The Historical Review/La Revue Historique

Vol 18, No 1 (2021)

Historical Review / La Revue Historique

The Historical Review
La Revue Historique

VOLUME XVIII (2021)

Section de Recherches Néohelléniques
Institut de Recherches Historiques / FNRS

Section of Neohellenic Research
Institute of Historical Research / NHRF

Literary Outlooks on Women Implicated in the Greek Revolution: The Case of Józef Dunin-Borkowski's Philhellenic Poems

Ewa Róża Janion

LITERARY OUTLOOKS ON WOMEN IMPLICATED IN THE GREEK REVOLUTION: THE CASE OF JÓZEF DUNIN-BORKOWSKI'S PHILHELLENIC POEMS

Ewa Róża Janion

Abstract: This article analyses the philhellenic poems of Polish romantic poet Józef Dunin-Borkowski with the focus on gender representation. It discusses the four roles envisaged by Dunin-Borkowski for women: as war casualties, soldiers' lovers, sexual slaves of the enemy and heroines taking part in armed combat. It argues that Dunin-Borkowski casts a vision of femininity that is different from the parlour or domestic model, subordinated to the cause of the homeland's freedom. The Greek woman in his oeuvre is often an autonomous individual, actively involved in public affairs, while Greece is presented as an Enlightenment utopia, a project of universal emancipation and also of women's freedom. Therefore, Dunin-Borkowski's poems can be read as an attempt to formulate a modern image of emancipation in the contexts of debates on democracy, slavery and women's liberation.

The juvenile poems of Józef Dunin-Borkowski count as an important example of Polish literary philhellenism. Even though they speak about an armed conflict, a theme usually associated with masculinity, there is a remarkable women's presence in them. This article focuses on Dunin-Borkowski's constructions of gender, especially in relation to categories such as sacrifice, pleasure (jouissance) and freedom. After providing some information about the poet, the article offers some general remarks about Dunin-Borkowski's philhellenic poetry before going on to analyse the terms on which Dunin-Borkowski envisages women taking part in the independence movement. The argument shows that freedom – the main concept at stake in this poetry – is understood according to the Enlightenment tradition as free artistic creation, production of knowledge and participation in culture. Moreover, in several poems women are cast as rightful subjects who fight for liberty and are entitled to enjoy their freedom. Yet, when the poet speaks about women's liberty, the latter often gains a bodily,

* The major parts of the article and all poetic excerpts were translated from Polish into English by Joanna Dutkiewicz.

The Historical Review / La Revue Historique
Section of Neohellenic Research / Institute of Historical Research
Volume XVIII (2021)

intimate dimension; it means avoidance of being objects of captivity and sexual abuse. As a result, the image of sexual enslavement plays an important role in the rhetoric of these poems; it reflects voyeuristic desires and legitimates fantasies on vengeance.

Józef Dunin-Borkowski (1809–1843) was a Polish scholar and poet affiliated with Lvov, a less well-known centre of Polish Romantic culture, remaining in the shadow of Vilnius and Warsaw. From 1827 to 1829, during a stay in Czerniowce/Chernivtsi in Bukovina, Dunin-Borkowski met some members of local Greek diaspora and – as his biographers state – "took the Greek cause to heart".[1] The majority of the 20 poems analysed below were most likely written in this period, making them the work of a poet not yet 20 years old. Dunin-Borkowski later also became a Hellenic philologist, an expert on Greek literature and culture, which he studied with Konstantinos Koumas in Vienna. According to an account of the poet's friend August Bielowski, Dunin-Borkowski's poems were supposedly known in Greece, though this has not been confirmed. A member of the Ziewonia poetry group, which gathered several Polish patriots and democrats from Galicia, Dunin-Borkowski was interested in Slavic folklore and local history, which inspired his national ideas.[2] Dunin-Borkowski's Romantic interest in folk traditions, and to some extent maybe also his democratic views, find a reflection in his philhellenic poetry.

