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# Is the Place of Women in Neo-Sarmatian Social Hierarchy Always Below Men? On the Example of Borderland She-Wolves in the Prose of Jacek Komuda, Andrzej Pilipiuk and Others\*

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**ABSTRACT:** The article analyzes the characters of Borderland she-wolves in the context of Neo-Sarmatian literature in the novels by such authors as Jacek Komuda or Andrzej Pilipiuk. Borderland she-wolves, inspired by the image of strong independent women living in the border lands of the Eastern part of the Commonwealth constitute an interesting element of literary Neo-Sarmatism. The study analyzes how these characters are inscribed into the hierarchy that reflects the vision of social structure created by the radical right-wing Neo-Sarmatians. Due to the ability for self-determination, which carries out the libertarian principle of self-ownership and a particular sense of honor, expressed in the obligation to fight in an open manner, worthy of a well-born person, Borderland she-wolves can take a place at the top of the social ladder, together with the Cossacks or the noblemen. This also demonstrates that it is impossible to talk about women in Neo-Sarmatian writing as about a homogeneous group. Similarly to men, they are divided into sub-groups which – depending on the features displayed by their representatives – can take up higher or lower positions in social hierarchy determined by honor and the principle of self-ownership.

**KEYWORDS:** Neo-Sarmatism, Borderland she-wolf, radical right-wing, Jacek Komuda, Andrzej Pilipiuk

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## Introduction

A night somewhere in the province, Poland of the 17th century. A furious crowd armed with torches breaks down the doors of an inn, behind which a twenty-year-old noble woman is hiding. The woman, however, puts up resistance – fighting with a saber, she cuts a road out for herself... This description summarizes a scene from Andrzej Pilipiuk's novel *Kuzynki* [*Cousins*] (Pilipiuk 2018a: 30–31). On the surface, there is nothing unusual about it. However, after taking a closer look at its context – and especially the literary genre represented by the novels it features in – it is impossible to pass it by indifferently. In the present article I would like to showcase what is unusual in the figures of Borderland she-wolves in Polish Neo-Sarmatian literature, as well as what the appearance of female characters of this kind can tell us about the authors of the novels belonging to this trend, that is, about Neo-Sarmatians.

What, however, is the aforementioned Neo-Sarmatism? In the simplest approach, this trend consists of works that, one way or another, refer to Polish nobility of the Pre-Partition period: from the 16th to the 18th century, although the authors most frequently touch upon the 17th century. According to Obremski (1995: 122), Sarmatism was the worldview<sup>1</sup> of nobility that assumed its representatives to realize the Sarmatian personal model – connecting within it land-owning (as a nobleman made his living by selling the yield of his land) and knightly (as he had to defend the Commonwealth) approaches. Both these approaches were subordinated to overriding values, namely, faith and nobility. It is worth adding that Sarmatism is a subject present over several decades of Polish academic discourse, as it has been written about by such scholars as, e.g., Janusz Maciejewski (1974)<sup>2</sup>, Jakub Niedźwiedź (2015)<sup>3</sup> or Maciej Parkitny (2018)<sup>4</sup>. Additionally, some works written about Neo-Sarmatism cannot be de-

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1 The scholar defines “worldview” as a set of convictions that, in the eye of its proponents, create a complete image of reality together with the assessments and norms connected therewith that motivate behavior of an individual (Obremski 1995: 122); the construction of a worldview may be expressed directly by its proponents or described by scholars on the basis of various sources (including written ones). In a novel, a worldview consists of what is inscribed into the given text, creating a “superimposed” order” (Eile 1973: 5), in which the author’s judgments concerning the world and reality become visible and make it possible to formulate particular postulates.

2 He believed that the Sarmatian myth (assuming that a tribe of Sarmatians arrived in the future territory of the Commonwealth in antiquity and mixed with Slavs) connected states (townspeople and nobles) and nationalities (Poles, Lithuanians, Russians), confirming their belief that they all have common ancestors. Maciejewski also assumed that the geographic location of the Commonwealth was key to the formation of Sarmatian culture, as it was situated between the East, the West and the Orient, making it possible to draw on cultural models of these three areas.

