



EQUALITY SIGNS

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PLGBT+ 2020

“Is November a dangerous time of year for Poland?” – Wyspiański asks. Does this famous quote from “November Night” also relate to the Polish LGBT+ community? Of course it does, it really does!

We were, are, and will continue to be part of this nation, this homeland, this community. Everyone needs to be reminded of this obvious point, which may be isn't always so obvious. And that's precisely why we organised a poetry, graphic and short story competition for you, to show that Poland is our country as well and that we're an essential part of it. We're going to show you the winning entries in this edition of the newsletter.

Some people will think that publishing a piece of art that celebrates the supposed 50th anniversary of the Polish right wing clearly proves that we're a bit messed up. Nothing of the sort! The image contains a perverse hidden message. We'll leave interpreting and describing it up to you. Meanwhile, we'd like to take the opportunity **to encourage you to take part in our next competition – this time you need to write a short interpretation of the winning image (entries in English will be accepted).** Please send your entries by email to konkurs@znakirownosci.org.pl by 24th January 2021. The winning interpretation will be published in the next edition of the newsletter and the winner will receive a set of LGBT gifts.

Moving on to the poetry entries, we were particularly taken by Agnieszka Frankowska's piece, which contains a reference to one of Polish literature's most famous lesbians, Maria Konopnicka. The poem is dedicated, among others, to valiant Pietrek or Maria Komornicka (alias Piotr Włast), a transgender writer who came out publicly and particularly theatrically in 1907.

In the short prose category the jury was impressed by Maciej Gośniowski's story (also known as Gaśiu). The author plays in a perverse way with the fears that queer culture engenders among those who move in so called nationalist circles. The colloquial, frequently vulgar language aptly reflects the world of the main character.

Author: Agnieszka Frankowska

Eljeebeetee independence

We won't step into the coffin alive.

/Maria Konopnicka

The crime drags on

from generation to generation

I go out into the street

to win back little Mary, the orphan

and other queers from fairy tales

the sun will not unsee

what it has seen

as it bows and wishes

Valiant Pietrek and Mary

a shared grave

/L. Poetess

One dark November night

Maciej “Gaśiu” Gośniowski

One dark November night

[a short story]

I heard the sound of tape being torn and a loud crack. I opened my eyes and saw it: a being with a diabolic gaze, its facial features highlighted with a sharp bold line, with elongated nostrils, a smile as black as tar and some silver tape on its teeth which had been torn so as to be perfectly perpendicular. The hand of this figure started to move gradually towards my crotch, but – chained to the chair – I couldn't do anything.

10.11

– Hi mate, are you going to the march tomorrow? – I heard through my Motorola. I used to have an iPhone but I swapped it with my sister because Motorolas are supposed to be gay. Marta's 17 and has been hanging out with some hot chick. I have nothing against lesbians, I even think it's cool. Basically I'd rather another girl gave her a good fingering than some poof sticking his needy dick in her.

– Sure, just say where and what time, Beaver – I answer. He's a good guy, but he got this nickname coz apparently he went down on his own mother once while pissed. I'd rather not know, I don't ask. On the other hand, once he bought some jeans at Zara and went off poncing around the town like some poof. Anything's possible with this dude.

– I'll send you a text later.

– A text? Fuck, you sound like you've been watching too much MTV. OK, I'll be waiting.

I hung up. I'm a bit suspicious of this guy. Once we started following some bloke down Marszałkowska Street – because he looked like a total twat – and, out of breath, Beaver said that basically he had nothing against gays. We shouted “Fuck, well perhaps you'd like to cum in a hairy cunt, yeah?” He said no, that's just the way it is. Basically, what they do to us... We started yelling until we couldn't be arsed to chase after that Marszałkowska twat any more.

– What the fuck, Beaver? What are you on about? We're supposed to hate gays.

– Well ... yeah. But what about chicks? Them too?

We looked at each other. Well it's dum to hit chicks, but basically, if it means there'll be more of that, we should smash them in the face as well. Maybe if they feel a man whack them, then that'll put an end to all this lezzer business. Though it would be a bit of a shame, coz two fannies together is never a bad thing.

