wydanie XVI w 5 tomach, Warszawa 1968.

23 Ibidem, *Miłość*, part 1, p. 272.



Mischievous, morbid curiosity pushed her to the works of Russian literature, which she took from the school reading room. As if to her even greater anguish, an indelible spell seeped from the books, which captivated her. Ukrainian characters from Gogol's short stories, the novels by Goncharov and Turgenev, Pushkin's and Lermontov's stories were so vivid and touching, as if she was surrounded by a bunch of close friends who seemed to be asking her: "Why do you hate us?"... and with her wide, startled eyes she was looking at a terrible, dark tragedy of discord between nations.<sup>24</sup>

Russian school library, therefore, allows Agnieszka to look at the cultural and spiritual patriotism. The end of the story in the novel is different from the one in the collection of short stories, due to the lack of reference to the "knights of little Bolesław Wrymouth." Nevertheless, the character of a medieval king is present in throughout the novel, whether be it the troop of Adrian, Bogumił's grandfather (volume 1), or the young Polish hero in the mind of the very young Agnieszka (volume 2). In addition, Bogumił's middle name is Adrian. The recurring theme alluding to Bolesław Wrymouth indicates the importance of *Noce i dnie's* little story entitled *Rebellion*. "And now we want a Polish school," called out the Polish children in the 1918 collection. In the novel, the cry could have been "we want a Polish novel" concerning the preparations to independence. The Polish school with such a historical background is, in the story, synonymous with homeland. In the novel, the desire for independence reflects the 1918 pattern, bordering with autofiction associated with the educational current in inter-war period literature. This can be seen mainly in the second part of chapter 24 entitled *Love* where Agnieszka follows Marcin in Lausanne on his way to a Polish independence group meeting. The reader is faced with the views of the main participants of the meeting regarding the future of Polish independence. The whole chapter is organized from Agnieszka's point of view: it might be a processed version of actual conversations heard by the writer during her studies in Lausanne.<sup>25</sup> The quest for independence is one of the main themes of the novel, from the prologue's insurgents<sup>26</sup> through the causes of the national-liberation struggle

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24 Ibidem, pp. 315-316.

25 E. Głębińska, *Dąbrowska (nie)znana. Szkice*, Trzecia strona, Warszawa 2015, p. 149: "However, if the author is to be believed, even the political discussions in the novel are often quotations from real conversations in which she participated, so they are important historical testimonies" and on p. 284: "The writer outlined political confrontations and divergences concerning the question about the sense of the fight for freedom in an almost documentary form."

26 M. Dąbrowska, *Noce i dnie*, op. cit., *Bogumił i Barbara*, p. 9: "Bogumił grew up a healthy lad, and at the age of fifteen he took part in the 1863 Uprising with his father" and on p. 11: "After a year of such a life, the uprising of 1863 broke out."

against the genealogy of the Niechcic and Ostrzeński families, to Agnieszka's youth in the Kaliniec Wenordens' school and then the Russian high school. Chapter 24 of the second part of the novel includes a sharp exchange of views on independence, socialism and the First World War, between young people studying in Lausanne. The question is whether Poles need to transition to socialism through independence, or straight to socialism and then adapt to the international situation, when the European war is about to break out. For Agnieszka, the final conclusion from the political debate is: "If only the best ones could cooperate with each other despite the contradictions."<sup>27</sup>

Political debate from Chapter 24 begins when "it was already full and noisy at Sztok's"<sup>28</sup> and ends when "groups left the place."<sup>29</sup> It occupies more than ten pages where one can read the opinions of the four main participants and some of the various other participants. This passage begins with Agnieszka's point of view and goes on without internal focalization, which gives the whole discussion a documentary dimension. The fragment begins with a brief description of the place:

At Sztok's it was already full and noisy. Blue and gray wefts of cigarette smoke lay in the air in motionless layers. Śniadowski was called aside. "Listen, Marcyś. It's going to be heated, but this is going to be good."<sup>30</sup>

Concerning the closed and smoky room in which it is difficult to hear anything, the instrumental "motionless layers" gives a natural feel to the meeting, like an allegory of the national situation, closed and motionless in every layer of society. It is this gathering of pro-independence youth that will be "heated, but it is going to be good." It will break through the motionlessness. This brief initial scene is a preliminary descriptive stage seen through the heroine's eyes. This is evidenced by the following sentences in which the subject is Agnieszka:

Settling as far on the side as possible, Agnieszka heard a hoarse whisper nearby: "Miss Niechcic came with Śniadowski. One vote more for us for sure." She blushed and decided that whatever will come out of the session, she will not vote. "Here's how things move forward," she thought bitterly and at the same time, she felt embarrassed to remember the reasons that brought her here. Severely overwhelmed by a sense of loneliness, as if the

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27 Ibidem, *Miłość*, part 2, p. 264.