3 According to whom, Sarmatism is a creation of scholars trying to study Pre-Partition noble culture.

4 He drew attention to the fact that Sarmatism did not compete with the Enlightenment but, rather, co-existed with it, creating Enlightened Sarmatism (as a result of a conjoining between philosophy of the Enlightenment and Sarmatism), as well as Sarmatian Enlightenment (whose expression was the transposition of ideals of the Enlightenment to noble culture).

scribed as objective, such as Janusz Tazbir's (1978)<sup>5</sup>, in whose texts can be found elements of socialist propaganda, or Jacek Kowalski's (2006)<sup>6</sup>, actively engaged both in overthrowing negative myths about Sarmatism, and in maintaining positive ones.

Various authors have referred to Sarmatism in their bodies of work over the course of centuries; however, due to spatial limitations, I will focus on contemporary references to this culture. The phenomenon has been studied by Paweł Bohuszewicz, who states that it is “a reference to Sarmatian cultural formation whose aim is to construct one's own and collective identity” (Bohuszewicz 2011: 99), and that “[Neo-Sarmatism – S. T.] constitutes a conscious choice of inscribing the action one undertakes into a system of signs referring to noble cultural heritage” (Bohuszewicz 2011: 77). In their works, Neo-Sarmatians, including the authors of the texts to be analyzed herein, use those elements of Sarmatian cultural formation they have chosen themselves – and the way they do so is not accidental. Indeed, these are fragments of noble culture that are, above all, particularly close to the authors (that is, correspond to their worldview – to be discussed in more detail later in the present article). Against the backdrop of specific works, the audience (as well as the creators) can build (or perhaps: strengthen) their own identities, based on imaginary visions concerning Sarmatian nobility.

I have already mentioned Borderland she-wolves, and thus, it would be necessary to explain who they were. It is Józef Apolinary Rolle (1883) who was responsible for creating the myth of the Borderland woman: a noblewoman who, during the existence of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, lives in the vicinity of troubled, war-torn South-Eastern borders of the Commonwealth. According to Rolle, a she-wolf was supposedly vastly different from women coming from other territories – with regard to both her mental and physical aspects. As Maria Korybut-Marciniak (2023: 179) points out, in Rolle's oeuvre Borderland she-wolves are masculinized women, endowed with characteristics seen as masculine, among which the scholar lists: strength, independence, ability to make one's own decisions, ability to fight and ride horses, or cruelty. Therefore, due to the dangers that the Borderlands were rich in, the she-wolves were supposed to be women who openly enter masculine social roles while, simultaneously, not losing their femininity. This type of a heroine is also attractive to contemporary Neo-Sarmatian creators.

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5 Tazbir wrote that Sarmatism was the peak form of defense of the political system of the Commonwealth (noble democracy, in which nobility enjoys numerous privileges, such as the possibility of electing the monarch), the representatives of noble culture as such were supposedly xenophobically closed towards all ideas coming from the abroad or attempts at introducing any kinds of changes.

6 He considered “Sarmatian” to denote everything that surrounded a nobleman during the existence of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth: thus, an expression of *sarmackość* (as he refers to Sarmatism) was art, music, literature, architecture, clothes, weapons and all other things one could encounter in Poland and Lithuania.

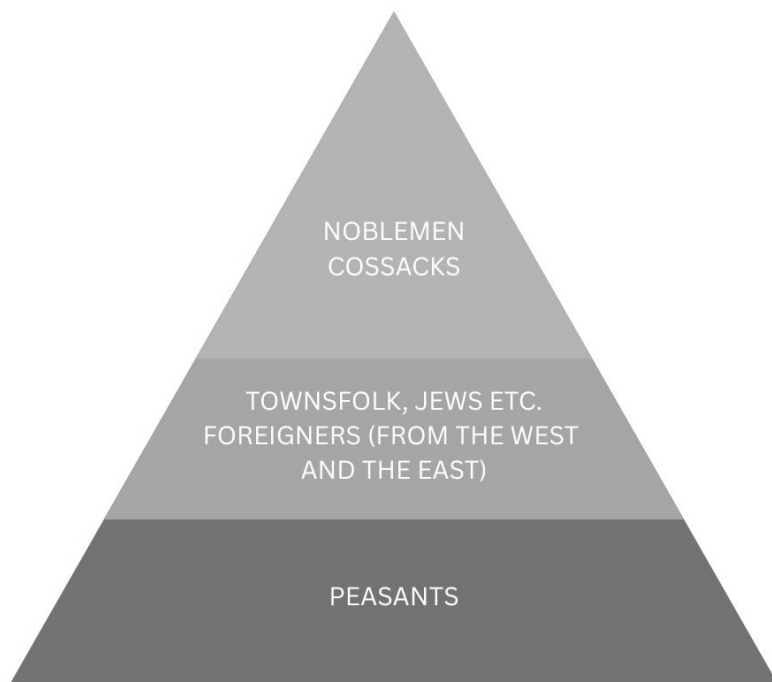
## The Hierarchic Nature of Society in Neo-Sarmatian Radical Right-Wing Narratives

