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FASHION WRITING IN WOMEN'S MAGAZINES OF INTERWAR POLAND: INFLUENCES OF THE AMERICAN PRESS

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the influence of American fashion journalism on the Polish market of fashion magazines in the interwar period. The main objective is to identify the strategies of fashion description in interwar Polish fashion magazines or fashion columns in women's magazines and to map their variance according to two categories: elitist and democratising. Such tools of textual as well as visual description such as 'magical writing,' advice manuals, ironic writing and fashion non-fiction will be discussed. The article is the first attempt in the literature on interwar journalism in Poland to argue that fashion discourse in the domestic press mimicked the way fashion was covered in American fashion magazines.

Keywords: interwar fashion, *Pani, Teatr i Życie Wytworne*, *Moja Przyjaciółka*, fashion writing, Polish fashion, Polish fashion journalism

Introduction, or the Americanisation of the fashion press

The interwar period in the history of the fashion press should be linked to two important phenomena: the professionalisation of these media and their gradual internationalisation. Many scholars (see Pouillard 2013; Nelson Best 2017; Miralles 2021) have already addressed the professionalisation of fashion journals at that time, so I will concentrate on the latter trend, especially in the context of Polish fashion magazines, which developed under strong influence of American media, and in fact imitated titles such as *Vogue* or *Ladies Home Journal*. The internationalisation of the fashion press was associated precisely with the sweeping impact

of American journalism and found expression not only in a series of overseas mutations created by American publishers, but also in the copying practices of these magazines in terms of fashion writing and visual strategies.

The process of creating fashion magazines through imitation needs to be historically contextualised and thus, in this instance, tied to events that shaped a larger-than-life image of America in interwar European society as a better, mythical continent. The most important of these events is one related to the way in which the fashion world itself worked: although subordinated to the work of Parisian couturiers in terms of the distribution of information on fashion trends, it relied on the rapid processing of this information by American journals. It was in the States at the end of the nineteenth century that popular fashion magazines such as *Vogue*[1] emerged. These Eurocentric publications, relying on the work of an ever-growing number of fashion correspondents permanently based in Paris, and catering to the New York socialite interested in French fashion, would dictate to the whole world how to interpret fashion. In addition, in the interwar period, these magazines – particularly *Vogue* as Catherine Horwood has noted – grew to become increasingly mass-market and transfigured into the role of "the fashion mentor women across the middle classes referring to it as a fashion guide and mentioning it more than any other magazine" (Horwood 2005, p. 16). Thus, although these magazines continued using intellectualised language and promoted exclusive clothing, they also extended their reach to aspirational social groups. The internationalisation of the *Vogue* Patterns Company's pattern service so that readers who could not afford an original *Vogue* garment could buy its pattern and sew it themselves using cheap materials, became a tangible sign of this equalitarian approach[2] (albeit a very superficial one), where high fashion could apply to everyone. The international exposure of women's advice magazines such as *Ladies Home Journal*[3] also drove the Americanisation of the European fashion press. The editors not only distributed patterns, but also produced copious amounts of fashion and housekeeping instruction. As a result, fashion publications (fashion columns in these magazines) were targeted at the broadest readership ever: from humble working-class women to wealthy social elites. The American Dream was further popularised by the growing availability

1 *Vogue* was launched in 1892 (in New York) as a social magazine that sought to support the traditional mores of New York socialites in a time of fast-changing reality. In 1909, Condé Montrose Nast took over the magazine, whose vision and vigorous changes made *Vogue* an international brand.

2 *Vogue* had already been running its own pattern service since 1899, but Conde Nast founded the Vogue Patterns Company in 1914, and after World War I internationalised the distribution network for patterns of clothing featured in *Vogue* (Davis 2006, pp. 13–14).

3 The success of *Ladies Home Journal* (a magazine with a tradition dating back to 1883) can be traced to the work of Edward W. Bok, who took over the editorship at the end of 1889 (he ran it until 1919) and made a revolutionary shift in the title's business practices: he introduced low subscription rates, and began publishing popular content like instructional books, how-to guides and episodic romances. Between Bok's departure in 1919 and the subsequent revolutionary "reign" of the Gould marriage, the magazine declined (it was outstripped by magazines such as *Good Housekeeping*, *Woman's Home Companion* and *McCalls*).

of transatlantic cruises (in Poland, for example, these were the Batory and Piłsudski cruises), which contributed to the spread of consumption as an international practice. All these developments led to an "acceleration" of fashion production between the wars. As consumption began to impact more people, designers produced more collections, and the annual fashion cycle became divided into more parts than the previous four seasons. For the first time in history, changes in fashion began to cross geographical, national, and often gender and class boundaries en masse. In addition, since part of the job of journals is to help the reader recognise when such changes are happening (Sheehan 2018, p. 125), emulating American magazines was often the only way to keep up with the latest developments – especially in a country like Poland, which after regaining independence, had been a fledgling state for the whole of the twentieth century, with high levels of poverty and illiteracy, and was only just forming its own fashion and media system.

