

STRUGGLE FOR RECOGNITION. Theosophy in Early 20th Century Warsaw¹

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ABSTRACT: The present study focuses on the activities of the first Polish Theosophical group, which for many reasons was never fully institutionally recognized. It was active from around 1905 and concentrated around Kazimierz Stabrowski (1869–1929), a Polish painter and the head of the Warsaw School of Fine Arts. The aim of this paper is to sociologically analyze this esoteric environment in Warsaw, which is treated here as an example of a *cultic milieu* from the perspective of visibility and recognition. Referring to the category of rejected knowledge (anomalies or the “cultural rubbish bin”) and using the case of Stabrowski and other members of the group, the authors highlight their efforts in the struggle for the recognition of their ideas in various environments and trace the process of their exclusion. Further, they examine the status of the Theosophical current in the public discourse of the time, which was undoubtedly related to the scope of Theosophy itself, which largely focused on the liminal aspects of hu-manity and cognition.

KEYWORDS: Kazimierz Stabrowski, *cultic milieu*, Western Esotericism, Theosophy, Theosophical Society in Poland .

THEOSOPHY AND THE NEW AGE FROM A SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

Theosophy in the meaning of teachings and practices of the Theosophical Society appeared in the orbit of sociological interest mainly due to research on the phenomenon of the New Age. The interest in this conglomerate of ideas grew rapidly in the sphere of Central and Eastern Europe in the 1990s, which was much later than it was in the West due to the political and ideological situation in the region. With a growing interest in the syncretic beliefs challenging traditional religiosity and freely combining elements from various cultural and religious contexts, it became a vivid field of interest for scholars of religion, with a strong representation of sociologists.

More specifically, the main interest was in contemporary phenomena, religious freedom, the scope of common interests, attempts to reconstruct the belief system, and the lived religion and its meaning in various smaller and larger, more or less formalized groups. In this research,

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the focus was on ideas based on specific elements from various contemporary cultures rather than similar historic syncretic phenomena, including modern Theosophy. And those earlier ideas include the beliefs that emerged as teachings of the key figures of the Theosophical Society – mainly Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831–1891)—in her two classic works, *Isis Unveiled: A Master-Key to the Mysteries of Ancient and Modern Science and Theology* (Blavatsky 1877) and *The Secret Doctrine, The Synthesis of Science, Religion and Philosophy* (Blavatsky 1888); the popular writings of Alfred Percy Sinnett (1840–1921) or early William Quan Judge (1851–1896) and others, i.e. the first generation of Theosophists. Those ideas were later modified in the second generation, not only by followers of Blavatsky in line with the Theosophical Society, Adyar (Annie Besant, 1847–1933, or Charles Webster Leadbeater, 1854–1934), but also as neo-Theosophy or post-Theosophy, that is teachings of Roerichs (Agni Yoga), Ballards (I AM Activity), or Alice Bailey (1880–1949).

Moreover, the focus on the idea of a coming astrological and spiritual New Era was present in Theosophical journals of the interwar period around the world as well as in Central and Eastern Europe; many such publications are well-known such as from Poland. However, the most developed, and later most popular, ideas that were focused on were described and published by Bailey, who was subsequently hailed as the Mother of the New Age, and inspired the teachings of the movement's leaders in the 1960s and afterwards. Theosophy is, then, the root of the New Age movement not only chronologically—as a similar syncretic cloud of beliefs—but also genetically as its ideological source.

While the New Age was in the scope of interests of many sociologists, the Theosophical Society remained a marginalized topic in this kind of research (also in Polish Sociology), and if it appeared, it was mentioned in a very specific context as a root or inspiration of the New Age. Of course, the position of Theosophy in academic fields has changed in the three decades since the 1990s, and it has become a main field of study for many researchers in the field of Western esotericism. However, it has not become a similar trend for the field of sociology and other disciplines, where both Theosophy itself, and Western Esotericism as a whole, sometimes still tend to be treated from the perspective of deviance and marginalization.