There is no doubt that Neo-Sarmatism is a diverse trend. This is pointed out by Paweł Bohuszewicz (2021: 79), who introduces a two-level division of the phenomenon. Firstly, it could be divided into two large and non-competing sets: one post-colonial<sup>7</sup> and one right-wing. Subsequently, at a lower level, the trend would be divided into further sub-sets (Bohuszewicz lists, e.g., anarchic Neo-Sarmatism) which are not permanently assigned to overriding categories, and can enter into relations with any of the two overriding sets (that is, some of the works belonging to a given sub-set can be seen as belonging to right-wing Neo-Sarmatism, while some others – to the postcolonial one). It is also worth noting that these groups are motivated by political reasons (that is, they are based on worldviews inscribed into particular texts of Neo-Sarmatian literature). The works I am analyzing in my article all belong to a trend I would call radical right-wing Neo-Sarmatism (which, obviously, is included into a larger set, namely, right-wing Neo-Sarmatism). It would be closely connected with the political formation of the radical right. In its description I will draw on the conclusions made by Leszek Szczegółła (2020: 73–86), Dominika Kasprówicz (2017: 17–67) and Tomasz Bojarowicz (2013: 53). These scholars note that the set of ideas propagated by groups of the radical right may appear – when one looks from the outside of this worldview – inconsistent, which results from them drawing on the achievements of other political trends. These borrowed ideas will be subordinated to achieving a certain political goal<sup>8</sup>. The writers creating within the trend under discussion will borrow certain ideas from libertarian thought (the principle of self-determination, considering individual liberty to be the overriding value), reactionary thought (the need to re-create what had already stopped functioning but used to be of value – in the case

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7 There is a debate in Poland concerning whether one can talk about post-dependency, that is, legacy from the period of dependency from partitioning countries or the USSR (Gosk 2014), or about post-colonialism. Ewa Thompson (2011) favors the latter term, arguing that although the situation of Poland was different than in the case of African or Asian countries (e.g. there was no sea barrier separating the colonized from the colonizer; the national language was retained; the leaders ruling on behalf of foreign empires were of Polish origin, etc.), given the overall mechanisms (loss of prestige in the international arena; decisions concerning the country being made outside its borders and benefiting not the citizens, but foreign empires; cultural and economic collapse), one should consider that we are dealing here with post-colonial relations. In the context of noble culture, Thompson (2011: 301) additionally states that “the originality of Polish culture is based on the fact that over two centuries ago what was called, in brief, ‘Sarmatism’ was ‘raped’ by stronger neighbors and, despite this fact, would constantly be revived in texts literary and non-literary, and in social life. This originality becomes completely blurred if we put it in the shallow waters of ‘dependency’”.

8 As it seems, it would consist in re-creating the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth: however, not in reality as such, but, rather, in the minds of people engaged in this trend. They would subsequently be able to create new nobility – elite of Polish society, based on ideas drawn from noble culture. Jacek Komuda mentions the project of creating new nobility in one of his interviews (Księski 2009); I also had an opportunity to talk about this with Michał Mochocki, one of the creators of the *Dzikię Pola* RPG, during our meeting in March 2025.



**Picture 1:** Social groups in the radical right-wing Neo-Sarmatian writing. Source: designed by S.T.

of Neo-Sarmatism, this is nobility culture) or conservative one (attachment to a hierarchical structure of society)<sup>9</sup>. Therefore, as can be noticed, the worldview of radical Neo-Sarmatians will be a conflagration of consciously chosen ideas derived from various political trends, connected by a common denominator: achieving a particular goal.