The expansion of *Vogue* and *Ladies Home Journal* that was oriented towards Europe, and the methods of fashion description that these magazines generated, also ties in with the growth of American media corporations.[4] With the ambitions of American publishers to internationalise the media scene and American domination of that scene, Paris and New York became the hub of the interwar fashion world in the sense that France was involved in the production of fashion and the mechanisms of imitation (fashion merchants distributed the patterns of new collections, and fashion catalogues), and New York, as the media distribution centre for these trends, exhorted the rest of the world to mimic Parisian fashion. As many scholars of fashion history acknowledge (Horwood 2005; Davis 2006; Pouillard 2015; Sheehan 2018; Kurkdjian 2020), Paris retained its undisputed supremacy in trendsetting during the interwar period, not least due to the practices of American fashion magazines that regarded Parisian couturiers as oracles of fashion. This was largely because neither in the interwar period nor earlier, had an American autonomous fashion system taken shape. With its elaborate network for the exchange of fashion information, bolstered by the high-speed transatlantic telegraph cable, which both buyers and fashion journalists used to send fashion reports from Paris to the USA, New York still fulfilled the role of the first importer of French fashion (not even the rise in customs duties during the Great Depression changed that). The Americanisation of the fashion press in Europe and the cross-linking of some publications caused understandable discomfort for French designers, who feared a loss of influence and mass reproduction of their designs. Nothing of the sort happened,

4 This is especially true of the Conde Nast publishing company, which already had three mutations of *Vogue* outside the United States in 1920, and was also acquiring titles from its home markets, thus eliminating competition on one hand and adding qualified editors to its titles on the other (Miralles 2021, pp. 78–81). In the case of Curtis Publishing Company, publisher of *Ladies Home Journal*, the expansion was not so literal; however, brand awareness in Europe was immense due to the international distribution of the publisher's dress pattern catalogues and the number of international subscriptions.

however, until after the Second World War. The formulas for media relations[5] that couturiers devised, though, led to an increasing awareness in Europe (including Poland) of American magazines as brands, and the evolution of the fashion press according to a dichotomous model: highbrow and lowbrow magazines.

This division of the fashion press spoke directly to the heterogeneity of interwar society and its attitudes to fashion and reflected the two ways of writing about fashion: elitist and democratising. The former focused on quick reproduction of trends by creating a magazine formula that mediates the commercial relationship, builds awareness of fashion brands and sets the stage for the promotion of people from the so-called socialite (in this essay, this variant is represented by *Vogue* and the copycat Polish titles *Pani* and *Teatr i Życie Wytworne*). The democratising variant is concerned with the illusory notion that fashion mediated by cheap magazines can erase social differences. As such, it supports the practice of fully disclosing haute couture designs to the masses, introduces a mode of instructive writing and insists that all the signifiers of fashion are produced in a relationship between people and clothes, not in a relationship of consumption (in this study, the *Ladies Home Journal* and the Polish *Moja Przyjaciółka* are examples of these magazines). Although highbrow and lowbrow magazines offer different ways of apprehending and structuring the description of fashion, both essentially subscribe to the method of editing fashion magazines as "enchanted temples of consumption" next to department stores (Ritzer 2001). In order for such a "temple" to achieve longevity, it must – in Ritzer's view – be sustained by rationalising and standardising tools on the one hand, and relentlessly call for the purchase of goods on the other. In this study, therefore, I will try to identify not only the differences in the description of fashion in terms of democratising and elitist modes, but also to show that both modes were aimed at increasing consumption practices, even if this was done by reproducing mechanisms of class differentiation (cf. Pouillard 2013; Seebohm 1982, pp. 72–73). In other words, while fashion writing in *Moja Przyjaciółka* contextualises and rationalises dynamic fashion movements, and the style of description in *Pani* focuses on indulging in novelties from couturiers, these are always editorial moves centred on the profits of advertisers or the publisher, which perpetuate social divisions. Looking at fashion descriptive strategies through this lens helps establish that fashion journals have for years not only delivered echoes of fashion news, but also positioned themselves as an essential conduit between fashion and the reader. In this way, fashion journals depend on, but also compete with, the rhythm of fashion (Sheehan 2018, p. 125).

5 These include, primarily, the "exclusive" formula, i.e., limiting the number of photographers, illustrators, and foreign correspondents at shows, creating limited collections, sharing information about collections only with selected editors. The editorial board of American *Vogue* occupied the most prominent place in this „media field" created by French couturiers (cf. Bourdieu 1995).