28 Ibidem, p. 251.

29 Ibidem, p. 264.

30 Ibidem.

crowd made it not easier, but on the contrary, it destroyed any possibility of achieving an agreement with one other.<sup>31</sup>

In her eyes, a meeting like that was going to be a bad thing, as opposed to what was announced by the previously unidentified voice: “this is going to be good.” And it turns out that the voice was right. The reader, therefore, detaches from Agnieszka’s subjective judgment. It was Marcin who opens the windows (“he did not smoke and he hated smoke”): a symbolic gesture, as he destroys the allegory of a closed, non-breathing country. The para-documentary aspect of the chapter is focalized externally: the reader knows only whatever the narrator does; the account of the large political debate maintains the style of a newspaper article or story based on facts. The political debate scene begins with a brief description of the theme:

The subject of the meeting was to be a discussion of the various groups of young democrats’ stance on the cause of Polish independence. Czaplic acted as the chief spokesman for the resumption of not only ideological slogans, but also armed struggle for freedom.<sup>32</sup>

The instrumental “para-documentary” used here indicates objectivity: the present focus on what immediately follows. The first sentence closes with the objective expression “Polish independence” and its center, the subject, is the core of the matter: “the various groups of young democrats’ stance.” The four main ideas are announced, as well as some other sub-opinions. The whole scene ends in a “tumultuous” manner when everyone has already unofficially voiced their opinion. Czaplic announces the slogan “through independence to socialism” in a direct way: “I dare say,” and ends his first utterance with a triple adjective statement: “free, whole and independent homeland.” A New Testament-like comparison follows, likening the cause of independence to the intellectual Gospel of John: “Only in a liberated country may the liberation of the spirit and of the proletariat become flesh.”<sup>33</sup> Then, Wiczorek’s statement against independence comes, because “the pernicious tendency to raise nationalist slogans is the danger of a squandering of socialism and the international solidarity of the workers.”<sup>34</sup> His statement is saturated with negative judgments: doom, danger, squandering. The focal point of his opinion is his main concern: “nationalism.” After those first two statements, therefore,

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31 *Ibidem*, p. 251.

32 *Ibidem*, p. 252.

33 *Ibidem*, p. 253.

34 *Ibidem*, p. 254.

the crux of the matter comes to light: independence will lead either to socialism or to nationalism. How should the Poles act and what to do with the announced independence? This is what the course of this journalistic fragment of the novel communicates. Polish independence becomes a primary and mysterious character throughout the novel. A note on a Swiss song coming from the outside, through the windows Marcin had opened (“Oh, voilà madame du bon fromage”<sup>35</sup>) signifies that if Poland was Switzerland it could, having obtained independence, focus on the cheese, which means that a free Poland would be a bourgeois country that cares about trivial matters such as cheese, is unreal because “the song sounded on, fading slowly into the night.” The dream of an independent bourgeois Poland is detached from reality: an independent Poland will be something other than Switzerland. The note about the song thus negates Wiczorek’s whole speech about the danger of nationalism. The third view on independence is expressed by Wadwicz, and it concerns statehood in a modern socialist era:

The issue of what is to be reached first, independence or the socialist system, is only a question of the tactics of our actions. ...If national feeling is something spontaneous and original, it should be... subject to criticism and control of reason. If it is... something transitional, its form should be the more subject to criticism, as it is time to build on another, social and international basis.<sup>36</sup>

For him, therefore, socialism is what counts and independence of the state is intended to transform itself in it, because “national liberation is in line with the ideals of socialism.” Of course, Wadwicz’s statement is very dogmatic; blind trust in the new socialist system can be seen in it. What is interesting in his argumentation is the issue of statehood in the history of mankind. Wadwicz justifies socialism and its international supra-state dimension by taking the imperial Rome as an example, and a model for the 19<sup>th</sup> century partitioning powers that absorbed the Polish state. The issue of independence is to be explained to the end, which is the purpose of the fourth speech, i.e. Marcin’s statement on the main theme of the discussion: independence should be introduced in the first place, because national freedom is a sign of civilization and culture:

You will not find a single manifestation of civilization or culture on which nationality would not leave its mark on it. Greek cities were organized

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35 Ibidem, p. 255.