Anyway, fuck Beaver. I clambered out of bed, it was 22.00. I'd finished work and had a nap. In fact, I could do with a walk, it would clear my head before morning. I still had to buy a red and white smoke machine and iron my arm band. After all, this festival, our patriotic one, is only once a year. But fuck that. I took my RED IS BAD tracksuit out the wardrobe and looked at it, it was clean and smart. “But no, maybe not, I'll leave it for tomorrow.” I put some trainers on. My fags in my pocket, though I'd promised myself I'd give up. Apparently fags make your dick shrink. But

we'll see, an evening of cigarettes is a good thing. I leave the stairwell. A little frost gathers under my nose. The boys from Wola have disappeared, but it doesn't matter, they're looking forward to tomorrow. We know that.

Zajeżdźnia Wola stop

I've been walking for several hours. I can never sleep before the march. I imagine myself being pulled up on to the podium and shouting into the microphone "GAYS SHOULD BE BANNED". That's never happened, but shit, it would be awesome.

The streets are empty, I hold my mask to my chin with my left hand in case the fifth drive past. I light up my fag just by Tesco. I take a deep breath. My hood has slipped over my eyes and the smoke has obscured my vision. Out of the corner of my eye I see a figure standing at the stop. Rather broad shoulders, blonde hair, about two metres tall. This person's standing facing my direction. I can't see because of the smoke, so I wave my hand. Nothing. There's no one at the stop. I look at my watch, it's 02.00. "Fuck me" are the only words that come to my mind. I slightly shat myself with fright, coz someone had been standing at the stop. I took my fag out my mouth and chucked it in a bin. It crossed my mind that I should probably fuck off home. I grabbed hold of my hood to straighten it and my blood turned cold. Under my hand I felt a coarse scratchy bundle. I took it and looked at it. It was a ball of dry blonde hair. I jumped back and chucked the dead fibres away from me. I knocked into the rubbish bin behind me and fell flat on my back. What I saw threw me completely. Right above me, a figure was hanging

upside down from the roof above a shop window. It was wearing black high-heeled boots, which it must have been using to cling on to the roof, from the boots there extended muscly though smooth and shiny legs, which led up to a pair of light-blue frayed jeans shorts. At the waist it was wearing a black corset which some colourful jewels had been sewn on to carelessly. It had a bare man's chest and the nipples were pierced through the middle with round rings. It seemed that the figure was hanging there completely straight, defying any sort of gravity. The only things that gave away that this figure was upside down were a short jeans jacket that was slipping off its shoulders and its loose blonde hair that was hanging above my head. But the most terrifying thing was the face. Strong, masculine features covered with exaggerated dark, though entirely woman's make-up. Pink eyes with eyelash extensions and black lips that were moving all the time as it chewed.

— Boo — it said in a deep man's voice, and another bundle of dry blonde hair fell out of its mouth. I wanted to run away as fast as possible, but my body refused to obey me. I lay there paralysed, while the suspended figure took a few steps in the air and, as if coming down some steps, descended to the ground. It grabbed me by the back of the head, revealing fingers tipped with longish dark-violet nails. It dug them into my the base of my skull and lifted my head up. As it looked into my eyes it started to move its terrifying smiling face towards my throat. It moved its hand forwards from the back of my head and invaded my face. As I unconsciously closed my eyes I felt its moist tongue on my Adam's apple.

Ideology

I heard the sound of tape being torn and a loud crack. I opened my eyes and saw it: the being that had been hanging from the canopy, with a diabolic gaze, its facial features highlighted with a sharp bold line, with elongated nostrils, a smile as black as tar and some silver tape on its teeth which had been torn so as to be perfectly perpendicular. The hand of this figure started to move gradually towards my crotch, but chained to the chair I couldn't do anything. It bent down, revealing a mirror that was being held by two monstrosities that were similar to it: one tall in a red skirt with a strong, woman's build and contrasting hands and chest, which were hairy like a man's, and the other — smaller, with more delicate features but a brocade beard stuck to its face. The room was dark, although there were lights of different colours. A rhythmic, trance bass vibrated through my body, the music was narcotic, some sort of hardcore techno. The sound was muffled, as if it were coming from another room. I sat on the edge of the chair, in such a way that my genitalia dangled, although actually — looking at my reflection in the mirror — I was starting to see myself as a woman. I could see myself with long red hair, a perfectly made up face with deep brown shading and bright, full and shiny beige lips. I felt beautiful. The gloomy figure with the tape grabbed my testicles and pulled them back between my thighs.