Methods

This paper uses a descriptive-historical method. It will primarily discuss those linguistic tools of fashion writing that attempted to allude to or simply imitate American writings, i.e. "magical writing" understood after Moeran as various "seduction techniques" that situate the power of fashion in the symbolic processes surrounding fashion objects rather than in the objects themselves (Moeran 2018, p. 142), advice manuals, ironic writing and reportage-styled human interest stories. This paper will also delineate the emergence of inter-war celebrity culture as a means of verifying taste and making content accessible. Polish women's magazines representing different journalistic traditions will be used as research units: luxury fashion magazines with very low circulation (*Pani*, *Teatr i Życie Wytworne*) and women's advice magazines featuring prominent fashion columns, which were not only sold in Poland, but also had regular subscribers abroad. The American titles, *Vogue* and *Ladies Home Journal*, already widely analysed in the context of fashion writing by many researchers (incl. Scanlon 1995; Damon-Moore 1994; Davis 2006; Parkins 2017; Sheehan 2018) are a benchmark for comparison. I have made this selection in order to correctly distribute the variants of description in relation to time and function. I realise however, that it is difficult to study the impact and degree of imitation between magazines if one of them lacks publishing continuity. *Pani*, for example, had been published since 1922, but there were months in which the title was not printed. The same was true of *Teatr i Życie Wytworne* (published since 1928). This irregularity pertained to many Polish titles and was on one hand, the result of the participation of the editorial staff in certain social arrangements, as their members were connected with many magazines and regular publishing was possibly hard for them to reconcile, and on the other hand, of a very irregular readership and thus sales which did not bring the profits the publishers wanted (Łozowska-Marcinkowska 2010). As this makes it impossible to conduct a quantitative study, I propose that, as part of a comparative study, we look at those methods of description that took place more or less contemporaneously in American and Polish periodicals (or with a slight delay in Polish ones), and which the available archival issues of these titles would allow. When discussing the allusions to American fashion magazines in Polish fashion journals, I omit those that are direct references to any of the American media brands although there is no shortage of such. In *Pani*, comparisons such as "the colour of rotten leaves as in *Vogue*" (1923, 7: 32) are commonly used, whole sections of text from *Vogue* are copied, and the credits of the dresses include affiliation with *Vogue*. However, these references did not have a direct bearing on the way fashion was reported but are part of the strategies of advertisers and editors who succumbed to marketing pressure. I also want to stress that the fashion press discussed in this article is part of the so-called women's press. However, it does not necessarily respond to the demand for women's articles in other social magazines, and mostly fails to address the important theme of emancipation between the wars. Therefore, I only briefly examine the pursuit of feminist demands in these

titles and indicate their place in the sphere of fashion description, where they are more likely to be contested.

The fashion press in interwar Poland and its American echoes

The development of the fashion press in the Second Polish Republic has been mainly linked to the influence of Western periodicals[6], as well as to combating communication barriers caused by the war and over a century of partitions. The most serious problems were not only illiteracy and poverty, but also the poorly connected provinces, where the only suppliers of newspapers were often door-to-door salespeople peddling outdated press and fashion patterns. Fashion magazines in Poland evolved from two antagonistic models of femininity and life: rich women and aspiring women (usually manual workers or homemakers) dreaming of social advancement. In consequence, there were over a dozen low-circulation glossy magazines geared towards the elite[7] and the remainder of women's magazines intended for a less sophisticated readership[8], who had not read the press regularly before and were just forging reading rituals (Idem 2022, pp. 28–31). This dualistic mode of development of women's periodicals between 1918 and 1939 was confirmed by a study conducted by Kamila Łozowska-Marcinkowska (2010), who questioned the existence of a single, cross-class image that was imperative for women in the press during this period. This division also chimed with the tendencies of women's and fashion magazines worldwide, which were opening up to mass readership on the one hand and maintaining the existence of a privileged class on the other (cf. Nelson Best 2017, pp. 73–104).

The question of the ephemerality of most Polish fashion magazines, which was the result of the imitative nature of this press in Poland, is significant for this research. A total of 312 titles for women were registered throughout the interwar period, but most of them went out of print after only a few months (Sokół 1983).

6 It is worth noting that I will only discuss the influence of American journalism on the Polish women's press and fashion press as "Western" in this article. This does not mean, however, that journalistic discourse described here as "Western" is limited to American influence only. During the interwar period, the French and German media markets were of foremost importance for the development of Polish periodicals, and when it came to the women's press it was mainly German-influenced. In Poland, the most popular magazines were the carbon copies of Gustav Lyon's German periodicals, including the largest *Modenschau*, whose Polish counterpart was *Przegląd Mody*. Increasing German influence on the Polish press was also because some German women's magazines from the luxury segment were distributed in Poland for free as part of National Socialist propaganda in neighbouring countries. This was the case, for example, with Ernst Herbert Lehmann's *Die Mode*, whose mission was to present National Socialism as modern (Ganeva 2011, pp. 50–83).

7 In the 1920s, such magazines included *Pani* or *Świat Kobiecy*, while in the 1930s they included *Elegancka Pani*, *Teatr i Życie Wytworne* and *Świat Pięknej Pani*. The magazine *Bluszcz* aspired to the rank of a luxury magazine throughout the interwar period.

8 These include such magazines as *Gazeta dla Kobiet*, *Moja Przyjaciółka*, and *Kurier Kobiecy*.

This was due to the adaptation of foreign publishing technologies to the Polish market. For example, it was common practice to import German, French or English fashion journals translate them into Polish and sell them as original publications. Press companies such as the French Germaine Joumard and German Gustav Lyon offered to buy single fashion illustrations or entire mock-ups of magazines (this was overseen by qualified intermediaries) ready to be filled with Polish texts. Copyright titles, which promoted Polish illustrators and journalists, and although they did not use such ready-mades, aspired to become visually and textually similar to magazines such as *Vogue*.[9] This was not only because of the prestige of the magazines they emulated, but also because of the cultural increase in the exposure of fashion and celebrity life, and thus the acculturation of global fashion developments by an emerging Western-centric mass audience.[10] Furthermore, a dynamic, more and more internationalised fashion and beauty market fostered the growth of women's magazines and journals, with much of the marketing based on being featured in these titles. New wardrobe items such as lingerie, and standardised hats and shoes needed an advertising medium. Brands began to treat magazines as part of the showcase of their products. The relative ease of publishing fashion magazines in such a copy model meant that there were a lot of titles on the market, but they struggled to keep their audience for long. In this context, magazines such as *Pani* (1922–1925), *Teatr i Życie Wytworne* (1928–1932) and *Moja Przyjaciółka* (1934–1939), which I deal with in this study, provided a fairly constant offer. When employing the methods of fashion description and visualisation that had been used earlier by American magazines – which focused on simultaneously reporting on trends and suggesting ideas on how to substitute them cheaply – they bolstered their authority through a posture of scepticism and irony toward novelty in fashion.[11]

9 Tadeusz Gronowski, as creative director of magazines such as *Pani* and *Teatr i Życie Wytworne*, designed magazine layouts along the lines of the American edition of *Vogue* and the French *La Gazette du Bon Ton*. These were magazines that were sparing in form, based on high-quality fashion illustration and poster-like covers (cf. Szabłowska 2006, pp. 27–30).