In our view, the Theosophical environment is equally interesting as the New Age for sociological research because of the role played by its main representatives in social and cultural life at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. Studies on Esotericism, practiced within the niche subdiscipline called Sociology of Occultism or Esotericism, despite being on the peripheries of this discipline, shed light on key sociological problems such as the following: modernity, the problematic category of the “disenchantment of the world,” secularization, or counter culture. Furthermore, sociological studies on Esotericism are accompanied by the conviction that a marginalized esoteric environment and transmission of knowledge connected with its activity is a significant, and not niche, atavistic element of modernity (Tiryakian 1974c; Kasperek 2015, 73–83; Kasperek 2019, 77–88). We share such a conviction when we think about the Theosophical current—an important part of Esoteric tradition at the turn of the 19th and 20th century, tradition, the significance of which goes way beyond the hermetic environment.

There is a very interesting example of a circle that wanted to gain institutional recognition as the Polish Theosophical Society, but was unable to do so for many years. It was a group formed at the beginning of the 20th century around a known painter, Kazimierz Stabrowski (1869–1929). Our research focus is on the process of institutionalization of the Theosophical group in Poland, an environment that—using the term coined by Collin Campbell (1972, 122)—can be called a “*cultic milieu*.” On the one hand, here, we treat Theosophy as an example of the liminal space of religious and scientific imagination, while on the other, we try to show

how the very center of the cultural and intellectual elite of Warsaw simultaneously functioned as a cultural and religious niche.

If the notion of *cultic milieu* belongs to the key sociological categories that have been used in the studies on the esoteric tradition for decades now, there is also a specific criticism against it. It was elaborated by Collin Campbell, who understood it as a society's specific cultural underground, which also included deviant systems of beliefs and practices. Here, the following can be included: the phenomena of Occultism, Magic, Spiritualism, Mysticism and the New Thought, faith in the wonderful properties of natural medicine as well as the institutions, media, and individuals associated with deviant system of beliefs and practices (Campbell 1972, 122). Moreover, *cultic milieus* comprise both non-orthodox science—the rejected knowledge denied by institutions of scientific establishment—and religious beliefs regarded as deviant by dominant religious institutions. Thus, the milieu is a mixture of different cultural elements and influences with no tendency toward uniformity and centralization. However, despite the diversity of the components of *cultic milieus*, there are grounds for treating this cultural background as a whole. First, the aforementioned activities are linked by heterodoxy, which is the deviation in relation to the dominant and orthodox culture. This borderland is created by some specific cognitive minorities that build their own authenticating structures in opposition to the authenticity structures defined as valid by establishment institutions. This forces cultic environments to legitimize the world view they promote in cases of openly manifested hostility or derision towards the group. This results in a simultaneous attack of orthodoxy and defense of individual liberty of beliefs and practices (Campbell 1972, 122). As Campbell noted, these movements rarely aim their criticism at one another. On the contrary, they emphasize the tolerance towards all beliefs (the belief in the possible creation of eternal philosophy is a feature attributed to different varieties of esoteric currents), which focuses on the liberty of beliefs and the resistance against dogmatism and simultaneously draws from the mystic tradition. It is from this tradition that the belief stems that the unity with what is divine can be achieved in a variety of ways. As per this perspective, the mystic tradition gets an ecumenical, non-church, syncretic, and tolerance-based form. However, some doubt (that is justified in our opinion) can be raised here about Campbell's concept as to whether such a conciliatory and tolerant image of *cultic milieu* is not a too far-reaching definition. For the purpose of the study, we understand the category with emphasis on the kind of borderline character of *cultic milieus* and its peripheralness—from the standpoint of the institutions that represent the establishment in modern societies. Here, the category is treated as useful in the analysis of the environment centered around Kazimierz Stabrowski.