In this article, a poem is classified as philhellenic when it clearly references modern Greek culture and the Greek Revolution. It is important to mention that Dunin-Borkowski's philhellenic output is subordinated to the persuasive function, its perception of morality is black and white, and roles are clearly defined. This may be exemplified by the poem "Sekos", which refers to a heroic episode from the revolution. When a Greek fighter sets fire to an ammunition depot, it is obvious that all his compatriots go to heaven while the Turkish corpses are torn apart by vultures. Thus, in these poems there is no room for dilemmas and aporias, and the entire system of values is subordinated to the

[1] August Bielowski, "Żywot Józefa hr. Dunina-Borkowskiego," in Józef Dunin-Borkowski, *Pisma*, vol. 1 (Lwów: Nakładem Kajetana Jabłońskiego, 1856), xii. For further information on Dunin-Borkowski's biography, see Oktawiusz Jurewicz, "Z recepcji kultury nowogreckiej w Polsce: Józef Dunin-Borkowski," *Przegląd Humanistyczny*, no. 1 (1965): 117–43; Stefan Treugutt, "Józef Dunin-Borkowski," in *Literatura krajowa w okresie romantyzmu 1831–1863*, ed. Maria Janion, Bogdan Zakrzewski and Maria Dernałowicz (Krakow: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1975), 1:543–68.

[2] The poetics and political ideas of the Ziewonia group are discussed in Marta Pruszczyńska, *Ziewonia: Romantyczna grupa literacka* (Zielona Góra: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Zielonogórskiego, 2002).

idea of freedom for the homeland. Since the ethical dilemmas connected with conspiracy and armed conflicts are a recurring motif in the Polish patriotic poetry of this time, Anna Opacka argues convincingly that their absence in Dunin-Borkowski's philhellenic poems may prove that they result from a genuine fascination with the Greek cause, and thus do not constitute an indirect strategy to speak about the situation in Poland.[3] Yet, this article stresses that Dunin-Borkowski's oeuvre is in any case embedded in Polish complexes linked to the lack of statehood and that this connection is visible in his attitude to the relations between masculinity and femininity.

It was noted that in the nineteenth-century Polish gender paradigm, masculinity is fulfilled in the public sphere, in access to power and in the ideal of personal and political freedom.[4] To these, one may add the right to education, free creation and participation in culture, all of which are important to Dunin-Borkowski. However, Polish men were deprived of these fundamental indicators of masculinity when Polish lands were invaded, partitioned and occupied by neighbouring states. For Dunin-Borkowski, the Greek uprising is the space where this complex plays out and is resolved through triumph in battle. Women play an important role in this process, not only with their sacrifice as war victims, innocently killed or enslaved by the enemy, but also as lovers of soldiers, who possess the means to regulate men's behaviour. They are also involved actively in the battle, this time proposing an alternative model of femininity that transgresses the typical gender roles.

When women are portrayed as casualties, their death demands vengeance and motivates men to fight. This is the image presented in the poem "Ptaszek" (The little bird), in which a bird's "virgin voice" tells Greek men about the death of women in flames, in order to persuade them to attack the enemy. (Dunin-Borkowski's frequent talking-bird motif originates in a Greek folk song and testifies to his interest in folklore and oral traditions.).

Like terrible flashes of lightning
I saw you, maidens,
In flames beneath a cloud.
I watched teary-eyed
…

[3] Anna Opacka, *Trwanie i zmienność. Romantyczne ślady oralności* (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 1998), 40.

[4] Filip Mazurkiewicz, *Siła i słabość: Studium upadku męskiej hegemonii w Polsce* (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego; Warsaw: IBL, 2019).

Listen, palikars!
The dead want sacrifice,
The Turkish throngs
Are sitting down to feast,
Assail them all together
And with fire and iron,
Then use the blood drawn by the sword
To write Souli's story
For the enemy and for the world.[5]

Since femininity was stereotypically associated with innocence, virtue and a peaceable disposition, the victimisation of women was an effective rhetorical strategy, legitimising the necessity of war and mobilising men to fight. The image of women as innocent victims thus surfaces regularly in the philhellenic works of various authors, both in literature and art: poetry and iconography related to the history of Souli exemplify this phenomenon. It is significant that in Dunin-Borkowski's poem, the sacrifice of women is sense-building, that is, it serves as a reason to recount history and lend it meaning. In this sense, it plays an important role on the path to victory.

Yet, in Dunin-Borkowski's philhellenic poetry women are most often depicted as fighters' lovers, while *rozkosz* – a noun that may be rendered in English as "(sexual) pleasure", "delight" or "bliss" – recurs regularly in many poems. In Polish dictionaries of the early nineteenth century, *rozkosz* is defined, first, as "any pleasure at the highest level" and, second, as "carnality, voluptuousness".[6] This focus on (sexual) pleasure encourages the scholar to describe the dynamic of erotic relations between the two genders as presented by Dunin-Borkowski with psychoanalytic terminology. Thus, the understanding of pleasure/bliss employed in this article is close to the Lacanian jouissance, that is, not just sexual arousal and orgasm, but also satisfaction from possessing and using things whose character is not necessarily directly linked to sex.