10 One should additionally point out here several revolutionary changes in fashion that had a direct impact on the increased popularity of women's magazines: the reduction of clothing prices, the simplification and standardisation of cuts, the standardisation of styles that were suitable for faster production, the increased importance of dressmaking, the spread of viscose silk (from which stockings were produced) as an equivalent to natural silk (Idem 2022; Sieradzka 1993; Dziekońska-Kozłowska 1964).

11 It is worth noting that when analysing the content in *Pani* and *Teatr i Życie Wytworne*, it is easy to find such literal references to American magazines (for example, it was common to create collage illustrations from American advertisements for the Hermes brand and to name sections as literal translations of sections in American *Vogue*). The authors of these magazines also admitted that they willingly imitated American periodicals. As for *Moja Przyjaciółka*, it is more difficult to make such a claim, especially if one considers the fact that even in the interwar period this periodical was accused of German inspiration (Wodniak 2017). Today, it is difficult to judge whether these accusations are valid; however, while *Moja Przyjaciółka* may indeed have been partially inspired by low-end German periodicals in terms of illustrations and photographs, the connection to American media is easy to establish at the level of the text (see footnote 13). This is also confirmed by interviews I conducted with the daughters

This strategy helped them to inspire confidence in their readers, while suggesting to fashion houses and potential advertisers that they needed to heed such magazines and their influence (cf. Sheehan 2018). Such a method of writing about fashion was especially important in advice magazines (such as *Moja Przyjaciółka* or *Ladies Home Journal*) because it strengthened the message that fashion is a convention, and that it also functions on the periphery (outside the metropolitan centre). In such a view, fashion advice does not only have a practical character, but also a democratising potential (Hackney, Bigham 2022).

Pani, the exclusive fashion magazine, conceived by lingerie shop owner Gustaw Zmigryder, was certainly one of the most interesting and over-invested press projects in interwar Poland. The literary crème de la crème of the time and illustrators who had previously worked for French fashion magazines collaborated with the magazine. It featured French-language, snobbish columns laden with recommendations for luxury goods. All visual elements were designed to turn the magazine into a status prop for those who wanted to emphasise their membership of the high society, as well as essential reading for those who needed a guide to exclusive shopping. The immediate successor of *Pani* after it was suspended was the magazine *Teatr i Życie Wytworne*, with mostly the same editorial team, but edited by Ignacy Kołłupajło, who was more experienced in editorial work. The periodical focused on the life of the artistic milieu (mainly actors and actresses) and presented current trends from their vantage point. The purpose of both magazines was, firstly, to report accurately and quickly on fashion from Paris and, secondly, to inform socialite women what other fashionable women were wearing and doing in fashionable places (cf. Seebohm 1982, pp. 76–77). As was the case with *Vogue*, these magazines played a role of authority in legitimising trends among the social and aspiring elite, which required selecting contributors on the basis of social status, cultural qualifications and hard-won fame as arbiters of taste (cf. Coser 2019, p. 96). Since these associates were supposed to provide "secret knowledge of fashion" they had to have status-guaranteed access to world journals and foreign travel. The artistic director of both of these magazines was Tadeusz Gronowski, who never hid his desire to cultivate the visual method of magazines like *Vogue* on the Polish magazine market. He designed these magazines as carbon copies of foreign journals: he dropped static layouts, exposed the importance of double-page spreads, where illustrations can form a single whole, often altered the size of fonts, used combinations of text and illustrations and a large amount of the so-called "light," i.e. white space on the pages (which adds elegance to the magazine). The covers

of Alfred and Anna Krzycki (creators of *Moja Przyjaciółka*), who said that their parents were committed to the American publishing model. This was not only due to the content of these magazines or to personal reading preferences, but also to the fact that a sizable portion of the Polish magazine's subscribers came from the US. It should also be noted that in the second half of the 1930s, the Krzyckis were openly critical of German politics and its media system, so it seems unlikely that they edited texts based on articles from German magazines.

of these magazines, which were styled like posters or paintings, stripped of any lettering, were a separate story.

