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**Summary of a doctoral dissertation titled:  
THE LITERARY WORK OF ANNA FRAJLICH**

Anna Frajllich is a Polish poet of Jewish descent, who left Poland in 1969 during what is known as the March Emigration. For the past 48 years she has lived and worked in the United States. She is the author of ten volumes of poetry, prose miniatures, diaries, essays and letters. Her work began to be published in Poland following the political transformations of the late 1980s and early 1990s. Polish journals for which she has written and continues to write include *Akcent*, *Dekada Literacka*, *Migotania*, *Przekrój*, *Gazeta Wyborcza* and *Tygodnik Powszechny*. In the US she has been associated principally with the London-based *Wiadomości* and the Parisian *Kultura*, as well as the publishing house of Stanisław Gliwa and Polish-language titles such as *Tydzień Polski*.

Frajlich's work, rich in terms of both genres and subject matter, has not yet been the subject of a comprehensive study, and the vast quantity of critical and press material concerning her has remained in need of systematic analysis. It is intended that this dissertation should fill that gap. The work is a monograph which considers all of the literary genres represented in Frajllich's output. Analyses and conclusions are presented topic by topic. What is revealed above all is the strong link between her life and her literature. The Holocaust and exile, which have proved the most significant experiences in the poet's life, form the basis of the main areas addressed here: memory and identity. The dissertation is interdisciplinary in nature. Frajllich's work is analysed using, among others, the concepts of nomadism, emigration, biography and autobiography, postmemory, autobiographical places and spaces, identity and memory. Reference is also made to existential philosophy, and use is made of the assumptions of somaesthetics and body-centrism. My findings are also significantly influenced by Jung's theory of archetypes, anthropology (in revealing the relations between nature and culture), Hayden White's theory of tropes, Roman Ingarden's concretion theory, and strategies of silence. The analysis is further enriched by the voice of Frajllich herself and the correspondence that I have conducted with her.

The complex life story of Anna Frajllich can be divided into several stages. In the first chapter, titled "Life Geography and Areas of Creativity", I show that the first significant place in the poet's biography is Kyrgyzstan, where she was born. The second is Szczecin, the city

where the future émigrée spent her childhood and youth, and where she formed her early identity. In this area, though indicating the similarities between Frajlich's work and that of Józef Wittlin and Józef Łobodowski, I demonstrate above all her originality. The memories recalled in her work are marked by a clear division between the times before and after her emigration. The third significant place is Warsaw – the city where the future poet entered adulthood, but also the place where on the door of her flat “stupid cruelty directed the hand writing on it words of anti-Semitic abuse”.<sup>1</sup> The exile of 1969 caused Frajlich to travel to further new places – first to Vienna and Rome, and finally to New York, where she still lives today. She initially found this world capital to be foreign and hostile, but over time she became accustomed to it and accepted it. The viewing of Anna Frajlich's creative work through the lens of its geographical connections demonstrates how her life story turned into an autobiography.

In the second chapter, “Poetic Pictures of Places”, Frajlich's literary “places” are shown to have a real connection to her life story. In analysing this aspect of her output, I use the classification of autobiographical places proposed by Małgorzata Czermińska. Thus Szczecin is described as a recalled autobiographical place of fixed character, whose memory was seen by the poet as guaranteeing a feeling of safety and stability. Other places in Poland from the pre-emigration period in her life I define as recalled lost places. New York was seen for many years by Frajlich (and by the heroine of her works) as a temporary place, where she felt spiritually homeless. Only when she became accustomed to that city did it provide again a sense of stabilisation and safety. Her acceptance of her new home, in combination with her strong bond with her motherland, is an example of the “third value” attitude formulated by Danuta Mostwin, and close also to the ideas of Kazimierz Wierzyński. The third space of Frajlich's autobiographical places is Lviv. I study the family's history against the backdrop of that city, applying the postmemory theory of Marianne Hirsch. I thus show the link between family experiences and geography as a mediated space, and reveal this part of Frajlich's work as a literary homage to her family and to the nameless victims of the Holocaust.

In the third chapter, “Composition of the Whole”, I attempt to show how the poet builds and welds her dismembered identity from three equal components: Jewish, Polish and American. A kind of completion of her multi-layered identity is provided by her journey to Kyrgyzstan. In constructing herself in her work, she also reveals her relations with others. It is

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<sup>1</sup> This apt description of the act of vandalism was given by Wojciech Ligeza. See his article “Lampa w oknie” (“The lamp in the window”), *Rzeczpospolita*, 2 August 2000, p. E5.

existence with and for other people – family, friends, colleagues and literary authorities – that enables her fully to construct herself, to order her life history and in some way to accept it. Having experienced exile, the poet shows that self-realisation is possible even in such a position. The émigrée composes her identity also through her literary presentation of a picture of herself as creator and of an individual existence, as I discuss in a subchapter titled “The Poet’s Self-Identification”.