A scenario of symbolic castration and the related economy of pleasure unfolds in the poem "Pożegnanie palikara" (Farewell to a palikar), which fulfils the topos of a soldier's parting with his lover. The woman in the poem cannot be an object of desire because the man enslaved by the invaders has, at the same time, been deprived of his masculinity and condemned to impotence, to sexual

[5] Dunin-Borkowski, *Pisma*, 1:108.

[6] Interestingly, many examples given by the dictionary stress the moral ambiguity and danger pleasure may pose. See Samuel Bogumił Linde, *Słownik języka polskiego* (Warsaw: Drukarnia XX Piiarów, 1812), 5:85–86.

frustration. In the first verses, the subject reveals that political bondage makes him transfer his desire to the accumulated phallic attributes of masculinity: sabre, shotgun and sword, which are in fact personified and want to fight, just like their "master". ("My sword desires battle / As much as I desire victory.")[7] Not until he regains his freedom (= phallus, also in the Lacanian sense, since freedom is the condition sine qua non of masculinity) will he be able to desire a woman.

> Fare you well black eyes,
> Your brightness is not for me today,
> Where blood flows in a stream
> The sabre's glint will be my delight.[8]

Importantly, the lover herself also regulates access to pleasure: her love is a reward for a victorious battle and is only possible once she has inspected the scars that are signs of valour, that is, evidence of escape from the state of castration, of fulfilling the condition of masculinity. In the lover's behaviour anticipated by the poem's subject, the phrase "cannot love a Greek woman" signifies not only the subject's impotence, but also the fact that a Greek woman would not accept such love, that she is the one who sets the standards of masculinity for her lover.

> Then you will weave wedding roses,
> Seeing glorious scars in the chest –
> He who does not love his country
> Cannot love a Greek woman.[9]

Generating masculinity by branding the body with scars and wounds is the central theme of the masochistic libidinal economy of these poems. "Let us kiss his sweet, dear scars for the last time," say the fellow soldiers in "Pieśń pogrzebna palikarowi" (Funeral song for a palikar). For Dunin-Borkowski, there is no masculinity without scars; masculinity is not given, it has to be won, and the only path to this goal is the marking of the body. A scar becomes a sign of action, of completing a masculine rite of passage, of acquiring potency, a phallus. Also the Greek woman – the subject of the eponymous "Greczynka" (The Greek woman) – associates her pleasure with looking at male scars, and this gives her erotic fulfilment; it is the highest stage in the gradation of pleasure.

---

[7] Dunin-Borkowski, *Pisma*, 1:127

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid., 128.

When I see him, my heart beats harder
And my aroused blood doubles its eagerness;
Ah! how wondrous that he only lives
For the homeland and for glory.
…
When he stands next to me, I stand blushing
Feeling previously unknown bliss,
When he clasps me to his bosom
I float to the heavens.

When he tells me how he loves his country,
How he values his brothers' happiness over his life,
When he shows me his glorious scar
I am enraptured.[10]

The Greek woman fully identifies with the cause, the struggle for national independence; even her pleasure is patriotic, completely subordinated to the phallic economy, colonised by the idea of the homeland and described using male-centric language. The subject's pleasure is also conditional on the man's military triumph; the poem does not envision the attainment of pleasure with someone who has lost the fight, as the only alternative to victory is death. "For we have vowed to die in glory or win," says "Pieśń pogrzebna palikarowi".[11] Pleasure is thus a union of the female subject and the homeland – this is probably how we are meant to understand the rules of unequal exchange in the poem's final lines: "I am prepared to do anything for thee, / For thou will do a great deal for us."[12] The "us" here is the homeland and women considered together, their "liberation" being a condition of pleasure.