THEOSOPHY AS A CONGLOMERATION OF IDEAS AND REJECTED KNOWLEDGE

Modern Theosophy, or the conglomerate of beliefs and practices associated with the activity of the Theosophical Society, was established in 1875 in New York. It should be distinguished from Christian theosophy, which is related (among other works) to the studies of Jacob Böhme (1575–1624), (cf. Faivre 2005, 259). Moreover, in this movement, of which the undisputed leader was Blavatsky, Theosophy was defined as the “Divine Wisdom such as that possessed by the Gods” (Blavatsky 1889, 1), which can be accessed by humans in the process of their development. In the sphere of ontological beliefs, Theosophy is a pantheistic (it recognizes the progressive evolution of the world and humanity) and perennial system. These assumptions result in many beliefs concerning religion, philosophy, and ethics. The goals of the establishment and activity of the Society were finally formulated as points comprising the postulates of creating a union of universal brotherhood, without racial, sexual and religious differences, conducting comparative studies on religions, philosophy and science, and exploring the unknown laws of nature and hidden human powers (Blavatsky 1931, 1–2). Although, from its inception, Theosophical science was presented in comprehensive works (Blavatsky 1877, 1888) and then developed for many years (cf. Besant and Leadbeater 1908 etc.) and also had both theoretical

and practical aims, the superior aim of the Society was to implement the idea of universal brotherhood. At the same time, Theosophy presented itself as an anti-dogmatic current.

As Theosophical beliefs were to be revealed in various religions and philosophies, a need for their comparative analysis was postulated. Although this system, right from the beginning, fulfilled or at least could fulfil religious functions, the acceptance of the members' diverse beliefs presented it as a philosophical worldview—a meta-system which merges apparent diversities into unity (Hess 2020, 192; 509). This merging took place without omitting any arguments and studies coming from scientific works, comprising various disciplines from humanities and medicine to physics. Over many decades, Theosophy balanced on the border of science (Asprem 2013), and it was able to interest large circles of intellectuals. Its assumptions were implemented in different ways in various circles: there used to be groups of engaged social activists as well as the circles focusing on theoretical and philosophical aspects or Occult studies. Thus, it should also be remembered that Theosophy, apart from its metaphysical and religious context, was also a social movement.

More specifically, Polish Theosophists were deeply engaged not only in educational, charitable, abolitionist, and egalitarian activities but also in political ones—revolutionary, national liberation activities. But similar to Theosophy itself—which was very popular at the turn of the 20th century and especially in the interwar period, but gone from most contemporary studies—people presenting these types of ideas have been almost totally forgotten today. Among others, this is the case of Doctor Józef Drzewiecki (1860–1907), a physician and homeopath, Konstanty Moes Oskragiełło (1850–1910), a promotor of vegetarianism and a return to Slavism, and the following Theosophist writers: Zofia Wojnarowska (1881–1967) and to a larger extent, Hanna Krzemieniecka (Janina Furs-Żyrkiewicz was her real name, 1866–1930). Although Krzemieniecka was a widely read writer after whom a large Warsaw street was to be named (Plan m. st. Warszawy c. 1935), she is today only known to the literary scholars exploring the turn of the 19th and 20th century. Meanwhile, some authors or artists who published works both inspired by the esoteric tradition and not related to it are often famous for the latter. The rest of their “odd” works were marginalized and forgotten. It is thus not surprising that these authors' publishing, the contents of which were almost entirely inspired by initiatory traditions, were largely forgotten by mainstream culture. This sentenced them to gradual disappearance from scientific studies as well.

Moreover, there are also many examples of well-known figures who are taught about at schools today and who were inspired by Western Esotericism or engaged in different initiatory structures; however, this is left untold. Such “whitewashing” of famous people's biographies to remove the “flaw” of Esotericism is a worldwide well-known process; as plenty of studies devoted to Western Esotericism show, this type of worldviews, widely accepted or even popular in the past, has been pushed to the margin and rejected in academia (cf. Hanegraaff 2012). One of the model examples is the removal of information about the engagement in Spiritualism of many members of American Women's Equality Movement, which was omitted in the first study devoted to it (cf. Stanton, Anthony, Gage 1881) but reappeared later. More specifically, it disappeared from academic studies for over 100 years, only to be rediscovered by Ann Braude (1989) in her work, *Radical Spirits. Spiritualism and Women's Rights in Nineteenth-Century America*. Another example can be in relation to Theosophy and the Arts; even with famous artists underlining the meaning of Theosophy, the idea of Theosophically influenced art was rejected by researchers for many decades. Among others, the research network, *Enchanted Modernities: Theosophy, Modernism, and the Arts, c. 1875-1960*, was established in 2012 and funded by the Leverhulme Trust with the aim to revise this omission. While we will not go into the details here, it should be noted that the lack of important esoteric currents in the

academic studies on various cultural phenomena is a very common occurrence that academics in the field of Western Esotericism have had to deal with.