Moja Przyjaciółka, on the other hand, was the most popular democratising magazine. The title was also the best-selling women's periodical in interwar Poland.[12] It represented the interests of modern provincial women and recognised that progressive women who are featured in women's press should not have solely intellectual backgrounds. Katarzyna Wodniak, a researcher of the periodical, has pointed out the great importance of its fashion columns, which said relatively little about current trends but described fashion as a determinant of beliefs and values (Wodniak 2020, pp. 90–95). The avowedly frivolous subject of fashion surfaced as a key to understanding cultural change. The magazine was part of the mainstream press for working-class and impoverished middle-class women, and so espoused the traditional view of home tailoring, proclaiming that it could be an attractive alternative to ready-made clothing. Many of the ideas that *Moja Przyjaciółka* covered, quite obviously refer to the *Ladies Home Journal*, edited by husband and wife team Bruce and Beatrix Gould.[13] *Moja Przyjaciółka*, also published by a married couple, Anna and Alfred Krzycki, dispensed with the conventionally posed photographs, popular in the press in the 1930s, and replaced them with small-scale fashion illustrations and, in between 1938 and 1939, increasingly often with unscripted snapshots of everyday life. Although it was a rather popular black-and-white women's magazine, it printed sewing tutorials and embroidery instructions. In terms of textual content, it valorised fiction such as episodic romances, and supplemented news of world fashion with correspondence from smaller Polish cities. These were revolutionary approaches for the time, yet they proved that Polish society had a favourable perception of the methods of editing women's and fashion magazines typical of Western media.

It is worth noting here the general distinction between these journals manifested in the modes of fashion description. The elitist magazines used patronising, often

12 Sales of *Moja Przyjaciółka* stood at 250,000 copies, thanks to clever mail-subscription distribution and gifts that the editors granted to regular readers for renewing their subscriptions. Such sales could not be compared with any other women's title at the time: the second-ranked *Bluszcz* distributed 20,000 copies in its best months. It is also worth mentioning that *Moja Przyjaciółka* was a biweekly magazine, so when compared with the sales results of other titles, its monthly sales should be doubled.

13 My comparative analysis of *Moja Przyjaciółka* and *Ladies Home Journal* from Gould's interwar period (1937–1939) suggests this. A recurring element was multi-column texts with tips on housekeeping and fashion, columns on motherhood and marriage in the form of dialogues or conversations of fictional characters, and detailed articles on how to organise the kitchen, or decorate your home step by step. An interesting aspect of *Moja Przyjaciółka* is especially the American inspirations included in the letters-to-the-editor column titled "Between Us Women" ("My kobiety między sobą"), in which the editors assign homework to female readers. In the *Ladies Home Journal*'s "You're asking me" column, the editor also respond to readers' letters with the phrase "Homework to you." One thing that differentiates the two magazines is certainly the poorer visual and typographic design of the Polish magazine (especially the significantly smaller number of photographs and infographics).

ironic language. The authors of the articles seemed accustomed to living in a world of propriety and etiquette. They were keen to stigmatise women who ventured outside their "assigned" social class, who, for example, dressed incongruously with their class or profession. These magazines advertised luxury consumption: expensive clothes modelled on Parisian and Viennese designs, new beauty treatments, international trips to spas, and theatregoing. Other women's magazines – destined for poorer women – may have democratised fashion and eagerly propagated ideas of masculinisation of the female figure and identity, but they were encumbered by the language of moral restrictions and ambitions. They were dominated by an advice-giving discourse, detailed instructions about specific rules of how to match the outfit and behaviour to the occasion, and thus the fear of committing a social faux pas. These journals were rather critical of foreign fashion and suggested that it was possible to satisfy consumer needs through alternative methods: alterations, or cost-saving. I write in detail about the linguistic tools inherent in these descriptive methods in the following chapters.

Fashion writing in the elitist press

Fashion writing in elitist magazines coincides with the goals that the editors of these magazines set for themselves, namely, to become authentic in the world of high fashion and to strike a close relationship with their customers: both readers and advertisers (Coser 2019, p. 98). The magazines were never passive commentators on trends, but rather active participants in the fashion industry. This was made possible by their ironic tone when it came to fashion news (which often distanced itself from fashion) and their self-referential style, which allowed them to build a "magical" image of the magazine as a brand (it is in this sense that we speak of Planet *Vogue* or the world of *Pani*). I will deal with the latter first. The self-referential style comprised first and foremost stories portraying the backstage of fashion, i.e., all the articles that took the reader behind the scenes of the fashion world: reports from the designers' studios (*Teatr i Życie Wytworne* 1930, 12: 20–21; 12: 26), photographs of the editors' work (*Pani* 1924, 7: 10), as well as whole series of pieces about the interior design of actresses' flats, the contents of their wardrobes, handbags, make-up bags, and tips for packing a holiday suitcase. All of these texts fell within the formulas of interview, biography and reportage, with pronounced characteristics of a personal story, which we can read as part of a celebrity story. What is also interesting are the formal properties of these texts, which let the magazines remain neutral towards the vagaries of fashion. By means of intimate descriptions of well-known people, the editors succeeded, on one hand, in pointing out that interwar fashion abounded in various major revolutions (this is the case, for example, when lingerie and more casual clothes on the beach are mentioned), and, on the other hand, in winking at the reader with the language of "positive sensationalism" or various exaggerations that situated these revolutions in the realm of eccentricities of wealthy and capricious celebrities.