"Pieśń pogrzebna palikarowi" also turns to fellow fighters, incorporating the theme of unity with other men into the erotic script ("Soon, soon my friends / We will be amid the battle's thunder / I shall strew the road / to my lover's house with Turks").[13] Indeed, the subject desires community with other men, which precedes and is a condition of a relationship with a woman. Male homosocial desires are fulfilled most completely through unity in battle. This is the image presented in a verse of the poem "Do Greków" (To the Greeks), which is a call to armed action. The metaphors of this verse (knot, heart, bonding, love) invoke those related to marriage. At the same time, the shield

[10] Ibid., 114–15.
[11] Ibid., 130.
[12] Ibid., 115.
[13] Ibid., 128.

and armour are obvious references to the (medieval) world of knighthood and the Romantic ideas associated with it: nobleness and fidelity. The brotherhood of the fighters not only ensures victory in battle here, but also cements the nation's unity.

> May the agreeable knot of unity
> Bond everyone's hearts together,
> With such a shield, with such armour
> No powers can defeat you.
> Brotherly love works miracles,
> It unites ghosts with the living,
> Binds howling peoples together
> And turns one man into a hundred.[14]

The community of fighters finds its extension in unity in death, which constitutes an act of joining the fallen brothers, the model figure among them being Leonidas ("Onwards, to Leonidas!" cries a Greek warrior in the poem "Sekos" before suicidally blowing up the monastery). Another means of fulfilling male unity is coexistence in memory, its main depositaries also being fighting men, as portrayed in "Pieśń pogrzebna palikarowi" ("Thy memory will not be lost among us for ever and ever", but also: "We take you, dead corpses, we take you as witnesses" – charting the continuum of masculinity from the ancient chiefs, through fallen friends, to a future of remembrance and deeds).[15] Death in battle is bliss ("The deathbed is paradise / Death is bliss – and scars are sweet" ("Do Greków");[16] actually, the very status of death is questioned, as brotherhood in arms ensures continuance in the memory of one's fellow fighters.

Thus, Dunin-Borkowski's philhellenic poetry abolishes the dilemma of choosing between what is private and what is public; it identifies the woman with the homeland, and either subordinates sexual pleasure to the idea of freedom or identifies it with the fulfilment of male homosocial desire, fighting and death ("Death for freedom is bliss," says the subject to his lover in "Piosnka" (The song).[17] Although suspended until the time of military triumph, pleasure is a very important element at stake in this poetry. Its literal, vivid, sometimes even physiological portrayal in "Greczynka" is especially worth noting. Contrary to conservative discourses' typical rejection of this kind of motivation in favour of

[14] Ibid., 111.
[15] Ibid., 130.
[16] Ibid., 112.
[17] Ibid., 107.

promoting the notion of duty or a rhetoric of martyrdom and sacrifice, in this case pleasure remains a major source of motivation.

As mentioned earlier, pleasure is conditional on freedom. Most often, Dunin-Borkowski understands the latter according to the optimism of Enlightenment ideas, as being inextricably linked with reason. In the poet's approach, "bondage emerges from the bosom of ignorance" ("Hymn do wskrzesiciela Grecji" [Hymn to the resurrector of Greece])[18] and freedom is the road to creating philosophy and poetry, which are the ultimate elements at stake in these poems. They express faith in the era of light, faith that enlightened reason will bring progress and the liberation of humanity. The poem "Na Korayisa" (On Korais) includes the figure of the Enlightenment scholar, the intellectual responsible for educating the people; "Do Greków" has the subject drawing personal pleasure from "pacifist" reading, which is contrasted with weaponry. Free Greeks turn to Homer, that is, an oeuvre interpreted as the universal heritage of the whole world and not easily reducible to national particularisms.

> When you end your glorious battles,
> Edification will shine agreeably
> And, having been silent so many years,
> Hippocrene's springs will gush.
> And, crowned with nine stars,
> Parnassus will sparkle constantly;
> Xenophons and Zenos
> Will open Minerva's school.
> …
> Let our ship sail forth then
> We shall go without armour, without steel
> And in the land of free Greeks
> We shall read Homer.[19]

In other poems, freedom remains an abstract ideal, a sublime value *in se*, a primary object of desire, which does not require definition. However, the notion of freedom may gain another dimension when it refers to women; in this case it also means freedom from captivity and sexual slavery. The image of enslaved women constitutes an important theme of philhellenic and Oriental literature and art, the most important examples being perhaps the paintings of Eugène Delacroix, famous for their rhetorical importance, on the one hand, and

[18] Ibid., 103.
[19] Ibid., 113.

voyeuristic potential, on the other. In Dunin-Borkowski's poetry, the mentions of miseries of an enslaved woman precede and justify detailed descriptions of vengeance performed by a Greek on a Turkish abductor.