Whereas such ideas were valuable for individuals promoting them in their time, they became an archaic curiosity, which was treated as something incomprehensible and marginal by later researchers. After all, if Theosophy was not recognized as either important or serious, the interest in it could not be either. Consequently, Theosophy was gradually occurred pushed into the category of a more or less harmful oddity. It may be the reason why the association with Theosophical structures of some of the most popular Polish writers at the turn of the 20th century, such as Eliza Orzeszkowa (1841–1910) or Maria Rodziewiczówna (1864–1944), is almost not discussed at all in scholarly publications. Even the Nobel prize winner in literature Władysław S. Reymont's (1867–1925) fascination with Theosophy has been omitted (cf. Hess 2020).

THE "SALON OF INITIATES" OR OCCULTISM IN WARSAW

Although the interest in Spiritualism and French Spiritism intensified in the last decades of the 19th century and developed in the two interwar decades, it did not come out of nowhere. The activity of invisible life currents and other so far hidden abilities of the human organism, typical of the 19th century discourses, had been described much earlier. Since the 1820s, animal magnetism (mesmerism) was popularized in Poland. Since 1816, the quarterly *Pamiętnik Magnetyczny Wileński* (*The Magnetic Diary of Vilnius*), edited by Ignacy Emmanuel Lachnicki (1793–1826), was issued. As in the rest of Europe, the surge of interest in Spiritualism and Spiritism took place in Poland in the second half of the 19th century. The foundation for their reception had been laid by the Polish national bards: Juliusz Słowacki (1809–1849) who was fascinated with mysticism and regarded by later esotericists as the progenitor of modern Theosophists; Adam Mickiewicz (1798–1855) was interested in the Kabbalah and in the works of Alphonse-Louis Constant (1810–1875), who was more commonly known as Éliphas Lévi, the father of the 19th century Occult Revival, who himself was inspired Józef Hoene-Wroński's Polish National Messianism (1776–1853) (Prinke 2013, 134–146); and finally, Zygmunt Krasiński (1812–1859) who organized spiritualist séances in his flat in Paris with a renowned medium, Daniel Douglas Hume (1833–1886) (Grzybowski 1999; cf. Kuczkowski 2014, 77–88). Moreover, the trend of spinning tables reached Poland rather early, which is confirmed for instance by the fact that as early as 1853, there was some news concerning this subject published in the *Czas* daily (*Time*) in a separate column, and later that year, the first experiment of such a type was reported (cf. *Czas* 84/1853, 2). Subsequently, the interest in Mediumism and Spiritualism developed, and journals on the subject matter were established (the long list of these starts with *Światło Zagrobowe* (*Light from Beyond the Grave*), issued from 1869 in Lviv). They finally got into the center of cultural life in 1893, when Eusapia Palladino (1854–1918) came to Poland at the invitation of renown psychologist and inventor, Julian Ochorowicz (1850–1917) (cf. Hess 2018). Palladino was one of the most famous mediums in the world. The sessions organized in Warsaw with her participation were attended by local elites, including Bolesław Prus (which was the pen name of Aleksander Głowacki, 1847–1912), who was Ochorowicz's friend from school. In the whole country, newspapers commented on these events in various ways, but they were loudly echoed. Further, this was the year that Warsaw esoteric circles gained members of the Theosophical Society who were enrolled in London. Later, in 1898, Stanisław Przybyszewski (1868–1927), Sad Satan, the forerunner of intellectual Satanism, came to Krakow with a few interesting ideas, including those inspired by Manichaeism dualism (cf. Hess 2017, 134, 152–153). His friend, Tadeusz Miciński, who was fascinated with both Sad Satan and the Theosophical Lucifer, would later join the Theosophical Lodge and would travel with Polish and Russian Theosophists to various Theosophical congresses and meetings. Consequently, at that time, the following reached Poland: the works on distant cultures and ancient Egypt, artistic journals on esoteric issues in German, English, Czech, French and other languages as well as Rosicrucian brochures and information on contemporary Zoroastrianism in the

