

Introduction

The Other Voice

Writing years after the terrible events that colored her life forever, Anna Stanisławska (1651–1701) meticulously reconstructed in an autobiographical epic poem the episode of her forced marriage to a deviant who terrorized and humiliated her at every turn. It is a poetic account that represents a remarkable tale of triumph in the face of overwhelming domestic oppression. The manner by which Stanisławska wrested back control over her life was an unprecedented feat for a woman in the time in which she lived, for not only did she escape the clutches of a feared magnate family but managed to secure a divorce and marry “for love” soon afterwards. The poem is an unparalleled and compelling work in terms of its exploration of a woman’s situation in marriage and the stark choices posed by a coerced life in the seventeenth century. Long unknown to Polish letters, Anna Stanisławska may be rightfully hailed as one of the most important “other” and certainly “forgotten” voices of the Baroque era, grappling as she did with the dark truths and eternal hopes that underpinned so many women’s lives.

Awaiting Discovery

In 1890, during the course of research in the archives of the Imperial Public Library of St. Petersburg, the Polish Slavic scholar, Aleksander Brückner, discovered the late seventeenth-century manuscript of a lengthy poem with the equally lengthy and rather shocking title: *Transakcyja albo opisanie życia jednej sieroty przez żałosne treny od tejże samej pisane roku 1685* [A Transaction, or an Account of the Life of an Orphan Girl by way of Plaintful Threnodies Written in the Year 1685]. The poem ran for 254 pages; contained 654 stanzas, was divided into 77 threnodies of differing length, and was bookended by opening and closing poems to the reader. The work also had brief margin notes on the left hand side of the pages (in this book, the margin notes are to be found on the right-hand side of the poem), which were placed beside certain stanzas. More curiously still, like a petition to the Holy Family to bless the endeavor, the top left-hand corner of the title page featured the names of Jesus, Mary and Joseph.

Three years after the discovery of the manuscript, in what was the first article devoted to the poem, Brückner revealed that the author was Anna Stanisławska, surnamed Warszycka by her first marriage, Oleśnicka by her second, and Zbąska by her third, and judged the work to be a vivid account of a momentous life

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lived in momentous times.¹ Some years later, however, the scholar would be less effusive. Describing the work as a life in verse intermingled with never-ending complaints about the workings of Fortune, Brückner asserted that the manuscript boasted “terrible poetry” [*wiersze marne*], but stated, in turn, that it was one of the most fascinating works to come out of seventeenth-century Poland.² His pronouncement perhaps unintentionally set the tone for the adverse judgments that followed. What is more, by referring to the poet throughout his article as Anna Stanisławska, Brückner also established a tradition whereby she would henceforth be referred to most often by her maiden name.

Decades of difficult negotiations with St. Petersburg, which after the Russian Revolution became Leningrad, meant that *Orphan Girl* (as the full title of Stanisławska’s *Transaction* is abbreviated in this volume) would not be read by the *fin de siècle* generation of Young Poland, or indeed the generation of post-World War I writers. In 1934, the manuscript was brought from Leningrad to the National Library of Warsaw as part of a larger exchange of manuscripts, and this exchange coincided with the publication of the entire manuscript, as edited by Ida Kotowa, who had made recourse to facsimiles of the poem.³ Kotowa also included in her introduction a letter dated May 5, 1699, from Stanisławska to Franciszek Bieniecki, which is preserved in the Museo Correr of Venice. Although the letter is mostly dictated, the poet did extend her salutations in her own handwriting, and so revealed beyond a shadow of a doubt that the Anna Stanisławska-Zbąska of both letter and poem were one and the same person.

A review of *Orphan Girl* by Renaissance scholar, Tadeusz Sinko, in the Kraków broadsheet *Czas* [Time]⁴ drew for the first time the attention of a wide number of potential readers to this literary pearl. However, the fact that Kotowa’s edition had a small print-run, and that it was aimed principally at a narrow group of Polish literary scholars, meant that Stanisławska would remain a largely unknown figure in Poland. Having been relegated at the outset by Brückner to the status of third rate, the case was rarely made forcibly enough that *Orphan Girl* was deserving of a celebrated place in the Polish canon, which would inevitably have won for the poem the kind of readership that comes with being an anthologized work.

1. Aleksander Brückner, “Wiersze zbieranej drużyny: Pierwsza autorka polska i jej autobiografia wierszem,” *Biblioteka Warszawska* 4 (1893), 424–29. Translations of Polish titles are given in the Bibliography.

2. Brückner *Dzieje literatury polskiej w zarysie*, vol. 1 (Warsaw: Gebethner i Wolff, 1908), 366.

3. The edition of Ida Kotowa, with her introduction and notes: *Transakcja albo opisanie całego życia jednej sieroty przez żalodne treny od tejże samej pisane roku 1685* (Kraków: Polska Akademia Umiejętności, 1935). Kotowa discusses this manuscript exchange from Leningrad to Warsaw in the introduction, 18, for which see also Dariusz Rott, *Kobieta z przemalowanego portretu* (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2004), 32–33.