This economy of pleasure is visible in "Pogrzeb beja" (The bey's funeral) – a piece written several years after the other philhellenic poems.[20] This ballad presents a Greek brigand observing from concealment as jackals tear apart the dead body of a bey (Turkish chieftain) defeated by the Greeks. Carrion-feeders carry out the klepht's revenge for the abduction of women, whose fate is recounted from a strongly masculine viewpoint: the woman is not so much an autonomous person as an "embellishment of holidays and feasts" and, differently than in Dunin-Borkowski's other poems, she does not exist outside her association with a man. By abducting women, the bey deprived the Greeks of their jouissance (the possibility of gaining pleasure from ownership), and this is essentially what the klepht wants to avenge.

> Feeding on coerced embraces,
> You seized our sisters, and daughters and wives,
> To be slaughtered like animals.
> Your every kiss poured venom into their souls.
> Brother jackals, on to your meal!
> We celebrate a Turkish feast.[21]

However, the bey's body has many feminine features: it is described as soft and plump. The avenging jackals, penetrating it with their teeth, "have their way" with the corpse, they violate it. Devouring, consuming, digesting is a sign of the enemy's annihilation and a figure of the ultimate triumph. The poem ends with an extensive, multiverse image of a cannibalistic fantasy, the projection of a sadistic desire (blending libido with aggression) to incorporate, to take possession of the enemy.

> All in a line, plunge into his tasty body,
> All your teeth, and your whole jaws,
> Gnaw the bones, chew the meat;
> He has a sweet heart and a lecherous bosom,
> A string of pearls behind his lips' snowy rose,

[20] Unlike other philhellenic poems that remained in the manuscript, "Pogrzeb beja" was published in the first number of the annual *Ziewonia* in Lvov in 1834. Its significant difference from other philhellenic poems may be explained by the fact that it was written after the collapse of the November Uprising (1831), when the last remains of political freedom of Polish gentry were lost and which therefore represented a turning point in Polish political and cultural life.

[21] Dunin-Borkowski, *Pisma*, 1:156.

And stars behind black lashes.
The jackals growl, ripping the heart to pieces,
and break the ribs, sucking the brain from the skull
They divide the face into minute scraps,
And split the pieces of head so greedily,
That they have awakened the rooks and the owls
With eyes like diamonds.[22]

The frenzy of this spectacle in a night-time forest setting shows the wild – literally – pleasure of revenge, of regaining masculinity and sexual fulfilment. Although this poem essentially repeats the same script of the phallic economy – castration–fight–pleasure – it is the only work featuring bliss that is colonised, vampiric, situated outside the community, morality and homeland. Similar imagery is found in other poems as well. "Pieśń pogrzebna palikarowi", imbued with exalted patriotism, ends with the slightly surprising image of the victors' banquet and drinking from the skulls of enemies; the talking forms in "Kacandonis" (Katsantonis) are the ravens flocking to feast on the bodies of Turks killed in battle. This cannibalistic fantasy contrasts with the civilised ideals of the Enlightenment and creates a Romantic crack in the rational ideology of Dunin-Borkowski's philhellenic work.

The poet does not envisage an analogical type of jouissance for women. Female pleasure in this poetry cannot be placed outside the phallic order, it is always subordinated to the cause. Yet, Dunin-Borkowski stresses women's autonomy, their influence on the course of history and the importance of their freedom. Two women who took part in the uprising actively and not symbolically are featured. The first one is Princess Elisabeth Ypsilanti, who apparently offered her valuables to support the Greek army ("Na księżniczkę Ipsilandis" [On Princess Ypsilanti]). The other is Laskarina Bouboulina, the eponymous heroine of the poem "Bouboulina". Both testify to the Polish poet's interest in the alternative gentry femininity that oversteps privacy, and both are connected with the Enlightenment's liberal project embedded in these poems. Interestingly, Dunin-Borkowski links his vision of the Greek Revolution with female bravery also in the poem "Pielgrzym" (Pilgrim), where the subject declares to be dreaming about free Greece while lying on the tomb of Wanda – a Polish legendary heroine.[23]

[22] Ibid., 156–57.

[23] There are other juvenile poems of Dunin-Borkowski on female bravery, such as "Na mogiłę Wandy" (On Wanda's Tomb) and "Trembowla" (Terebovlia).