form of Mazdaznan, of which an enigmatic center would come into being later in Warsaw. Additionally, alternative medicine was gaining a growing number of supporters as physical exercises and breathing practices were becoming popular. In 1902, Wincenty Lutosławski (1863–1954) and Joachim Sołtys (1865–1948) established a philosophical-religious society: Eleusis. Thus, Theosophy increasingly fascinated painters and literary people (cf. Hess 2020).

Eventually, this set of ideas reached cities from Krakow through Warsaw to Vilnius and Lviv. When, at the beginning of the 20th century, a famous painter Kazimierz Stabrowski (1869–1929) moved from Krakow to Warsaw just after marrying sculptor Julia Janiszewska (1869–1941), his charisma attracted a group of people associated with art. In the house of this co-founder and newly appointed head of the Warsaw School of Fine Arts, many literary figures appeared including prose writers and poets, as well as other painters, including professors working in the school and their students. Among them, there was a student from a Polish-speaking family who, at the age of thirty, would recognize himself as Lithuanian. Despite his status as a student, his age was similar to the age of his professors, with whom he soon became friends. This was Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis (1875–1911), who started studying painting in Warsaw late, as this was his second passion and educational path as he was already a well-known composer at that time. Here, it is clear that the Stabrowskis' salon was full of artistic inspirations and not limited to visual arts and music. Thus, it was not without reason that it was the meeting point of what Warsaw elites called the "Salon of Initiates" and housed the so called "wild-strawberry tea parties." This curious name referred to the meetings discussing a variety of issues from the borderland of modern sciences to philosophy and art as well as séances, in which the function of mediums was held by different people, including Čiurlionis, for whom that was the first such experience (International Cultural Centre 2015, 232). Moreover, these famous tea parties were attended by the following people: professors of the School of Fine Arts—Ferdynand Ruszczyc (1870–1936) and Konrad Krzyżanowski (1872–1922); Zenon Przesmycki (known as Miriam); Jan Żagiel (the editor of the iconic literary journal *Chimera*, published between 1901 and 1907); and Artur Górski (1870–1959), known as Quasimodo, the literary critic whose series of articles, *Młoda Polska (Young Poland)*, gave a name to the then new current in art and the literary epoch. Additionally, the elite meetings in the Stabrowskis' salon, where Occultism co-occurred with the discussions on the vision of new art, were also attended by poets and novelists such as Bolesław Leśmian, Tadeusz Miciński, Stanisław Wyrzykowski, and Artur Franciszek Michał Oppman—"Or-Ot" (a poet, columnist, and editor of *Wędrowiec (Wanderer)* and later of *Tygodnik Ilustrowany (Illustrated Weekly)*). Further, Stefan Jaracz, an actor, writer and columnist, who in 1930 founded the Ateneum Theatre in Warsaw, was a regular visitor as well. Another interesting guest of the Salon of Initiates was Stanisław Franciszek Michalski, who obtained a doctoral degree in Indian philology a few years later in 1912. This orientalist had already joined the meetings as a student educated both in Warsaw and Vienna. In the interwar period, he became famous as an Indologist and translator of Sanskrit and Pali as he translated parts of the three Hindu scriptures (*Rigveda, Upanishad, and Bhagavad Gita*) as well as the *Buddhist Dhammapada* (cf. Hess, Dulcka 2017, 50).