For the purposes of my article, the last of the aforementioned elements included in the radical right-wing Neo-Sarmatian discourse, that is, attachment to social hierarchy, will be the most significant. An analysis of texts of such authors as Jacek Komuda (2010, 2009, 2011, 2013, 2017), Jacek Pilipiuk (2018a, 2018b, 2018c), Darosław Toruń (1998) and an RPG manual written by Jacek Komuda, Michał Mochocki and Artur Machlowski (2008) yields the conclusion that the radical right-wing Neo-Sarmatians divide society in the constructed presented worlds into three categories, as illustrated by the image above (Picture 1.)<sup>10</sup>:

9 Following Bojarowicz (2013: 53), I divide the Polish right into three main currents: conservative, reactionary and radical. Moreover, as Krystyna Skarżyńska (2011: 86) points out, liberalism can take on both a left-wing and a right-wing shape – the latter can be termed neo-liberalism or right-wing libertarianism – and thus it should also be included as a fourth right-wing current.

10 It is worth noting that social hierarchy of modern-period Poland was different from those found in Western Europe. In Poland, the entire noble state was equal. There were no internal divisions (there were, e.g., no titles), nor a division into nobility and aristocracy.

The topmost layer of the hierarchy consists of Polish noblemen and Cossacks, that is, groups privileged from the point of view of the writers. This is where (almost) all protagonists of Neo-Sarmatian works come from, it is from their perspective that the reader gets to know the Commonwealth, and, as follows, it is on the basis of their experiences, convictions and actions the author and the audience have the possibility to construct their identity – and, as I have already mentioned, Neo-Sarmatism consists precisely in creating one's own and collective identity. The very bottom of this imagined social ladder of the radical right-wing Neo-Sarmatians is occupied by peasants, fully dependent on the higher social strata. Their place in social hierarchy is depicted well in the aforementioned RPG manual (Komuda et al. 2008: 206). The description of a “Polish peasant” contained there was put – after the creators' full consideration, as emphasized in the dehumanizing description – not in the chapter dedicated to the peoples inhabiting the Commonwealth, but in the one describing beasts. In the hierarchy of beings a peasant is, thus, equal to a boar or a wolf. Between these two categories there is, in turn, space for other inhabitants of the Commonwealth (Jews, townsfolk, soldiers, robbers, craftsmen) and, significantly, foreigners, regardless of their social standing – in the eyes of the Neo-Sarmatians people from outside the borders cannot measure up to a Polish nobleman, as expressed by Komuda (2011c: 192–193) in his descriptions of Polish and foreign inns in the short story *Nobile Verbum*<sup>11</sup>, where statements concerning the cowardly and duplicitous nature of foreign nobility are juxtaposed with the image of Polish nobles – open, honest and happy. Therefore, there can be no doubt that they should be placed equally with other inhabitants of the Commonwealth, showcasing the same negative features which differentiate a nobleman from someone unworthy. Both these groups are held in equal contempt by the noble protagonists of Neo-Sarmatian works.

It is worth noting that the social hierarchy described above does not reflect its actual state – for instance, in the actual Commonwealth the Cossacks were not equal to the nobility. One should look for the causes of disorder in reflecting historical reality in the genre of the works by the aforementioned Neo-Sarmatians. Indeed, their works are not historical novels. Rather, they realize a conceit that Teodor Parnicki referred to as historical fantasy literature (Uniłowski 1991) – in contrast to the former, within the latter convention the author does not need to aim for the novel to be subordinate to knowledge derived from historical sources. In a historical novel, history is superior to literature, while in a historical fantasy novel this relation is reversed: literature begins to process history, artistic concerns become the most important (rather than fidelity to sources), which leads to emphasizing the fictional nature of the presented world. Such a device is significant for Neo-Sarmatians, as it makes it possible for them to saturate the novels with their own worldview. To add

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11 The title means literally “a noble's word”, that is, a promise made by a nobleman in which he refers to his social status that obliges him to keep his promise.

meanings that make it possible to introduce the project of forming collective consciousness of the audience on the basis of Sarmatian *universum* that is not supposed to reflect historical truth as much as evoke particular impressions and emotions in the reader. Indeed, as mentioned by Eile (1973: 165–166), creating appropriate emotional reactions in the reader is much more efficient than using intellectual arguments. To put it simply: if the writer wants to influence the reader, showing a simplified social hierarchy<sup>12</sup> that will strongly influence the emotional sphere will be more helpful than depicting a complicated structure that would faithfully render current historical knowledge. The latter could, in fact, only damage the Neo-Sarmatian identity project: it would cause the simple and clear message to be blurred by facts, which are rarely black-and-white. Thus, the novel's message would be weakened.