The poem dedicated to Elisabeth Ypsilanti implies the conscious participation of women in the national idea: as autonomous individuals with free will, who dispose of their wealth rationally and at their own discretion. The princess's gesture builds a different kind of femininity from the sentimental parlour model: devoid of trinkets, ascetic, dedicated to the cause. The princess gives up the attributes of her status, beauty and aristocratic femininity out of voluntary solidarity with the oppressed. The poem also highlights the woman's agency – the fact that she can influence history by her actions, as the princess's deed was to find many followers.

> When bondage darkens freedom's golden day,
> What are pearls and bright gems then?
> An intrusive light that shamefully illuminates
> The trivial wealth of some, and the fetters of others.
> Thus said the maiden with a Greek heart.[24]

The epigram devoted to Ypsilanti is worth interpreting against the background of Enlightenment universalism. Dunin-Borkowski does not problematise the issue of women's freedom; perhaps, like some of the more progressive liberals of the Enlightenment, he assumes that liberating a nation from foreign bondage and the triumph of reason stemming directly from this fact will also cause women – automatically, so to speak – to gain freedom. He designs female subjects who are fully "mature" (in the sense that Enlightenment rhetoric placed emphasis on growing out of and leaving behind the state of childhood) for emancipation. According to *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, the main criterion in the development of an acting subject is resistance, self-control and, above all, sacrifice.[25] Odysseus is a prefiguration of the ego when he renounces pleasure, that is, lying in Circe's bed, eating the lotus flower and the cattle of Helios. In this context, the sale of jewellery would mean renouncing a vision of carefree but objectified femininity in favour of the constitution of an autonomous self – "self-authorisation" to emancipation, to becoming a rightful, rational acting subject.

Whereas Ypsilanti suggests a correction to the model of femininity, Bouboulina, by getting involved directly in military operations and displaying qualities such as ambition, strength, ruthlessness and courage, clearly transgresses nineteenth-century gender norms. It is worth pointing out that female fighters are mentioned in other elements of Dunin-Borkowski's oeuvre: he translated a

[24] Dunin-Borkowski, *Pisma*, 1:125.

[25] I refer to the chapter "Odysseus or Myth and Enlightenment," in Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 36–62.

song about the valiant Moscho Tzavela of Souli into Polish, and mentions the valour of women twice in other works.

In formal terms, the poem devoted to Bouboulina seems one of the most interesting in Dunin-Borkowski's collection, and also appears to be more carefully worked out than some of his other pieces. It comprises six hendecasyllabic octaves with a regular and original rhyme structure (abbacdcd). The poem features a dialogue (the voices are those of Bouboulina, Turks and nature), while the "narrator" addressing the lyrical heroes and the poem's readers offers a running commentary (in the present tense) on the battle. This lends the poem dramatic, pompous character.

The fight against the Turks has a cosmic dimension here. Bouboulina mobilises not only other fighters but also the forces of nature, of which she becomes the personification to some extent ("Like a sea storm, terrible and silent / Opposite the enemy Bouboulina stands", "Like a meteor she passes in the distance").[26] It is not irrelevant that her name thunders to the Polish ear, thus corresponding to the image of a sea storm, and this is why it is repeated many times in the poem. Together with rolls of thunder and the roar of waves, it creates the poem's sound.

The hour has struck for a new expedition,
A knightly ship floats on the water,
A woman stands on the ship's prow,
But tremble, enemies, it is Bouboulina!
The sea thundered, the waves roared,
The rumble carries across the foamy plain
And hill says to hill, rock says to rock:
It's Bouboulina – Bouboulina sailing forth.[27]

The hyperbolisation, the bird's-eye depiction of the battle, and the descriptions of meteorological phenomena serve to portray Bouboulina as an allegory or a goddess (of vengeance, destruction, death: "she rushes like a vulture", "strikes, and drowns, and burns down", "takes away life"). Furthermore, the Greek virgin hero does not so much lead the troops, who are a co-actor in the military operations, as she herself is the exclusive creator of victory, while her armour is a reference to the world of the knighthood myth, and maybe also to the legend of Joan of Arc. Such a presentation embedded in the tradition of female allegories distances the depiction from historical reality.

[26] Dunin-Borkowski, *Pisma*, 1:117.

[27] Ibid., 116.