The Stabrowskis' salon was a place where conversations about, for e.g., literature, music, Indian philosophy, and the Egyptian solar cult (Žūkienė 2015, 24–25) were popular. The guests also often discussed various Theosophical, Occult, and Buddhist ideas as well as magic and Jewish Mysticism, including the Kabbalah (cf. Mažrimienė 2015, 45–46; Andrijauskas 2006, 88). They were compliant with the apocalyptic and historiosophical premonitions, typical in different intellectual environments at the turn of the century. Under the influence of the Young Poland movement, Čiurlionis read Polish philosophers and Vilnius poets such as Mickiewicz, Słowacki, and others. The discussions on the spirituality of the Polish national bards were popular among other frequenters of the salon as well. As Vida Mažrimienė, a Čiurlionis biographer emphasized, at that time, he was interested in the treatise, *Theosophie (Theosophy)* (1904) by Rudolph Steiner and the book *Thought-Forms* by Annie Besant and Charles Lead-

beater (Mażrimienė 2015, 46). Moreover, similar meetings to “wild strawberry tea parties,” which Stabrowski attended, were also organized in Warsaw in the house of Edward Słoński, a poet; here, the medium was the famous Jan Guzik (Hass 1984, 90).

STRUGGLE FOR ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURES

The “wild strawberry tea parties” combined not only the exchange of impressions after reading various texts, talks about Occultism and different religious traditions, mediumistic experiments but also art and literature, the theory of which was developed here. Further, they attracted a growing number of people. Initially, the character of the group was informal, and its composition was subjected to fluctuations, but with the passing of time, the idea emerged of organizing its activity in a more formal manner. Thus, there were organizational ventures aimed at establishing a unit of the Theosophical Society based in Warsaw. Much earlier, Stabrowski had been recognized as an influential organizer, which was largely owing to his position at the School of Fine Arts, which he supervised and founded. Moreover, he also used his connections from Petersburg, which included, among others, a visit card with the signature of the Grand Duke Sergei Alexandrovich (1857–1905) containing a promise of fulfilling the painter’s every wish (Piwocki 1965, 15). However, it turned out that formally establishing an Occult organization was much more difficult than founding an institution of higher education.

Later, Stabrowski himself became an unattached member of the Theosophical Society in its London branch in 1907 (General Register, Vol. III, no. 33441), but mostly kept contact with Russian Theosophists. Formally, there was no Russian section until 1908, therefore one needed to seek affiliation in other countries. With his informal Warsaw organization, Stabrowski supported the Russians’ organizational efforts to establish their national section. As a consequence, several visitors at his salon meetings became members of the newly established Alba Lodge, one of the eight lodges subordinated to the newly founded Russian section (cf. Hess 2015, 58). Yet, this was a smaller number of people when considering the initial scope of the earlier meetings. Here, the following question can be asked: Were the meetings mostly a form of entertainment and did they not trigger interest in an organization of the initiation character? The answer here by any means is no. The reasons for not joining the Alba Lodge were in fact different and often of a political nature, and they were discussed by Stabrowski in mentioned correspondence. Poles did not want to provide mass support for activities authorized by an aggressor and join an organization, which—though assumed to be supranational—was nominally Russian. This resulted in a new initiative, which made use of the Russian experience but formally kept distance from it, to establish the national Polish Theosophical Society. The attempts to formalize its activity were made with the statute based on the Russian document, and the establishing of the Polish section was justified by their success in this respect.

However, this undertaking faced many problems. Although the people involved in the “Salon of Initiates” consisted mostly of important figures in Polish culture, painting, theatre, and literature who were influential and caused the forming of opinions, their involvement in Western Esotericism did not evade criticism and consequences. Specifically, in 1909, Stabrowski resigned from the position as head of the school after a conflict with its management. Here, the center of the conflict, apart from the poor financial management of the school, seemed to be the professor’s problematic commitment to Occultism and his sharing of this fascination with students (Polski Słownik Biograficzny 2002, 276). Undoubtedly, not only the academic staff, but also students took part in the meetings at the Stabrowskis. Yet, this was not approved by the rest of the scholarly environment, which directly criticized him at the cost of his professional

position. The scandal that burst out of those accusations is widely known, and was reported in the press.