4. Tadeusz Sinko, “Trzy małżeństwa jednej sieroty,” *Czas* 109 (1935): 5.

If prospects for the work's reception remained slight in the 1930s, World War II proved even more injurious to Stanisławska's legacy, as the precious manuscript was destroyed in the conflagration of the Warsaw Uprising. Happily, over the past two decades a growing number of academics have written of the power and value of *Orphan Girl* as a literary and historical work. That said, scholarship has its limitations when it comes to popularizing seventeenth-century poems, and Anna Stanisławska's unique contribution to the literary life of her homeland is still unknown to many.

The Historical Backdrop

As we shall see in this brief historical overview, Anna Stanisławska and her contemporaries lived in exceptionally challenging times.⁵ The long reign of Swedish-born Zygmunt III Waza from 1587 to 1632 saw the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth obtain dizzy heights in terms of its military and political reach. However, overconfident of his position, Zygmunt made injudicious claims on the throne of Sweden and attempted disastrous conquests of Moscow and Moldavia. Zygmunt's legacy would hinge on his foreign policy in respect of Sweden and Russia. He had been crowned king of Sweden in 1594, but the regency council distrusted his Catholic bias, insisting that he recognize Lutheranism as Sweden's state religion. It was also demanded of Zygmunt that his uncle hold the reins of power in his absence. In 1598, in an ill-considered move designed to wrest back control of Sweden, the Polish king staged a naval invasion, which soon descended into farce. Captured and dethroned, Zygmunt had to barter for his own life by denouncing his own Swedish supporters, who were subsequently executed.⁶ The two countries would also clash over Poland-Lithuania's claim to Livonia, which was held by Sweden. This led to a protracted war with Sweden, which, with minor intervals, lasted until 1629.

Zygmunt was mistrusted amongst the Polish gentry for both his marital alliance with the Hapsburg family and for his attempts at political reform designed to weaken the power of the nobility. Matters came to a head in the middle of his reign, when in 1607, during a parliamentary session, nobleman Mikołaj Zebrzydowski accused the king of attempting to destroy the Polish constitution. Though Catholic, Zebrzydowski was supported by Protestant nobles who had not been appointed to high positions. Soon, righteous anger led to outright revolt, which was put down at Guzów on July 7, 1607. But although Zygmunt effectively

5. The best accounts of this era in English are Daniel Stone's *The Polish-Lithuanian State, 1386-1795* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001), 129-244, and Norman Davies' *God's Playground: A History of Poland, vol. 1: The Origins to 1795* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 327-53.

6. See Stone, *The Polish-Lithuanian State*, 140.

won the day and accepted the apologies of the insurrectionists, for the remainder of his reign he had to contend with a more oppositional Diet.

Concurrent with the Zebrzydowski revolt was the Dmitry episode, where influential Jesuits, filled with the zeal of the Counter-Reformational spirit, egged on Lithuanian magnates to accept the story spun by a shadowy émigré named Dmitry, whereby he claimed to be son and heir to Ivan I, who had died in 1584. Dmitry's undertaking to convert to Catholicism convinced his newfound supporters that with his help they could secure a strong foothold to the east, and that mass conversion would follow on the heels of conquest. After the death of Tsar Boris Godunov in 1605, Dmitry led an invasion of Russia, supported by highly trained regiments, and as he progressed towards Moscow he was joined by Cossacks and the famine-stricken peasantry. Having taken Moscow, he was crowned Tsar, but the presence of Polish and Lithuanian advisors soon soured relations with his people and he was overthrown in a popular uprising. A second Dmitry would emerge a number of years later, and this time he involved Sweden in his attempts to secure the Russian crown.⁷ Zygmunt's own son, Władysław, was proposed as a compromise candidate, which would see the young man converting to Russian Orthodoxy and returning to Russia western lands which had been annexed in recent conquests. However, Zygmunt had no wish to countenance such an agreement, claiming both the crown for himself and voicing his intention to annex western Russia. In the face of such a declaration, together with competing Swedish claims, Russian nobles recaptured Moscow and killed the second Dmitry. With the Russians embroiled in a war with Sweden, Władysław, with the aid of Hetman (Commander) Jan Karol Chodkiewicz and an army of Cossacks, was able to retain his power-base in western Russia and uphold his claim to the Russian throne.⁸ Though Livonia was the principal flashpoint between Poland and Sweden, it was the decision of the Swedish king, Gustavus Adolphus, in 1626, to attack Royal Prussia that exposed Poland's tentative control of its borders to the west and northwest. By 1629, Poland had lost most of its coastline to the Swedes, who also went on to seize control of a demilitarized and weakened Gdańsk. The scene for a national disaster was set.

On the death of Zygmunt in 1632, the throne was awarded unopposed to his son, Władysław, but the new king failed to address the internal threat from the emerging power of the Cossacks, who had spent decades defending the Commonwealth's southern border from the slave raids of the Tartars. Having also provided a disciplined militia for Polish noblemen annexing vast tracts of land in

7. This episode was recounted by Hetman Stanisław Żółkiewski (1547–1620) in his memoir *Początek i progres wojny moskiewskiej* (Warsaw: Gebethner i Wolff, 1920). Żółkiewski led Polish troops into Moscow following his victory over combined Swedish and Russian forces in the Battle of Klushino.