### **Initial Assessment of the Position of Women in the Writing of Radical Right-Wing Neo-Sarmatians**

When describing the figure of Lisowski, one of the protagonists of Jacek Komuda's *Samozwaniec. Moskiewska ladacznica* [*The Pretender. Moscow Harlot*], Dawid Kopa writes:

As a Polish noble, Lisowski has no respect for women regardless of their social background. This is a broader principle, appearing not only in *Samozwaniec. Moskiewska ladacznica*, but becoming a characteristic feature of the entire presented world of Komuda's body of work based on Old Polish motifs (Kopa 2021a: 116).

He suggests that misogyny is rooted in the Sarmatian formation, while Neo-Sarmatians – trying to re-create it – become, inevitably, spokesmen of the patriarchal order which discriminates women. However, that is not true. Arsenia, the protagonist of the novel on which Kopa bases his reflections, similarly to other women in the novels under discussion: Konstancja Dwernicka, jilted at the altar (Komuda 2007) or the noblewoman Eufrozyna, kidnapped at the order of her own brothers (Komuda 2012) can be placed at the middle rung within the abovementioned social hierarchy, as they are dependent on male noble characters, subordinated to them, they are objects, rather than subjects of the plot. It is similar in the case of other women characters. As pointed out by Katarzyna Mróz (2019: 30), in Komuda's prose it is also possible to find women characters who appear liberated – mainly in the sexual sphere – and who, despite enjoying wielding apparent power over other characters are, in fact, puppets of other men. This pertains to the case of Eugenia, depicted in the novel *Bohun*, who, at the order of her principal, controls one of the two protagonists: Dantez. As the scholar points out, this manner of depicting women

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<sup>12</sup> These attempts at causing an emotional reaction in the audience can be seen, for instance, in equating a peasant with a beast.

characters was supposed to differentiate Komuda's body of work from Henryk Sienkiewicz's<sup>13</sup> writing, wherein a considerable majority of women characters is constructed as "passive objects of masculine feelings" (Mróz 2019: 31). In Neo-Sarmatian works, there can also be found women whose position is even lower, equal to a peasant, and thus, to a beast. One of those is Ewa Ligęzianka, sold into Tatar slavery by a nobleman (Komuda 2011c: 314–315). Circassian and Tatar women can also be counted in this category: they are described as game, and thus, similarly to a peasant, put into the same order as fauna (Toruń 1998: 79). It seems that Kopa also wrote about women at this rung of hierarchy when he described women characters as completely dependent on men. This dependence would be expressed mainly through reducing women only to their bodily sphere, while subordination to men is mainly expressed in bed. At this level of social structure, even such an action as raping a woman results not from lust as much as from wanting to influence her male guardian<sup>14</sup>. It could thus seem that the Sarmatian world created by Neo-Sarmatians is a strictly masculine space in which there is no space for women, or that the place of women therein is entirely dependent on a man's will. However, this is not true, as evidenced by the figures of Borderland she-wolves.

### **Borderland She-Wolves in the Writing of Radical Right-Wing Neo-Sarmatians**

The fact that Neo-Sarmatian world is not purely masculine was pointed out by women scholars. One of them is Aldona Kobus (2015: 287):

Unfortunately, all women characters also display the tendency to dying, being used instrumentally as motivation for the protagonist's further activities, so although Komuda considerably broadens the framework of Sarmatism by departing from the model of homosocial formation (mas-

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13 He was a 19th century writer of historical literature who put the action of some of his most important works: a *Trilogy* of the novels *Ogniem i mieczem*, *Potop* and *Pan Wołodyjowski* [*With Fire and Sword*, *The Deluge*, and *Sir Michael*] in the 17th century. To this day *Potop* remains on the list of required school reading, while the film adaptations of these books are regularly shown on Polish TV. Therefore, Sienkiewicz is the best known Polish writer who set his works at the time of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. However, the relationship between him and Komuda is complicated. On the one hand (as has been mentioned), the contemporary writer wants to differentiate himself from the author of *The Trilogy*, but, on the other, his writing evidences clear inspiration with Sienkiewicz's body of work, such as the repeatability of certain plot schemes, interest in similar themes – e.g. the Cossack wars – or even the manner of constructing the characters' utterances. The reasons for these similarities can be seen in the fact that when building his novels, Komuda extremely frequently reaches for borrowings and references to works important for Polish culture (Szagun 2019). Thus, Komuda remains under Sienkiewicz's strong influence; even in the situations where he seems to argue with his predecessor, he is unable to liberate himself from the baggage of associations, motifs and expressions connected with writing about the 17th century left by the author of *The Trilogy* (Bujnicki 2017: 321).