The purpose of ironic writing, however, was to scoff at luxury (while at the same time condoning it). Polish luxury magazines refer explicitly to their American counterparts in this method of fashion writing. Whether in *Vogue*, *Pani* or *Teatr i Życie Wytworne*, the point of reference for fashion stories is Paris, even when it proposes the most bizarre outfits. During the 1930 carnival season, Jean Patou, for example, suggested ball gowns entirely lined with diamonds, and the exclusive magazines instantly used this trend to ironically criticise the socialite, who did not perceive such fashion ideas in artistic terms. I provide an example from a Polish journal:

> "Patou has an international clientele … he is frequented by Maharajas with their many European wives, married for a season, for half a season – for less time," Bogusław Herse lamented in an interview. He would be happy to bring such a diamond dress to Poland, but here one views an evening gown more practically. The basic question when buying one is whether the dress will be a torment during a ball. And how to have a good time when one fears being robbed of one's clothes? (*Teatr i Życie Wytworne* 1930, 3: 12)

Thanks to ironic writing, the editors of these magazines are also able to navigate two modes of time, distant and near, to leap from current trends to analyses of how clothes combine past styles with contemporary ones. Consequently, we can read about the summer yearning for fur, which evokes a fashion novelty of "summer furs, which are giraffes and zebras that are pressed perfectly" (close temporal mode), and the history of the chiffon fabric, which begins with the line, "chiffon has this to offer, that it weighs little, but in retrospect it costs much" (far temporal mode) (*Pani* 1924, 10: 12). One can multiply examples of such temporal dualism: for instance, in the 1924 holiday issue of *Pani*, we find a four-page advertisement of holiday accessories, and next to it a column deriding them as superfluous: "Ladies who are fond of comfort still stock up on thermoses, blankets, luggage cases, etc., but this is only in cases where they also manage to equip themselves with an imbecile who will carry it all for them" (*Pani* 1924, 8: 21).

Part of this elitist fashion description is also the technique of magical writing, which helps to create a special atmosphere around consumption, while also positioning it as an almost artistic practice. In the most rudimentary sense, this style of fashion storytelling can be found in the visual content of the magazines. In *Pani*, the table of contents is designed to resemble a theatre brochure that summarises a three-act drama, and the thumbnails of the most interesting garments from the catwalk shows look like scripts of costume designers, while in *Teatr i Życie Wytworne*, fashion show stories are stylised like reviews of theatre performances. All this creates an idea of clothing as costume and centralises it around an aesthetic rather than a practical aspect. Magical writing also comprises long-winded descriptions, which are technical on the one hand (i.e. they describe details of fabric that, in the 1920s, cannot be shown with illustrations, such as "sable fur, lined with antelope and trimmed with exquisite lambskin and impregnated gabardine"), and artistic on the other, with no shortage of hyperbole, repetition or anthropomorphism:

> There are no flowers or leaves yet, not even green buds on the trees, the spring sun has not yet dried the unsightly puddles on the pavements; It is still cold and windy and damp and nasty … and yet maiden violets are blooming on the fur collar of the winter garment, the hats are already dressing for spring (*Teatr i Życie Wytworne* 1930, 3: 20).

These descriptions essentially highlight the quality of the clothes, the exclusive details of the garments that make their reproduction by the lower classes impossible. Significantly, in the elitist style, the account of fashion never reveals the minutiae of a garment's cut, sewing techniques or finish, but focuses instead on the impression that the garment evokes. In the spring of 1930, *Teatr i Życie Wytworne* writes, for example, that the navy blue jacket featured at the spring fashion show by Bogusław Herse had "a virtuoso cut that dazzled with novelty, was refined and calm in effect". However, the reader can in no way infer from this description what this jacket looks like: they only know the ambience surrounding its presentation during the show. Similarly, the magazine does not spell out exactly what the main evening gown looked like during the same show; instead, a mood is built up around it by means of anthropomorphism and a present tense form: "A murmur of delight grows louder and louder, like a rising tide, for behold, there have descended [onto the catwalk] phantoms of incredible loveliness, shrouded in clouds of light transparent fabrics that enchant women into giant butterflies or fanciful flowers" (1930, 3: 11).

In interwar journals, magical writing is also often accompanied by various descriptions of the ritualisation of fashion. The sorts of numerological incantations we find in texts promoting the purchase of vast quantities of things support the belief that it is indispensable to possess specific items in order to observe conventions. Especially in the pre-holiday and Christmas issues, we come across articles structured around headlines like: "Five umbrellas you need for the beach," "Several bathing suits and a dozen swimming caps for the season" (*Pani* 1923, 7: 20–21, 8: 19) and each of the items featured in these texts has a valid use. The editorial team often uses these texts, which serve as guides to morality, to spin their musings on the feminisation of fashion between the wars. Mostly, however, these are not thoughts that negotiate any tangible social change but rather contest the legitimacy of emancipating oneself by means of clothing. When writing about the subject of the masculinisation of the female figure, the editors of *Pani* resort to impersonal phrases such as "Madam Fashion is masculine," "The caprices of male Madam Fashion" which shift this postulate away from the woman and situate it in the symbolic processes happening around them. In the Polish elitist journals, fashion is used to uphold traditional female roles and is more often an attribute of flirting than of emancipation (cf. Parkins 2017).

These magical descriptions of fashion are complemented by the visual content of luxury magazines. Notably, in this press, fashion illustrations remained a powerful tool for fashion presentation all along, even when the use of photography was already widespread. This was due to the desire to "stop the reproduction of fashion" (Pouillard 2013, p. 718), and also to maintain the status of an expensive magazine,

which, since it showcases high-end dressmaking, is also a kind of haute couture press. Fashion illustrations were also an essential part of the episodic novels featured in these magazines. These illustrated fictional stories were possibly one of the few differences between American fashion journals and their Polish counterparts. In magazines like *Vogue*, the printing of fiction would have been unthinkable because such texts were seen as low brow.