A year later, the preparations for the opening of the Polish Theosophical section started in full swing. Stabrowski officially applied for a charter—i.e., the document confirming the recognition of a particular Theosophical unit. Here, it should be noted that separate charters had lodges and national sections. Specifically, Stabrowski asked for the establishment of a Polish Theosophical Society and, while describing it, emphasized the Polish National Society. The documentation of the correspondence with the International Headquarters in Adyar, India, which have been preserved in Poland, is from 1910 (Stabrowski, Kazimierz, and Weigt 1910). Upon reading it, it can be concluded that outside the Alba structures, over fifty declared Theosophists and supporters of this initiative (all associated with Stabrowski) were active in Warsaw. Yet, only twelve were finally enrolled in the Alba Lodge. Here, we can wonder whether Stabrowski's declaration concerning over fifty people can be considered false. However, this is very unlikely, as being aware of the necessity of establishing seven lodges with seven members for the national branch (such were the formal requirements of the Society), Stabrowski immediately sent both the payment for establishing those seven lodges and the data pertaining to their members along with the addresses to Adyar. Nevertheless, in his letter to the treasurer, there is the information that, due to a hurry, some mistakes were made in the addresses (a copy of this list has not been found in the Polish archives). Thus, it is clear that the group of "wild strawberry tea parties" and the people under their influence was steadily growing. However, Poles made one condition concerning the establishment of the national section of the Theosophists to the Indian office: they were to pay their member fees and become rightful members of the organization immediately after their section was approved as they did not want to be subordinated to Russian jurisdiction in the meantime. Here, the contents of Stabrowski's letter are most significant—he openly wrote that Poles entering Russian structures would be treated as Russification (Stabrowski 1910).

However, the awaited consent did not come. Yet, it is impossible not to recognize the existence of the society as it was not only founded in Poland and had status, but was also submitted to international registration. Nevertheless, today, it does not exist in historical studies, though it should be stressed that it was in fact much more developed than Alba. Here, it is highly probable that there were several official and unofficial reasons to account for the organization not being recognized as a national section. One of them was the political situation of Poland and the possible unwillingness of the society (at that stage) to undertake any action of such political significance as establishing a national organization in a non-existing country. It seems that an important argument for the negative decision given to Polish Theosophists was the expected negative reaction of the Russian authorities, who would probably question the legality of further activities of the newly established Russian Theosophical Society. To summarize, the situation of the Polish group was got increasingly complicated as popular beliefs about the Occult damaged Stabrowski's career, and the international organization that was supposed to legitimize the functioning of the national section failed. Further, although we are talking about a group formed by leading writers and artists, which strove to make this side of its activity open and promote it through all possible means, it still remained marginalized.

Nonetheless, Stabrowski, who without a doubt was an efficient organizer, used his skills again in 1912 and succeeded in establishing an officially registered Polish association, the Warsaw Theosophical Society. The activities of the society were focused on meetings and reading mystic and esoteric texts (Hass 1984, 90). In this aspect, the activities did not differ much from those undertaken by the informal group of the Salon of Initiates, yet the process of their recognition lasted for years and met with various obstacles and rejections of formal

legitimization. However, it is worth emphasizing that, for several years, the group centered around Stabrowski actively and unceasingly made efforts to gain recognition.

When Stabrowski's aim was at least partially achieved, the structure of the group was changed as there was a split within the Theosophical Society. Rudolph Steiner, with the majority of the German section, detached from the Theosophical Society and established the Anthroposophical Society. Some Polish Theosophists, among them Stabrowski, who regarded Steiner as an authority right from the beginning, followed him and joined the organization in 1913 (Register n.d., 236–237). The fate of the Warsaw Theosophical Society after that split is not known as no documents about it have been found. Yet, after World War I, some people from Stabrowski's surroundings, for e.g., Zofia Wojnarowska, a member of Alba, were activists of the Polish Theosophical Society, which was initiated by Wanda Dynowska (1888–1971) and registered in the already independent Poland in 1921. And after two years, in 1923, it was recognized by the Theosophical Society as the official national Polish branch.