— You're becoming one of us. — At these words it stuck some tape to my crotch and started to cover up what had previously been so precious to me. I felt that I was becoming special and strong.

— It was 11.11 and I felt I was myself.

Maciej „Gąsior” Gośniowski

#Together



None of us has any doubt that engaging in activism together is an important value, and helping those who need it is a value that cannot be described, even in a novel of several volumes.

The Tęczówka association from Katowice is an NGO that works for LGBT+ people. The main aim of its members is to ensure that support in a broad sense, both counselling and legal support, is available to lesbians, gay men, bisexual people, transsexual people, and everyone else who identifies as non-heteronormative. Tęczówka also organises support groups and events whose main purpose is integration, for strength lies in doing our bit for society together, as a team.

Silesia's Tęczówka has been in operation for over eight years. They've organised three pride marches, they hold four regular meetings, they've conducted countless counselling sessions and legal consultations, and they've seen through numerous projects, smaller and larger ones. You can support the association in various ways, including by signing up to the Tęczówka newsletter, by becoming a volunteer or by making a donation, for example to the psychological support fund "Od wstydu poMOC" at Zrzutka.pl.

Every type of support is important for those who work for the organisation and the people they help. The people from Tęczówka work together with professionals in their fields, from education, through legal support, to counselling and therapy, so that they are able to inform and effectively help everyone who approaches the organisation. This is possible thanks to their allies and financial help, as well as private individuals. So Tęczówka operates because of people and for people. As the association's mission statement says: "We are different ages, we come from different places, we have various stories to tell, yet we work together every day to make life better".

See people from the association in action and read about the areas of their activism work at teczowka.org.pl.



At DOM EQ we also now have a legal team!

A legal team has been working for the Equals Signs Federation for six months. The allies that it brings together provide legal aid to those who need it, legal support for the federation's member organisations and also conduct what can be broadly defined as advocacy work in order to promote LGBT+ rights, starting with full equality. Currently the team is made up of seven people who in their free time share their knowledge and experience and try to help others.

What does the legal team do?

- It helps in times of need

Over the last six months we have already managed to provide help to several people who found themselves in a difficult legal situation, for example conducting proceedings to change someone's gender designation, advising a victim of discrimination in the workplace, writing a notification of a suspected criminal offence or accompanying a person during a police interview.

- It opposes the exclusion of LGBT+ people from local communities

We played an active role in proceedings at the Voivodeship Administrative Court in Gliwice, as a result of which in an unprecedented judgement the court declared Istebna Parish Council's resolution to put a stop to "LGBT ideology" invalid - this is the first judgement of its kind in Poland(!) We are currently involved in two similar cases in the south of Poland, and have also put together a petition to repeal a resolution of the Local Council of the Voivodeship of Lesser Poland that opposes "LGBT ideology".

- It protects the legal interests of LGBT+ people here and now

We've prepared a set of documents for all couples who would like to secure their legal situation and protect their relationship by signing an agreement and giving their partner power of attorney.

- It fights for a better future, equality and tolerance

We provided an opinion on a civil partnership and a marriage equality bill.

- It supports DOM EQ and member organisations

We help our organisations to continue to function and we give advice where we can, and where it's essential.

The aims of our legal team are very simple: we help others and work together to protect LGBT+ people in Poland and guarantee them equal rights and civic freedoms.

If you're a lawyer or are simply interested in law, have interesting ideas, a little free time and want to help us - we're waiting for you! Don't put it off any longer! Send us an email today: kontakt@znakirownosci.org.pl and get involved in the work of our legal team!

But if you have legal problems that you can't cope with yourself, or need help, but don't know who to ask or are afraid of being met with a lack of understanding for your problem, or if you are the victim of discrimination or violence on the grounds of your gender, identity or sexuality - get in touch with us! Describe your situation briefly in an email and send it to kontakt@znakirownosci.org.pl, and our legal team will definitely respond to your message, telling you whether and how they can help you.