Fashion writing in the democratising press

The differences between elitist and democratising fashion writing are easily illustrated by the descriptions of national fashion shows, which were often held in the Second Polish Republic under the banner of protecting folk art. When one such winter fashion show was reported on in 1931 in *Teatr i Życie Wytworne*, the editors regarded the ethnic embroideries on the trims of jumpers and shirt collars as an appealing, marketable folk motif. When a similar show was held in Zakopane in December 1936 and covered by *Moja Przyjaciółka*, the focus was on a completely different aspect. For the local correspondents, the use of folk motifs constituted the harnessing of identity into the rhythm of fashion, and therefore there was a condemnatory assessment of such designer practices (*Moja Przyjaciółka* 1936, 23: 496). To point out the absurdity of this style, the authors used ironic writing, which had different functions in democratising magazines than in those with an elitist bias.

In the pages of *Moja Przyjaciółka* for example, we find quite a few descriptions that portray fashion as an abstract concept, or even the result of the whims of a handful of Parisian dictators who, "confined to the company of sycophants" (*Moja Przyjaciółka* 1937, 8: 172), do not properly decipher women's daily clothing practices. The texts articulate resentment against that handful of society who "can afford a dernier cri" and "who do not understand regular people" (Ibid.). Thus, using literal irony, one of the columns in *Moja Przyjaciółka* was dedicated to couturiers' predictions for the coming seasons, and mocked haute couture by pointing out its predictability and the fact that a simple housewife's cleverness and industriousness could easily defeat it. This type of columns, printed with considerable regularity in this magazine, fulfilled partly an informative function (because, news was reported, nevertheless, through irony), and partly imitated a familiar fashion esoteric column, where "fashion is returned to the people."

Cataloguing Parisian fashion as warped and elitist, however, was not always the leading narrative in the magazine. Fashion produced in Paris was a point of reference for the fashion editors working at *Moja Przyjaciółka*, but it was an element of inspiration, never an invitation to consume that fashion first-hand (Grabowska 1997). In this vein, a series of tutorials and manuals were published to help organise the world's wardrobe by means of various alterations (which helped to reproduce high fashion), but also looked for storylines from the lives of famous designers that would bring them closer to the working classes. Most often, the heroine of such stories (usually biographies and reports) was Coco Chanel, who, before she began

her design career, was an actress that made extra money by producing hats. Thus, it was possible to maintain the claim that Chanel's designs had a practical value inspired by the hardships of everyday life (cf. Bartlett 2013). Such a transfer of fashion stories (from snobbery to folk tales of dreams fulfilled), was a necessary procedure to be able to talk about the designers while not mentioning their designs. In fact, it was impossible to avoid discussing the great fashion houses, because, as brands, they were becoming part of the collective imagination and mass, international popular culture of fashion and the press in the interwar period. Such practices were parallel to those of *Ladies Home Journal*, which, when writing about designers, began to create a kind of nimbus of uniqueness and aspiration around them. For many readers, it was worth keeping savings books for many years in order to afford one designer product at least once in a lifetime (cf. Damon-Moore 1994). Such narratives in the democratising press were already common in the 1950s and 1960s, but it was the interwar phase, when the life stories of couturiers were made part of the identity of the popular class that most contributed to the production of the myth of these brands as props of symbolic and social capital.

However, returning fashion to the people, which the editors of *Moja Przyjaciółka* and other democratising magazines took as their goal, was done through the pervasive practical instructions and longer texts valorising human interest stories (in borderline journalistic genres like reportage or interview). The essential purpose of any tutorials in such titles was to imply that fashion could be equal, but only in a general sense, never in detail. While a neatly made dress from a pattern, and cheaper material and buttons could replace exclusive designs straight from Paris, they could not supplant the dream of genuine quality fashion. Therefore, although the language of these tutorials was firmly undergirded by the impression of possibility (there are a lot of comparisons such as "georgette that drapes like silk," "homespun, almost like Chanel tweed"), it was more a token of substitution, an indirect reference to high fashion. It conveyed the impression that the fashion in these magazines was merely a poorer version of real fashion. Consequently, *Moja Przyjaciółka* also used another variant of description to democratise fashion: short (usually participatory) reports, columns or editorial responses to letters to the editor were used to point out that all meanings of fashion are produced in a person's relationship with clothes, not through the material value of clothes. The editors of *Moja Przyjaciółka* reminded their readers repeatedly that fashion should not be treated as a whim, that it is an important part of social life, which even has the ability to transform fate. The punchline of a text published in 1934 titled "A little nothing is everything," says that "a drop of perfume, a small accessory or a collar can make all the difference, almost decide fate" (*Moja Przyjaciółka* 1934, 14: 5), so the reader can find non-fiction stories about girls who experience first love, a turbulent love affair or social advancement, where fashion is central to the narrative. There would be an evocative description of a dress in which the beloved fell in love, a well-tailored suit that brought about

a metamorphosis of the heroine's life.[14] In the construction of these texts, the narrator (played by the author) is the axis. They are usually written in the first person singular, which creates the illusion of an intimate story (Małgowska 1963, p. 197). It is also an interesting technical trick to draw the reader into such a genre form: fashion reports by female field correspondents, who *Moja Przyjaciółka* employed all over the country and who repeatedly romanticised fashion stories in the Polish provinces in a similar spirit. This method of fashion description is due to the fact that the articles in *Moja Przyjaciółka*, to a much greater extent than was the case in other women's press titles, were based on readers' letters to the editors. We can also assume that the reason behind the intimate tone of the personal story was a desire to avoid the mentoring tone of instructions in an advice magazine, which *Moja Przyjaciółka* was after all.