14 And thus downgrading a woman to the level of an object is complete – as she is not even the person whom rape as such is supposed to hurt – this action is aimed against another man.

culine ties of brotherhood) and presenting models of female Sarmatism, this cannot be treated as emancipating – suffice it to mention that aforementioned noble women carry out a typically masculine model of behaviors, sometimes even to a better effect than men (Konstancja’s brothers), while not losing their femininity and sexual attractiveness.

She notices what I have written about in the earlier part of this text, namely, objective treatment of some women characters. She aptly points out that by allowing women to enter masculine roles, Komuda opens the Neo-Sarmatian vision of the world towards women characters. Matylda Zatorska (2016: 81) goes a step further: noting the hierarchy of characters in Neo-Sarmatian writing, she states that there is no one way of presenting women and distinguishes between two different types of women characters:

women characters in Komuda’s historical prose are not literary creations that can be found in historical novels that are herstories, focusing on the stories of women and their participation in history. In a way, the dark, adventurous vision of 17th century Commonwealth forces one to present women only in two roles – perpetrators or victims of violence. The former group is made of battleaxes, steppe she-wolves and avengers. The latter consists of young women who are “objects” of matrimonial trade, oppressed widows, mistreated wives and women dying as a result of quarrels and wars started by men [...] Moreover, [Komuda] presents figures of women absent from common consciousness, strong and independent in difficult social and political circumstances. This is why the Commonwealth described by Komuda cannot be called exclusively “masculine”.

However, it seems that the criterion of violence is not the best possible choice. Indeed, its use flattens the Neo-Sarmatian project to a simple, one could say: primal structure, in which social relations are determined by the characters’ capability to enforce their will on the others: the rule of the stronger over the weaker. Despite all that, the radical right-wing Neo-Sarmatism is more complex and cannot be reduced to one principle.

It is worth going back to what I have written in the introduction about the political borrowings of the radical right. As I have mentioned, the representatives of this trend draw on liberalism. One of the main pillars of this thought is the principle of self-ownership. Liberals are convinced that every person is the owner of themselves, as well as of what they have been able to obtain by the means of their own work (Hankus 2017: 12). This works well with the Neo-Sarmatian conviction regarding the superiority of liberty as the most important value, as discussed by Paweł Bohuszewicz (2023: 107). He points out that for the Neo-Sarmatians, liberty is not a simple reconstruction of the 17th