8. See Leszek Podhorecki, *Jan Karol Chodkiewicz, 1560–1621* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Ministerstwa Obrony Narodowej, 1982), 238–43.

the Ukraine, the Cossacks began to demand more than simply mercenary status. This discontent was compounded by the grievances of the Orthodox population, who resented their poor treatment at the hands of the prejudiced and arrogant Polish magnates. The failure to tackle these festering issues came home to roost under the reign of his stepbrother, Jan II Kazimierz Waza (1648–1668), when a Cossack uprising broke out, led by Bohdan Chmielnicki. Aided by mercenary Turks and Tartars, who relished the opportunity to rape and plunder, the Cossacks ran amok and carried out the reduction of the peasant and Jewish populations in the Polish Ukraine. Although the Cossack rebellion was eventually put down, the Polish state was so weakened that it was unable to fend off Swedish armies that swept through the country as far as Kraków in the years 1655 to 1656, pillaging and wreaking destruction as they went. A reversal in Poland's fortunes occurred at the monastery of Jasna Góra in Częstochowa, where a small number of monks and local gentry withstood a month-long siege by the Swedes. Their success was accredited to the divine intervention of Mary, the Mother of God, and this perceived miracle gave rise to an enduring veneration of the Black Madonna image held in the monastery's main chapel. The small Swedish force would end up beating a hasty retreat northward, but came under constant attack from armed peasant militias. However, this war of attrition would continue for four more years and leave the country utterly devastated, with more than half the population dead. As a result of plague and wholesale slaughter, the cities were almost emptied, and bourgeois culture almost disappeared.⁹ What is more, the vast tracts of land left empty were appropriated by corrupt and increasingly dissolute magnates and nobles, many of whom had gone over to the Swedish army but had then deftly re-switched loyalties when the tide had turned. Looking to deflect culpability, Poland's nobles made scapegoats out of the members of the Arian church, who in 1657 were given the choice of either conversion to Catholicism or banishment. To add to their litany of outrages, the magnates found a way of paralyzing the political system by their appropriation of the *Liberum Veto*, which upheld the tradition of unanimity at central and local assemblies.¹⁰ Such was the chaotic nature of rule in the country at the time that bemused foreign powers observing from without soon labelled the governance of Poland as "The Anarchy," a term encapsulating a

9. As Czesław Miłosz notes, "The depressed condition of urban areas remained a constant factor in determining the direction of Polish cultural history for the next two centuries. The date 1655–1656 marked the end of bourgeois literature." *The History of Polish Literature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 114.

10. As Norman Davies writes, "The Sejm, the dietines, and the Royal elections were all governed by the principle of unanimity. It seems incredible to the modern observer that such an ideal should have been taken seriously. But it was, and it formed the basis of all their proceedings. No proposal could become law, and no decision was binding, unless it received the full assent of all those persons who were competent to consider it. A single voice of dissent was equivalent to total rejection." *God's Playground*, 1:259.

state of affairs to which many historians have attributed the ultimate downfall of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.¹¹

Anna Stanisławska's Early Life

Anna Stanisławska was born in 1651. Her father, Michał Stanisławski, was one of the heroes of his era, having distinguished himself as a soldier and in countless other roles in royal diplomacy and national politics.¹² He was not only Voivode (Governor) of Kiev, and a magnate with great wealth, but was also related to Poland's future king, Jan Sobieski (Sobieski's great aunt was Michał's grandmother). Stanisławska's mother was Krystyna Borkowa Szyszkowska, and her family had kindred links with both the powerful Potocki and Zebrzydowski families. By rights, Stanisławska should have had every expectation of a happy childhood, but death would take her mother when Stanisławska was only three years old, and not long after this, her father sent her to live with and be educated by the Dominican nuns in their cloister in Gródek near Kraków, where her great aunt on her mother's side, Gryzelda Dominika Zebrzydowska, was the prioress. Tragically, Gryzelda died following an outbreak of bubonic plague, and Stanisławska would never experience again anything approximating such motherly affection. In 1667, perhaps as a response to the recent death of Stanisławska's brother, Piotr, whom Stanisławska may possibly have never met, Michał took his daughter out of the convent and brought her home to the family estate of Maciejowice. Rapturous at the prospect, little did the young girl suspect that her being brought home was not inspired by sentiment, and that her father was not looking to make up for lost time.