Moja Przyjaciółka also used a stylistic device based on contrast to describe fashion. Despite the fact that, as I indicated earlier, the magazine tried to be "close to life," it still used many generalisations. The editorial board of *Moja Przyjaciółka* talked boisterously about the need for vacation trips, though this might have applied to a handful of readers, and it dissected instructions for sewing evening outfits, while the average reader had no occasion to go out. If anything, she or he was more interested in wedding styles. One should bear in mind that these tools of fashion description show how heterogeneous the audience of these titles was: both middle-class women and workers and peasant women read them. In democratising magazines, as the editors of *Ladies Home Journal*, Bruce and Beatrix Gould, frequently mentioned, one can often observe attempts to open up to a more elite audience (Gould 1968). Hence, the columns of *Moja Przyjaciółka* often contained what appeared to be contradictory suggestions: once it was bourgeois vacation advice, culinary news, and at other times instructions relating to dress economy or high fashion substitutes. This "contrasting style" was also often reflected in the visual elements of the magazines: on the one hand, it was composed of narrow columns, with black-and-white, modest fashion illustrations; on the other hand, there were elegant colour covers with photos of "ordinary women" who look like professional models.

Conclusion

As the above discussion demonstrates, fashion writing is present in a whole range of interwar fashion publications and magazines addressed to women, but this does not mean that fashion is an inclusive subject. Here we can refer to the classic distinction of Georg Simmel, who noted that fashion is both inclusive and exclusive; it helps build community while excluding those who do not conform to fashion norms

14 Examples of these and similar writing practices can be found as early as the first year of the periodical's publication. See *Biuralistki* (1934, 3: 5), *Królestwo brunetek* (1934, 7: 4), *Walka krótkich i długich sukien* (1934, 14: 11), *Trzeba umieć się ubrać* (1934, 17: 3–4).

(Simmel 1904). However, the description of fashion in interwar magazines seems to be a more complex research category. While the American fashion press argued that expanding the scope of fashion production and revealing haute couture designs to the general public would bring fashion to the masses, there remained the practice of distinguishing superior and inferior fashion through different aspects of clothing: the quality of fabrics, cuts, accuracy of workmanship, and meagre or opulent details (Pouillard 2013). The idea that fashion for all brokered through cheap fashion magazines could erase any social differences was illusory. However, this does not change the fact that even magazines targeting women of the working class (American and Polish) constantly referred to consumption and names associated with haute couture: it was hard to write about women's clothing outside of high fashion.

The rapid development of these two types of fashion magazines, influenced by the Americanisation of the media, paved the way worldwide for new glossy journals, which helped to discredit the top-down (i.e., Parisian) dissemination of trends. Trends gradually began to emerge from counterculture groups and "in the streets." In Poland, this development was interrupted by the outbreak of World War II, after which it was revived only in a deformed democratising version: in mass, quasi-equalitarian, centrally controlled women's magazines of low quality.

Polish fashion journalism, as well as fashion itself, developed according to a model of imitation. We can agree with historians of the period, who say that this represented an attempt to emulate Western culture as closely as possible and to make up for the time of Polish absence from international awareness (Dziekońska-Kozłowska 1964; Sieradzka 1993; Michałowska-Barłóg 2002; Korduba et al. 2013). The two types of fashion description that have been analysed here can be linked to the theories of disenchantment by Georg Ritzer (2001) on one hand, and on the other hand to the findings of Véronique Pouillard (2013), who points out that fashion writing had already been done differently in highbrow and lowbrow magazines in the interwar period. The Polish elitist and democratising models confirm that fashion description has been reproducing the mechanisms of class differentiation for years and is not an inclusive subject.

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STRESZCZENIE

Dziennikarstwo modowe w czasopismach dla kobiet w międzywojennej Polsce: wpływy amerykańskiej prasy

Artykuł przedstawia wpływ amerykańskiego dziennikarstwa modowego na polski rynek magazynów o modzie w okresie międzywojennym. Głównym jego celem jest zidentyfikowanie instrumentarium opisu mody w międzywojennych polskich magazynach o modzie lub w modowych rubrykach pism kobiecych oraz zmapowanie ich wariantywności według dwóch kategorii: elitarystycznej i demokratyzującej. W ramach tych kategorii omówione zostaną strategie opisu tekstualnego i wizualnego takie jak: „magiczne pisanie", instruktaże poradnikowe, pisanie ironiczne oraz techniki właściwe dla literatury faktu, stosowane w ramach dyskursu modowego (*fashion nonfiction*). W badaniu zastosowano metodę opisowo-historyczną. Artykuł jest pierwszą w literaturze o dziennikarstwie międzywojennym w Polsce próbą wyeksponowania tezy, że dyskurs modowy w prasie krajowej naśladował sposób, w jaki o modzie pisano w pismach amerykańskich.

Słowa kluczowe: moda międzywojenna, *Pani, Teatr i Życie Wytworne*, *Moja Przyjaciółka*, dziennikarstwo modowe, moda polska, polskie dziennikarstwo modowe