36 Ibidem, p. 256.

into states rather on the basis of their world views, and yet, art and philosophy which they have left still bear traceable characteristics of Greek nationality.<sup>37</sup>

Marcin then provides a second reason why Poland should necessarily strive for independence. This ambition is in fact aligned with the pan-European descent into war, where the struggle for independence will be part of the contemporary history of Europe and should not be played out on its margins. Independent Poland is to be part of the free world:

Only among the free development of national characteristics can deeds for humanity be done. ...Fighting for its right to independent existence, the nation is fighting for its right to participate in the construction of the world.<sup>38</sup>

The adverb “only” and the active participle “fighting” combined with the present tense used in relation to the total value of truth (“can deeds for humanity be done,” “the nation is fighting”), the two sentences sum up a program for independent Poland: to serve humanity. The whole speech is indeed future-oriented, but such a future is determined, it can become a reality in any moment, i.e., through war:

War in Europe hangs by a hair... and then our independence slogan which today lies trampled in the mud will become a great asset in the game for the future of Europe.<sup>39</sup>

This sentence is built on the antithesis between what is today, the “mud” and what tomorrow will bring as an “asset.” In this way, Marcin seems to be the only pragmatic speaker of the whole meeting. The journalistic description of the conversation during the meeting ends with the shouting “Long live independent people’s Poland!” and then noting all the small remarks heard in the hall. One sentence corresponds to one opinion. A general uproar arises, expressed by the exclamation marks and ellipses: “Not true!” Nata Szumska shouted. “Provocation! This is a provocation!;” “Your dictatorship of the proletariat will not only shoot the bourgeoisie, but anyone who dares to think. Wouldn’t you shoot us already!;” “Insinuation! Just remember, who’s using insinuations here!;” “Dear colleagues!!!”<sup>40</sup> The paradoxical aspect of the meeting is conveyed by the so-called “scene”:

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37 Ibidem, p. 258.

38 Ibidem, p. 259.

39 Ibidem, p. 261.

40 Ibidem, p. 263.

reading the whole scene takes as much as a meeting could actually last; there are no shortcuts nor extensions, because the descriptions are very brief and there is no apparent narrator, neither omniscient nor internal. This scene, however, has great importance in the whole artistic intention of the novel, which is to prepare the Poles for a successful independence. Therefore, in the last volume of the novel, entitled *It never rains*, Agnieszka, who is already involved in her journalistic work in Warsaw (in 1912) remembers that past meeting after an important conversation with Bolesław Orłowicz at Wilcza street, when she decides to write down her memoirs:

“Actually,” she concluded, “I should be writing a diary. Perhaps I immediately take to it?” And she began to scribble again. “I know one thing... that politicians will not save the world. State governments, as they are understood today, will not save the world ...And I’m afraid that what is coming will be some great disaster, which will only confirm my thoughts...” She paused; she remembered something, and again began to write. “Our one meeting in... Still in Lausanne... A discussion about individualism and the state... So passionate, that some friendships were broken. The concepts of individualism got mixed up with the concept of selfishness along the way...”<sup>41</sup>

Alluding to Agnieszka’s writing activities in this subparagraph and to the gathering in Lausanne indicates the main thread in the novel and it shows that the meeting had its importance in plan of this work of literature. Reflecting on independence, Agnieszka decides to start writing memoirs, which foreshadow the novel itself. Just like the episode about the school strike, this chapter, with its theme of independence, could be a story from the *Dzieci Ojczyzny* collection from 1918. The collection of short stories is therefore an important stage in the formation of the writer’s idea of a great novel from the times of enslavement, aimed at preparing the Poles for full independence. *Noce i dni* is not just a novel about the past “history of their own families.” It is also a signpost pointing to a full, conscious and moral – personal and national – independence. Maria Dąbrowska dreams of independence, not only political but social as well. In a free country, every person should contribute to the creation of long-term, real independence.

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41 Ibidem, *Wiatr w oczy*, part 2, p. 349.

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