A number of years previously, in 1663, Stanisławska's father had married again to Anna Potocka Kazanowska-Słuska, a confidant of Jan Sobieski and a strong-willed woman who was determined to marry off her stepdaughter as soon as possible. Undoubtedly preoccupied with the turmoil in the country, Michał fell in readily with these plans¹³ and found what should have been an ideal candidate for a son-in-law in the person of Jan Kazimierz Warszycki, son of Stanisław Warszycki from his first marriage to Helena Wiśniowiecka. Stanisław was Castellan of Kraków and a distinguished senator. As a magnate of great substance, he was

11. See Paweł Jasienica, *Polska anarchia* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1988).

12. See Ida Kotowa, "Anna Stanisławska: pierwsza autorka polska," *Pamiętnik Literacki* 1-4 (1934): 267-68.

13. Concerning the issue of the forced marriage of young girls in seventeenth-century Poland, see Aleksander Brückner, *Dzieje kultury polskiej: Polska u szczytu potęgi*, vol. 2, 2nd ed. (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1958), 450-57; Zbigniew Kuchowicz, *Obyczaje staropolskie XVII-XVIII wieku* (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Łódzkie, 1974); Janusz Tazbir, *Studia nad kulturą staropolską* (Kraków: TAIWPN Universitas, 2001), 187-200.

also a church benefactor. Like Stanisławska's father, Stanisław Warszycki had earned a formidable reputation for military success and martial courage during the Swedish invasions.¹⁴

The Aesop Episode

Both fathers entered into negotiations and agreed terms, which anticipated the strengthening of bonds between the two great houses.¹⁵ If Michał had heard any disturbing reports of the young man's mind and comportment, his failings must have been played down or explained away by Stanisław. Whatever of the regret that later followed, this marriage was principally a mercantile decision where factors of political influence and future income predominated, and this ill-considered bartering of his own daughter may have later gnawed at Michał's conscience, or at least that is what Stanisławska believed had been the case. Stanisławska, too, must have heard of Warszycki's aberrations and implored her father to release her from the arrangement. But bolstered by the determination of his new wife, Michał gave the heartfelt pleadings of his daughter no truck whatsoever.

Stanisławska's disquietude proved justified, for Jan Kazimierz was a monstrous-looking degenerate who feared only his father's chastisement and beatings, which were frequent and must have contributed inevitably to the young man's physical and psychological ailments.¹⁶ Only ever referring to her husband by his real name on one occasion—which comes at the end of the episode as she bids him farewell and magnanimously wishes him well for the future—Stanisławska would give Jan Kazimierz the name of Aesop due to his exceptional ugliness and decrepit demeanor. The Aesop of Antiquity was invariably described as one of the ugliest men of his time,¹⁷ and Stanisławska's very association with Aesop must have provided grist to her palpable disgust.

14. Kotowa, "Anna Stanisławska," 268–70.

15. Of marital negotiation in seventeenth-century Poland, Maria Bogucka writes, "Marriage was, as a rule, the outcome of negotiations conducted more by relatives or friends than by the interested parties themselves. [...] The date for the wedding was established after negotiations concerning dowry and jointure, and often among the more affluent nobility, burghers, and even rich peasants, following the signing of a detailed marriage contract." *The Lost World of the "Sarmatians": Custom as the Regulator of Polish Social Life in Early Modern Times* (Warsaw: Polish Academy of Sciences, Institute of History, 1996), 75–77.

16. As Zbigniew Kuchowicz writes, "młodzieniec, który przeszedł wychowanie domowe lub szkolne, doświadczył równocześnie na własnej skórze setek razów" [A young man who had been reared in the home or had attended school would have hundreds of marks on his skin to show for it]: *Obyczaje staropolskie*, 414. The harsh treatment of children in the noble households of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Poland is also treated in Brückner, *Dzieje kultury polskiej*, 447–50.

17. The anonymously written *Vita Aesopi*, dating to the 1st or 2nd century CE, told many ribald tales of Aesop's life as the slave of his master Xynthus, and the stories proved so popular that they were

The wedding day, which took place sometime in spring, is depicted in the poem as a ghastly spectacle, with Aesop, chaperoned by a one-eyed priest, arriving in a carriage and declaring that he does not know why he has been brought there. But under the watchful and stern gaze of his father, the groom does his best to hide the irredeemable deficiencies in his character. Stanisławska paints the picture of a bride recoiling at absolutely everything connected with the celebration, but typical of an indomitable spirit that comes to the fore as the episode progresses, she tries to put a brave face on things and accepts Aesop's invitation to dance. But the guests have only the shortest of time to compliment the newlyweds gracing the floor, as Aesop abandons Stanisławska in mid-step and she has to be escorted back to her seat. The situation achieves comic proportions when the young couple are brought to the bridal chamber, where they are expected to consummate their union. Whatever the predilections of the groom, he proves incapable of going through with this marital rite and shows himself to be more concerned with squashing flies against the windowpane. Fortunately for Stanisławska, her attendant maidens had the good sense to whisk her away before any further shame could be heaped upon what should have been a sacred beginning. Stanisławska's father, who as a leader of men and presumably a good judge of character, realized that he had been greatly deceived as to both the suitability of the candidate for his daughter's hand, and to the conditions in which she would live, with it emerging soon after the wedding feast that her newly acquired father-in-law intended to live with the couple; although it may just be that Stanisław understandably wished to be present in the house in order to protect Stanisławska from his son.