Memory is the basis for my fourth chapter, “Coming to Know the World”. I show here how the fallibility of memory may cause difficulties in becoming acquainted with the world. While it lives on, however, it sustains painful recollections which make the recognised world seem “wounded”, cruel and unpredictable, on both general and personal levels. Memory of the departed produces yet another picture of the world, a reality at whose base lies the experience of missing something. A further section of the dissertation, “Sensuality and Biologism”, presents the process of becoming acquainted with reality at the most fundamental level – the physical. In this regard, there emerges from Frajlich’s poetry a picture of a human being as an entity both spiritual and physical, getting to know the world through the senses. I show that in the recognition and unmasking of the hidden rules of the functioning of the body, particularly the female one, Frajlich’s work resembles that of Halina Poświatowska and Anna Świrszczyńska. Another way of getting to know the world, featuring in the studied body of work, is through dreams. In the subchapter “Onirism as Archetype of Cognition” I show how this motif may serve as a means of learning what is inside a person. The lyrical “I” of this poetry, thanks to the poetics of dreams, defines its emotional states, analyses the past and attaches values to events.

The subject of the fifth chapter, “The Person in Relation to the World and Culture”, is the poet’s attitude to the reality that surrounds her: everyday existence, attitudes to history and art, and strategies of silence. The analysis of the revealed experience of everyday life shows it to be founded on relations with other people: family, colleagues in professional and literary circles, but also the Unknown Other, which finds itself in a difficult position. It is shared experiences that impart a constancy to existence and provide security. Almost like an anthropologist, the poet discovers in the apparently mundane some important rules governing human destiny. Frajlich’s work is a dialogue with art – with painting, sculpture, music and film. For an aware participant in cultural life, a work of art is a stimulus for the creation of a work of literature. Another aspect of life to which Frajlich’s heroine adopts an attitude is history. This part of her literary work is studied primarily from the perspective of her Jewish background. Its heroine speaks both as a representative of a generation, and as an individual

being. She gives expression to her worries, to the place of human beings in historical mechanisms, and ponders the causes of armed conflicts, the goals of revolution and the existence of societies. In the subchapter “(Meaningful) Silence Towards the World” the poet is shown to use a strategy of silence to expose topics and content that are particularly difficult for her: exile, death, the Holocaust, interpersonal relations. This group of works is marked by things left unsaid, by silence, the balancing of words, subtlety, and graphical marks of the omission of words; these go to make up a strategy for the expression of pain.

Nature appears in Frajlich’s works as a kind of shelter from the cruelties of the world. In view of the large number and diversity of the motifs related to nature featured in her work, I devote to them a separate, final chapter, titled “Towards Nature”. In the first part I show how the details of nature – a single plant, flowers, grass, grains, buds, wild fruits, together with the seasons that provide their backdrop – are symbols representing the most important problems addressed in these works: exile, the putting down of roots, passing and death. A separate and much developed motif is that of the tree, to which I devote a subchapter. The tree as a symbol takes on a variety of meanings: it represents safety, constancy and rootedness, assimilation, but it can also symbolise tearing apart. Love is another thematic domain to which I give separate treatment. The poet expresses this feeling chiefly with the use of the rather popular symbolism of flowers – their stages of development, colours and scents. Frajlich’s love poetry is close to that of Konstanty Ildefons Gałczyński and Maria Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska. The heroine of these works is a woman who engages in creative thought about the human – and particularly female – psyche. In a simple but original style, the poet recreates different stages of the feeling; the distinguishing features of her work are the emotional element and the form of expression. The subchapter “Landscapes Painted in the Language of the Elements” describes pictures of nature which, against a background of elemental forces, symbolise the exile’s condition: the assimilation of painful experiences, acceptance of a new place of living, and finally a feeling of belonging. A further section is titled “Aquatic Motifs”. The boat and the harbour – symbols of settling down, her “anchoring” in the “New York harbour”<sup>2</sup> – are characteristic elements of Frajlich’s post-emigration life story. The juxtaposition of fire and water in these works becomes

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<sup>2</sup> This figurative description is due to Kazimierz Adamczyk. See his chapter “Nowojorska przystań Anny Frajlich” [“Anna Frajlich’s New York harbour”], in *“Tu jestem/zamieszkuje własne życie”. Studia i szkice o twórczości Anny Frajlich*, Wojciech Ligęza, Jolanta Pasterska (eds.), Jagiellonian University, Rzeszów University, Wydawnictwo Księgarnia Akademicka, Kraków 2018, pp. 235–248.

a representation of human spirituality. Wind is another form of elemental force that appears in considerations concerning nature. Symbolising inconstancy, periodicity and unpredictability, it serves as an expression of the émigrée's spiritual instability. With time the function of its imagery is reversed: motion ensures fresh air, dynamism and development. I end the chapter – and the dissertation as a whole – with a consideration of the relation of nature to culture. The heroine of works in this domain addresses the issue of technological development, which stands in contrast to nature, and shows the role that nature plays with respect to humanity.

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The complex turns of life, in particular the experience of expulsion and life in exile, have given a decisive shape to Anna Frajlich's work. It is characteristic that the multi-layered personal identity reveals the poet as someone who, with the passing of the years, has worked over the trauma of exile and transformed it into an enriching experience. Her writing can be viewed similarly, in spite of the many experiences that are far removed from pathos and feelings of hurt. Her work is strongly rooted in reality, while understanding the complexity of human spirituality; it is concentrated on herself, but also sensitive to other, often weaker, people. It is rooted in history, but capable of discerning the details of everyday life. It assumes a friendly attitude to the surrounding reality – reacting to changes, but not forgetting about those timeless values that belong to all of humanity.

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