THE AMBIVALENCE OF THEOSOPHY

Interestingly, to this day, Theosophy in Poland is associated with something spiritual, mystical, and often bizarre on the one hand. While on the other, the Theosophists mentioned here include some of the most famous Polish writers, who were main representatives of Polish positivism, which is a trend in philosophy and literature that is considered to be the most down-to-earth, contrasted with and following the Romantic era of focusing on development—technical, economic, and maybe most of all, cultural. There was an emphasis on education (including counteracting illiteracy) and equal rights as well as combating the exclusion of minorities. In this context, a lack of knowledge of the foundations of the Theosophical worldview—i.e., recognizing the priority of universal fraternity, mutual aid in growth, education, and equal rights irrespective of sex, race, or religion—leads to the bizarre conclusion that these individuals had completely contradictory beliefs and attitudes. Moreover, the layer of “strange” ideas was a religious fragment or a kind of framework allowing for the integration of different beliefs when they suddenly found themselves faced with a multitude of equal worldviews. Theosophy, like New Age more than a century later, was a spiritual way of dealing with the plurality caused by cultural changes. However, this religious aspect is sometimes wrongly viewed as the only, or the most important, layer of Theosophy, even though the only requirement for a new Theosophist was to accept the priority of universal brotherhood.

The problem here, as we see it, is that famous representatives of Polish culture who had associations with Theosophy and who were also active in the field of education or social change, are never considered Theosophists in this context. Specifically, the fight for women's rights is not Theosophical, but only the belief in reincarnation is. Such a view, while marginalizing membership in Theosophical organizations, not only marginalizes the importance of Theosophy itself and distorts the analysis of its reception in Poland, but also completely distorts the motivations of overt activists of this organization. Instead of being at least one of the reasons for such activity, Theosophy becomes a marginal personal quirk, which is not even considered in terms of important cultural fashions; so, there was no reason for them to be mentioned in history and sociology. Consequently, Theosophy in Poland, with an analysis of its impact on culture, has awaited research projects devoted to it for almost a hundred years.

CONCLUSION

Science, religion, and art are undoubtedly arenas of permanent struggle for recognition. Obviously, this includes the ways of social defining change and the specification of what these disciplines are as well as what criteria have to be fulfilled to consider certain activities and their outputs as lying within the borders of a particular discipline. The borders can naturally

be more or less precise. In modern societies, based on far-reaching specialization and the precise marking of limits, combined with the unwillingness towards everything that cannot be easily classified to any of the disciplines (see: Bauman 1991), the existence of the borderland between science, religion, and other phenomena, has become highly contested. Theosophy, Anthroposophy, the phenomenon of New Age (stemming from the Theosophical tradition), as well as many other examples of the knowledge rejected by scientific and religious institutions, has thus become the classical Other—a peculiar stranger in the post-Enlightenment world and a reality pushed into the margins of visibility and specific cultural backgrounds. Moreover, the history of the Theosophical movement in the 19th and 20th century is also the history of constructing peripheralness in the world of modern culture. Without a doubt, the examination of such “peripheral” phenomena is cognitively fruitful not only because it shows the work of the mechanism of gaining or rejecting recognition. In this context, exploring the history of the Polish Theosophical movement forces one to view the history of the Polish elites in the 19th and 20th century in a different way.

The analyzed example shows that in the early 20th century in Poland, Theosophy, despite being promoted by intellectual elites and in the literal and figurative cultural center, was at the same time on the margins and treated as something strange and obscure, or even dangerous. It was exemplified by Stabrowski’s problems related to the allegations of promoting esoteric ideas. On the other hand, the struggle of the Warsaw organization is an example of exceptionally unlucky circumstances that were created by the political, social, and religious conditions at the time, which made free activity impossible. Moreover, this was an activity that fitted into the wider dynamics of the development of the Theosophical Society as an international organization in this part of Europe; after all, in 1907, a Hungarian, in 1908, a Russian, and in 1909, Bohemian sections of the Theosophical Society (at that time, part of the Austria-Hungarian Empire and from 1918, part of Czechoslovakia) were established.

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