Whenever Aesop had the run of the home, he was violent and cruel towards Stanisławska, and he seems to have settled on a strategy of hounding his wife to death. Stanisławska, in turn, could only hope against hope that her father would rescue her. Tragically for Stanisławska, her father took ill with dysentery on a military expedition and died in Podkamień¹⁸ soon after, although this news was deliberately kept from her on the orders of Stanisławska's father-in-law, who feared that as an heiress to great wealth and lands, she might take action to free herself of her marital bond. From what Stanisławska relates, her father had already been considering options to extract his daughter from the world to which he had committed her, and before his death had appointed Jan Sobieski as Stanisławska's guardian. As Stanisławska was entangled in a dispute with her stepmother over inheritance rights, she was able to meet Sobieski under false pretences. During this meeting, Sobieski advised Stanisławska to mend bridges with her stepmother,

incorporated into other folkloric and poetic traditions. For a study on the Polish Aesopic tradition in the late Renaissance, see Janina Abramowska, *Polska bajka ezopowa* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, 1991).

18. See Kotowa, "Anna Stanisławska," 270.

which entailed making magnanimous overtures to the very woman responsible for having put her in the position that she now found herself.

Although Stanisławska rails against the machinations of Fortune throughout her work, serendipity played its part when in June 1669, a royal election was held in Warsaw following the abdication of Jan II Kazimierz Waza, which brought the Waza dynasty to an end. Stanisławska coaxed her father-in-law into allowing her to join them in Warsaw, perhaps once again claiming that the protracted issues pertaining to her inheritance needed further resolution. Having positioned themselves at the very heart of the campaign to elect Michał Korybut Wiśniowiecki,¹⁹ who was favored by many of the Polish nobility, the Warszyckis agreed to allow Stanisławska to reside in a nearby convent. Once inside the walls, Stanisławska claimed sanctuary, a move which was then supported by Sobieski, who as part of the faction of malcontents which had seen the defeat of their French candidate, Duke d'Enghien, for the kingship, threw all his support behind Stanisławska. It could not have been lost on Sobieski that his actions greatly discommoded and shamed a family that had singularly thwarted his ambitions.²⁰

Free from the clutches of father and son, who planned stratagems to kidnap her, or worse, Stanisławska was free to instigate annulment proceedings. Sobieski appointed lawyers to represent Stanisławska, who argued that she had been married against her will. Witnesses were produced, but the testimony of her stepmother proved crucial. Magnanimously injuring her own reputation, Stanisławska's stepmother testified to the roles played by herself and her husband in forcing Stanisławska up the aisle, a testimony that tipped the scales in Stanisławska's favor and secured the judgment, which was later upheld by Rome. The divorce—for Stanisławska refers to the judgment as such—created quite a stir in the royal court and elsewhere, and in other times could have led to soul-searching in many quarters on the legality of arranged marriages had more been made of the reasons given for the annulment. But in spite of the fact that Stanisławska was made the subject of unsparing verses, which poked fun at her rather unusual status as maiden and divorcee,²¹ the plight of Stanisławska was considered so extreme

19. At the election, Warszycki famously maintained that future parliaments should be held on horseback so as to safeguard the freedoms which their ancestors had won through bloody conflict. See Stone, *The Polish–Lithuanian State*, 233–34.

20. See Lajos Hopp, “Sobieski a orientacja profrancuska malkontentów węgierskich,” in *Studia z dziejów epoki Jana III Sobieskiego*, ed. Krystyn Matwijowski et al. (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 1984), 47–62. See also Robert I. Frost, *After the Deluge. Poland-Lithuania and the Second Northern War, 1655–1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 177–78. Little did Sobieski know at this time that the reign of Wiśniowiecki would be short: four years later, the incumbent died of acute food poisoning, which event paved the way for Sobieski's own election as king.

21. Morsztyn summed up the conundrum of Stanisławska's position following the divorce with the lines: “Pannam, bo męża nie znam, alem przecie żona, / Bo żyje ten, któremu była poślubiona” [A

that few paid attention to the legal technicalities upon which she had won her annulment. Freedom came at a price, however, as Stanisławska was ordered by the court to return a lengthy inventory of gifts which she had received, and her aggrieved ex in-laws made sure that every last trinket was returned.

Life after Aesop

Whilst Stanisławska was waiting out her time in the cloister, she received a proposal of marriage from Jan Oleśnicki, Sobieski's dashing chief cavalry officer and judge of Sandomierz; and a widower who was reputed to have poisoned his first wife. Even though she initially rejected his proposal of marriage, by the year's end, Oleśnicki had settled Stanisławska's debts and the two were married, but not before having had to secure a dispensation from Rome following the discovery that they were blood-related. There followed six years of connubial happiness, during which time they were of "two souls in one body / One heart" [*Dwie dusze w jednym ciele, / jedno serce*] (Threnody 39, stanza 355).²² During this period, Oleśnicki accompanied King Sobieski into numerous battles against the Turks. In 1675, whilst on a military expedition, he fell gravely ill when cholera swept through the camp. Sobieski had Oleśnicki brought home to his family estate of Szczekarzowice, where he died soon after.

There followed for Stanisławska a period of great grief, but she was roused from her desolation when it transpired that Oleśnicki's father wanted his son to be interred in the family chapel located in the Monastery of the Holy Cross on the mountain of Łysa Góra. Stanisławska resisted this move and determined to have Oleśnicki interred in a church in Tarłów, the adornment of which both she and her husband had funded. More pain would follow for Stanisławska when Oleśnicki's surviving relatives made recourse to the courts in order to reclaim the estate and lands of Szczekarzowice.