Her war attire gleams like a star,
She holds a lightning-shaped sword in her hand,
And in the dark night of her brow and eyes
A fiery thunderbolt hurls vengeful arrows.[28]

The heroine's sex is underlined many times – not only her bodily form, but also her gender role, for example in threats like "I'll make your bed at the bottom of the sea" or "here, feed on the salty water",[29] which the woman warrior addresses to the enemy, invoking the relationship between femininity and household chores and food preparation. An important element of tension in the poem is provided by the contrast between what is expected of a woman and Bouboulina's actual stance ("Does Bouboulina tremble? She does not tremble but rushes / like a vulture").[30] The drama is also built through contrasting the free individual (Bouboulina) and the enslaved crowd of Turks, "servants of a tyrant". The heroine's freedom is underlined several times, and seems to function as a kind of paradox – the poem plays with the reader's expectations, according to which the woman will neither be fully free nor capable of defeating the invading army.

It is worth looking at the way gender and freedom are understood here. The heroine is free because, contrary to the Turks, she is not a despot's subject. The poem also seems to suggest that her actions – fighting for her country's freedom – in themselves give her the status of a free individual. Furthermore, contrary to Turkish women, Bouboulina is not a concubine in a harem ("'What, a woman, a dependent of the harem, / Would dare?'" the Turks say).[31] The poem thus supports the view about Eastern women being subordinated to men, and Eastern men always ready to enslave women: "Go on, man, do it our way!"[32] the Turks cry, and since we are talking about a harem, a space that is much eroticised in the Polish imagination, this has to be an allusion to the heroine's subjugation through sex/rape. Bouboulina is thus also free in the sense that she is not subordinate to male strangers.[33]

---

[28] Ibid., 117.

[29] Ibid., 117–18.

[30] Ibid., 116.

[31] Ibid., 117.

[32] Ibid.

[33] A similar image of a Turk enslaving a foreign, this time Slavic, woman is presented in the poem "Turczyk" (Turk), about a young girl abducted during a Turkish raid on the Ukrainian town of Sniatyn. It confirms Dunin-Borkowski's interest in the question of European women's sexual slavery in the Ottoman Empire. Moreover, the poem connects Dunin-Borkowski's philhellenic works to the Polish experience of *jasyr* – captivity by Turks and Tatars.

The philhellenic poems do not enable us to say whether Dunin-Borkowski foresaw women's participation in the enlightened reason that would come after liberation. However, since the opponents of women's emancipation in that period explained female subordination with women's mental and physical disability (women as being incapable of rationality and physically too weak), the construction of a narrative about a woman warrior could be an argument in support of his positing some form of citizenship, that is, incorporating women into the public order and making them the subjects of universal laws. Naturally, in the Enlightenment paradigm women are tasked with becoming equal to men, not demanding a model of alternative humanity – the phallic, authoritarian Bouboulina might be an expression of this.

It is worth mentioning the practical aspect of the legend of Bouboulina. Historians note that, together with Joan of Arc, she was a role model for Polish insurgent Emilia Plater, who in turn inspired successive generations of female soldiers. In 1911 the left-leaning historian Bolesław Limanowski underlined the doubly emancipatory aspect of both women's activity: "When they fought, men – she [Plater] said – fulfilled their duty; Bouboulina did more than that, because she fought not only with the enemy but also with opinion."[34] In recent years, feminists and lesbians have been standing up for Emilia Plater and her story, underlining her gender nonconformity, which was previously effectively erased by historians.[35]

The fighting and free Greece from Dunin-Borkowski's oeuvre, however, bears no relation to reality; it remains an ideal and distant world. I would like to treat this narrative also as a utopia, understood as a tool enabling us to think about radical social change. Thus, imagining the struggle for Greece's independence enabled Dunin-Borkowski to imagine an enlightened world of freedom in which women participate in a project of universal emancipation: making a sense-building sacrifice, regulating men's actions as distributors of their pleasure, and acting autonomously in the public sphere. As such, they are also free in the sense that no one rules over them, they are not subject to anyone's power. However, the poet fails to notice the patriarchal structures that are part of the state or family order. Nor does he criticise the phallogocentric order of culture, which represses femininity, gives privilege to things masculine and considers them to be universal.

University of Warsaw

[34] Bolesław Limanowski, *Szermierze wolności* (Krakow: Spółka nakładowa Książka, 1911), 8.

[35] Alicja Kusiak, "Narodowa pamięć historyczna a historia kobiet," in *Polka: Medium, cień, wyobrażenie* (Warsaw: Centrum Sztuki Współczesnej Zamek Ujazdowski w Warszawie, 2005), 516.