Simply ask and come



Counselling at the DOM EQ equality centre

DOM EQ was created for the LGBTQ+ community to support, help and bring people together. That's why an essential element of our work and strategy is our counselling team. At present the team is developing rapidly and lots of people take advantage of our consultations.

Who makes up the team? What principles do we operate on? Who is our help intended for? How can you book a consultation? Answers below :)

The counselling team consists of two components. The first is made up of volunteers — mostly psychology students or graduates. They focus mostly on the worthwhile task of developing people's soft skills. These volunteers hold training sessions, lead workshops for visitors to the centre and share their knowledge.

The other element is made up of people who provide direct counselling in the form of individual consultations. The people in this group have counselling qualifications. They are all either undergoing specialist training, have already qualified as counsellors or have at least two years' experience working with clients. Currently the team is made up of eight counsellors.

Do you want to talk through your problems? Contact us!

- If you're interested in counselling support send an email to wsparcie@znakirownosci.org.pl and briefly describe your situation and main problem.
- We'll use your message to select a suitable person to help you and a course of action — emergency assistance, intervention or a therapy option.
- If necessary, after two free consultations the counsellor will refer the client for further therapy and will help him/her to choose the best path*.

Our meetings have a permanent time: they take place on Fridays

The pandemic has shown online consultations to be effective. At present they take place on Skype. A great advantage of e-meetings with a counsellor is that our timetable is flexible, so we are able to offer prospective clients more convenient times. Precisely for this reason, despite the fact that the restrictions have been lifted, we are continuing to provide consultations both face-to-face and online. It's worth knowing that e-sessions are more suited to emergency assistance than for therapy. So online consultations are not an adequate form of contact for those seeking help and psychological support.

All of DOM EQ's work is carried out on a voluntary basis. People devote their free time to improving the situation of non-heterosexual people. Therefore we cannot respond to emails immediately. The person receives an automatic message with the telephone number of the Crisis Intervention Centre and which also tells them that a counsellor will contact them within 24 hours.

* Important information: the counselling team will not suggest surgeries where you can continue your therapy and will not refer you to specific people. This choice is up to the client.

At the Krakow Equality Centre we provide counselling for LGBTQ+ people with all sorts of difficulties and problems.

People contact us who need to support before and after coming out, as well as advice about how to go about this process. Parents too, who have issues with accepting their child's sexuality or gender identity. Transsexual people contact us who require advice concerning diagnosis and transition from a medical and legal point of view. Furthermore, our team supports people who feel the effects of homo-, bi- and transphobia.

Consultations are not only intended for non-heterosexual people who are struggling with the emotional and psychological consequences of belonging to the gender, sexual and relationship diverse (GSRD) minority. We are also contacted by various couples and people who are separated from their partners and are looking for support. During lockdown we often helped people with various depressive disorders, anxiety and personality disorders because due to the pandemic they couldn't continue their normal therapy and needed support in order to function in their everyday lives.

Let's come together! Let's work together!

The counselling team from DOMEQ equality centre is in touch with the Krakow Crisis Intervention Centre. Gender identity training sessions at CIC are in the pipeline. This centre is also going to give us training in crisis intervention. Passing on both our knowledge and experience is important to our team, so we conduct internal training sessions on gender diversity and work with young people and children.

We are also planning to start working together with the police in order to set up a contact point which LGBTQ+ people can turn to without fear of being treated unfairly.

The team of counsellors at the Krakow Equality Centre includes people who specialise in various areas of work, consultations and therapy. **If you feel the need to meet a mental health expert and discuss personal matters that are difficult for you at an online session — don't hesitate to contact us**

How to support us?

- You may send one-time money transfer or you may define a standing transfer order using the following bank account:
IBAN: PL 61 1140 2004 0000 3602 7836 7437

Bank transfer details for donations:
Federacja Znaki Równości
ul. Czyżowska 43, 30-526 Kraków, Poland

mBank S.A.
SWIFT/BIC: BREXPLWXXX

- We also use the following crowd funding platforms:

Patronite:
<https://patronite.pl/domeq>

Zrzutka.pl:
<https://zrzutka.pl/dam35v>