Not long after Oleśnicki's death, Stanisławska found herself being determinedly courted by Jan Zbąski, the chamberlain of the Lublin region, whose cousin was Bishop of Warmia. Stocky and uncomely, and about ten years or so older than the woman whom he had set his heart on marrying, Jan called upon the likes of Sobieski and Stanisławska's own stepmother to persuade Stanisławska of the benefits of such a match. Fortunately for Zbąski, Stanisławska shared the same tastes as other noblewomen of the age and had a weak spot for the accoutrements of courtship; and seemingly, when she saw her fastidious suitor astride a horse, she

Maid, for she knows no husband, and yet a wife, / For he lives, he to whom she was married]. Cited in Brückner, "Wiersze zbieranej drużyny," 426.

22. For a descriptive account of courtship and marriage in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Poland, see Alojzy Sajkowski, *Staropolska miłość: Z dawnych listów i pamiątek* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 1981).

was greatly impressed by the figure he cut.²³ Soon after, Stanisławska succumbed to his attentions and accepted his proposal of marriage.

These were bellicose times when the elite were being asked to make extraordinary sacrifices in defense of the homeland. And even to discount war, a mild illness could take a person from this world in an instant. In such a context, we may sympathize with a preparedness to marry again on the part of Stanisławska, who was still a young woman and capable of having children.

Their wedding took place in Warsaw in 1677 amid great pomp and festivity, although some voiced their disapproval of the fact that Stanisławska had not occasioned respect for her recently departed husband. The couple chose to live on Zbąski's estate of Kurów, between the cities of Puławy and Lublin, where they led quiet and serene lives. This period of felicity was only marred by Zbąski's decision, contrary to the wishes of his wife, to concede defeat to the Oleśnicki family in the legal dispute over the Szczekarzowice estate. But when she saw how upset he was over the entire affair, Stanisławska forgave him wholeheartedly.

When the Ottoman forces laid siege to Vienna in July 1683, Zbąski, who was still an active soldier in spite of his age, courageously followed King Sobieski into battle. Having lined up before the walls of Vienna, martial fervor got the better of him, and he charged out of the ranks only to be wounded in the leg by a musket bullet. Initially, the wound did not seem to be life-threatening, and the royal physician wrote to Stanisławska stating that her husband would return home soon. However, Zbąski's condition deteriorated rapidly and Stanisławska rushed to be by her dying husband's side. Tragically, Stanisławska had only made it as far as Kraków when news was brought to her that he had passed away. Stanisławska subsequently learned that it had been Zbąski's great hope to the very end that he would die in the arms of his beloved wife. Stanisławska would collapse from grief when shots were fired over his coffin.

Widowhood

The writing of *Orphan Girl* draws a line under Stanisławska's life up until that point. As the poet herself hinted at the beginning of the poem, life at the court of King Sobieski held no appeal and she preferred a solitary existence, alone with her memories and removed from all the pomp, fanfare, and intrigue of courtly life. That Stanisławska was indignant at the excesses of those who held wealth and power—with many of the transgressors hailing from the ranks of her own family and circle of friends and acquaintances—may be gleaned from the records of a contemporaneous court proceeding which tells how Stanisławska led a company of servants and local villagers against the home of overlords who had come into

23. Threnody 59, stanza 523: "Że na koniu dobrze siedział, / z tego mi się lepiej podobał" [That he sat well on a horse, / and that pleased me more].

the possession of a neighboring estate arising from an unpaid debt. When later called before a court in Lublin, Stanisławska had to answer the charge of having hurled invectives against the lady of the house.²⁴

Towards the end of her life, Stanisławska donated generously to both the Piarist monks of Dunajgród and missionary orders in both Lublin and Warsaw. Her family must have had foreknowledge of her intention to divest more of her wealth in favor of the religious orders, because they made their objections known in no uncertain terms. But Stanisławska remained fixed on her course of action. In her final days she was cared for in the home of a Jewish woman in the town of Kurów. In great pain, she had her last will and testament witnessed by a local bailiff, who delivered both the will and the deeds of her properties to Fr. Michał Bartłomiej Tarło, the cousin of her third husband. Stanisławska had left her entire estate of Maciejowice to the Piarist order, and one of the three surviving portraits made of her in the latter stages of her life makes mention of her patronage. Anna Stanisławska-Zbąska died on June 2, 1701, and it seems that the tumult of her life continued in the wake of her death. Her testament was contested by her direct heir, Jan Koniecpolski, which led to protracted litigation between the plaintiff and the missionary order.²⁵

The Writing of Orphan Girl

Having settled affairs pertaining to the protection of her estate, and with time and the heart to devote to such an undertaking, in 1685, Stanisławska began to commit to verse the vicissitudes of her life up to the death of her third husband. The prospective poet must have considered that her time on this earth, blighted as it had been with misfortune and mishap, contained many incidents and episodes worthy of an epic account. As Stanisławska writes in the end poem to readers, a flood of memories had returned. And so, there surely must also have been a therapeutic dimension to the exercise.²⁶

Stanisławska may even have been inspired in her work by Anna Potocka-Stanisławska, her stepmother, who had encouraged Katarzyna Siemiotkowska²⁷ several years earlier to pen a collection of poems entitled *Gospodarskie*

24. See Kotowa, "Anna Stanisławska," 274.

25. See Kotowa, "Anna Stanisławska, 276–77.

26. Many commentators regard the poem as being part of a cathartic process whereby Stanisławska came to terms with the grief caused by *Fortuna variabilis*. See Ursula Phillips, "Piszące białogłowy od średniowiecza do końca XVIII wieku," in *Pisarki polskie od średniowiecza do współczesności: przewodnik*, ed. Grażyna Borkowska, Małgorzata Czermińska, and Ursula Phillips (Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Słowo/Obraz Terytoria, 2000), 5–16.

27. See Tadeusz Mikulski, "Drobiazgi Staropolskie: Anna Zbąska ze Stanisławskich," *Ruch Literacki* 7–8 (1935): 202–3.

nabożeństwo [The Arcadian Mass], a series of reworked devotional morning and evening prayers, which were appropriately dedicated to Stanisławska-Potocka. In fact, Siemiotkowska could be said to have a claim on the anachronistic title that has been traditionally accredited to Anna Stanisławska as that of Poland's first woman author.²⁸

Featured in the title itself, the word “treny,” meaning “threnodies” or “laments,” identifies the work closely with Jan Kochanowski's collection of the same name. Just as Kochanowski, writing one hundred years earlier, had upbraided Fortune and pagan Classical personifications of Death following the loss of his infant child, so too does Stanisławska rage against the fates throughout the work for their having treated her so shamefully. The role of Fortune had held a fascination for writers and philosophers from the time of ancient Greece right up to the late Renaissance, with many perceiving Fortune as cruel and malicious, playing some high-handed game and shuffling doubtful benefits. Stanisławska's view of Fortune aligned itself closely with Horace's contention that the attainment of happiness was being constantly thwarted by Fortune's malice, and that there was very little that could be done to alter matters. However, Stanisławska's interpretation of Fortune was inextricably linked to her own experience, wherein she accepted that Fortune would always do its worst and that the only appropriate response was to determinedly “face Chance down,” all the while finding comfort and strength in prayer.²⁹ Aside from this repeated invocation to Fortune, it is thought that beyond the scattering of Biblical illusions, the work is taken principally from life. And indeed, it was the adversarial nature of Stanisławska's life, filled as it was with the drama of courtroom appearances and the realities and consequences of war, which must have honed her power of observation and endowed her with a barbed and cutting wit. Stanisławska's failure to pursue publication of the poem is puzzling, especially given that the work often addresses readers directly, which indicates an aspiration that the work be published and read. Indeed, in the opening poem, readers are asked to set aside any prejudice about her sex, whereas elsewhere

28. There were, of course, other women writers in pre-Baroque Poland, such as the Reform-minded Regina Filipowska and Zofia Oleśnicka, both of whom flourished in the mid-sixteenth century and who wrote Protestant religious hymns. We must also mention Anna Memorata, who penned the Latin *Carmen gratulatorium*. Born in Leszno in the early seventeenth century, Memorata was the daughter of a pastor to Czech Brethren. In spite of her Bohemian origins, she signed her name as *virgo polona*. See Kotowa, “Anna Stanisławska,” 286–88; Rott, *Kobieta z przemalowanego portretu*, 11–30; and Maya Peretz, “In Search of the First Polish Woman Author,” *The Polish Review* 38, no. 4 (1993): 481.

29. Stanisławska's determination to resist the slings and arrows of misfortune through positive action distinguishes her belief system from the Stoic outlook. See Halina Popławska, “‘Żaloszne treny’ Anny Stanisławskiej,” in *Pisarki polskie epok dawnych*, ed. Krystyna Stasiewicz (Olsztyn: Wyższa Szkoła Pedagogiczna, 1998), 89–111. For a discussion on the perception and depiction of Fortune in Renaissance and Baroque Poland, see Jacek Sokolski, *Bogini, pojęcie, demon: Fortuna w dziełach autorów staropolskich* (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 1996).

the work is strewn with homespun advice to young people: albeit Stanisławska's idea of a successful marriage, based on mutual fondness and sound finances, was perhaps, ironically, not far from the criteria averred to by her own father when he was negotiating the match with Aesop. Peculiar to the poetry of *Orphan Girl* are emotional and psychological states brought to life in snapshot moments of time that are brimming with humor and sardonic tones. The many political and historical upheavals of the day only receive a precursory mention, and if they do so at all, only feature when they impact upon Stanisławska's life directly.

More frequently still, Stanisławska directly appeals to readers for their sympathy as she relates a time or episode which brought her acute pain or despair. And so, it is reasonable to contend that Stanisławska may not have written *Orphan Girl* simply for cathartic reasons but that the work's artistic and biographical imperatives could only have been fulfilled by the anticipation of a readership.³⁰ One possible explanation for the work not seeing the light of day is that Stanisławska, on completing the work, changed her mind about publication for fear of offending the Warszycki and Oleśnicki families. One way or another, just as Stanisławska's hopes and dreams were so often thwarted in life, her presumably tentative hopes for literary posterity were also dealt a blow by unforeseeable circumstances.

That the work disappeared for more than two hundred years is all the more tragic as the rigors of the poetic strictures that Stanisławska had ascribed to the writing of the poem betray a highly tuned artistic ambition not common for this era.³¹ Stanisławska chose for the poem's versification short octosyllabic octaves with *aabb* grammatical rhymes, often referred to as Czesłochovian rhymes and regarded with derision in Poland because of their perceived simplicity and banality.³² And yet, it could be said that Stanisławska's decision to place her life's story within this unusual poetic framework reflected her own tenacious personality, characterized as it was by a determination to resist always the confinements of tradition and the expectations of others. It has been suggested that for "The Aesop Episode" in particular, Stanisławska may have drawn upon the farcical comedies which she

30. See Alfred Fei, "Z poezji staropolskiej: Jan Smolik – Anna Stanisławska," *Pamiętnik Literacki* 1–4 (1936): 815–40. See also Karolina Targosz, *Sawantki w Polsce XVII wieku: Aspiracje intelektualne kobiet ze środowisk dworskich* (Warsaw: Retro-Art, 1997).

31. See Jan Stanisław Bystróż, *Dzieje obyczajów w dawnej Polsce: wiek XVI–XVIII*, vol. 1, 2nd ed. (Warsaw: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1976), 391–92. See also Tadeusz Bieńkowski, "Panegiryk a życie literackie w Polsce XVI i XVII wieku," in *Z dziejów życia literackiego w Polsce XVI i XVII wieku*, ed. Hanna Dziechcińska (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1980), 183–96.

32. Alfred Fei could not ascribe to Stanisławska's epic the status of a literary work, criticizing in particular the fact that she had failed to draw inspiration from any of her literary contemporaries. See Fei, "Z poezji staropolskiej," 838. That said, Zdzisław Stieber noted numerous rhymes which were used by poets such as Waclaw Potocki and Piotr Kochanowski, who drew on poetic traditions of the Sandomierz region. See Stieber, "Przyczynki do historii polskich rymów, 1. Rymy sandomierskie XVI i XVII wieku," *Język Polski* 3 (1950): 110–13.

would have seen in courtly theater.³³ It is certainly an explanation that would give credence to the notion that the poet's entire ambition for the poem was that it would be a performable work that could excite both high laughter and salty tears in equal measure.³⁴

An Other Voice: A Note on the Translation

My translation is based on Kotowa's 1935 edition. Given that the power of the account is predicated on the poetic form in which it was conceived, I looked to emulate the metrical and rhyming scheme of the poem and also to accentuate its rhetorical and performative potential. The poem presented here is a verse translation and has strived to serve what I regard as the poem's narrational imperative. I took this judgment further and divided "The Aesop Episode" into smaller titled episodes, which is a step intended to extol the poem's epic and historical sweep and also to support the reading of what is a lengthy poem.

I would be greatly amiss if I did not make some mention here of the margin notes. Very often, I incorporated information from a given margin note into the accompanying stanza, and because of this, I was strongly tempted to do away with the margin notes altogether. But in the interests of preserving the entirety of the text, I decided not to do so. However, it is important to be cognizant of the fact that the notes are intended to be contemporaneous explanations of past events, and so, for example, Sobieski is given the title throughout as "His Majesty the King." This is because he was king at the time of Stanisławska's writing of the poem, but in the events that the poem describes, Sobieski's coronation was some way off. What is more, where Stanisław Warszycki is mostly referred to as "the old man" in the poem proper, in the margin notes, Stanisławska refers to him as "Master Krakowski," which alludes to his link with Kraków. Adding more to the confusion is the fact that Jan Kazimierz Warszycki, or Aesop, is given the name of "kasztelanic" in the margin notes, which is a diminutive form of "castellan," suggesting that he is the son of the Castellan. And so, in the translated margin notes Aesop appears almost exclusively as "the Castellan's son."

My translation ends at the point where Stanisławska claims her freedom from Aesop and is looking forward with some trepidation to the next chapter in her life. Two further episodes—or marriages, as the case may be—await translation.

33. See Targosz, *Sawantki w Polsce*, 302.

34. Hanna Dziechcińska has written extensively on women's writing, theater and performable art in Poland during this era: see her (in order of date of publication) *Literatura a zabawa: Z dziejów kultury literackiej w dawnej Polsce* (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1981); *Kultura literacka w Polsce XVI i XVII wieku* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Semper, 1994); and *Ciało, strój, gest w czasach saskich renesansu i baroku* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Semper, 1996).

This translation could not have been completed without drawing on the research which has been written on *Orphan Girl*, and it is certainly my hope that “The Aesop Episode” celebrates not only the legacy of the work itself but also the work of the many scholars who have thrown light on the ways and means by which the poet came to relate both her life’s story and the sufferings of her age.