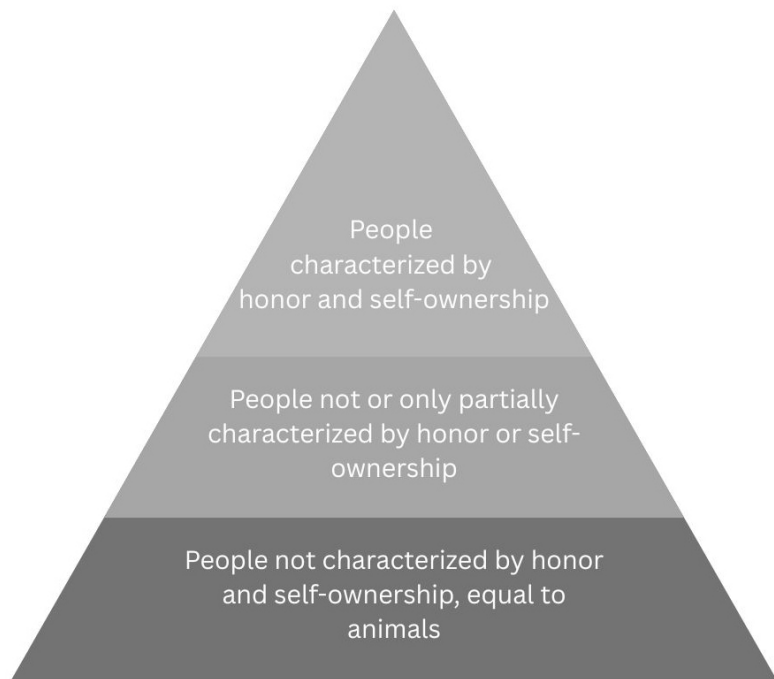
century noble idea of “golden liberty”<sup>15</sup>. In the Old Polish period, this value was connected with another one: concord, which was supposed to prevent negative effects of excessive individualism. In Neo-Sarmatism there is no latter virtue, and, as a result, fetishization of liberty manifests itself in the possibility of self-determination regardless the well-being of not only the remaining society, but also state, church or social institutions. This part of radical right-wing Neo-Sarmatian worldview is borrowed from libertarianism, does not result from a reactionary idea, which is why it takes on such a shape. Indeed, reactionism assumes restoration of old values in their original form (Skarżyński 1998: 33). Some features of reactionary restoration of old values can be noticed in the Neo-Sarmatian belief concerning, among other, non-honorable nature of solving conflicts in an insidious way. Intriguing against one’s enemy, using poison, attacking a foe from behind or refusing a one-on-one duel are behaviors unworthy of a nobleman, behaviors utilized by people from the lower rungs of social hierarchy. Killing an opponent not in an honest duel but, for example, through assassination is a “disgraceful and unworthy” way, and if a nobleman does so, it makes him into an “ordinary bandit” (Toruń 1998: 128). It seems that the two aforementioned features: self-ownership and the ability to solve conflicts in an honorable way – that is, open, non-insidious – will differentiate a noble from someone of an inferior condition in the eyes of Neo-Sarmatians, and thus, will constitute a differentiation between the first rung of the social ladder and the lower ones. Therefore, these relations would appear the following way (Picture 2).

It is also worth noting that, as has been mentioned, in Krzysztof Obremski’s approach, Sarmatism as a worldview was supposed to be characterized by, among others, connecting the attitude of a knight and of a landowner. Based on the picture above it is easy to notice that the division of society conducted by right-wing Neo-Sarmatians is based only on knightly attitude. The lack of appreciation for the landowner attitude in texts is a good showcase of the selective nature of Neo-Sarmatian identity project and of the tendency of the radical right to draw inspiration from history in a fragmentary way. Thus, it will not be a faithful recreation of 17th century social hierarchy, but, rather, an attempt at creating it anew, in a way adjusted to current social and political aspirations of the radical right.

Which category holds a spot for Borderland she-wolves? Were we to follow Paweł Bohuszewicz’s (2023: 108) reflection, it should be said that all women will be subordinated to noblemen, as Bohuszewicz notes that between the two aforementioned groups there occurs a relation of lordliness (a term Bohuszewicz derives from Pobłocki’s *Chamstwo* [*The Rabble*]) – and thus, subordination of the former to the latter. However, as has been mentioned, Matylda Zatorska

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15 Thus, an attempt at re-introducing freedoms and privileges enjoyed by the Polish and Lithuanian nobility, e.g. inviolability as pertains to person and property, religious freedom, the ability of a single parliament member to veto decisions made during a *Sejm*’s sitting, etc.



**Picture 2:** Features of particular human categories according to radical right-wing Neo-Sarmatians. Source: designed by S.T.

(2016: 81) notices that women in Neo-Sarmatism cannot be treated as a homogeneous group. According to the scholar, the fair sex can be divided into sub-groups, and Neo-Sarmatians approach each of those in a different manner. It seems that an appropriate criterion for differentiating between particular women's sub-groups would be the one that divides the entire society and which was presented above. Therefore, there are women in Neo-Sarmatian writing to whom the relation of lordliness applies: they are subordinated to noblemen simply due to the fact that they are at a lower rung of social ladder. There are, however, also such women who do not concede to men and do not enter subordinate relationships with them (or even, it is men who become subordinated to those women). These are the women who are their own mistresses (and thus, the principle of self-ownership pertains to them) and who can face their enemies in an open conflict in a worthy way.

It seems that this is what the Borderland she-wolves are. There is one more feature that sets them apart from other women characters. As Dawid Kopa (2021b: 208) puts it, "in the basket of similarities between Sienkiewicz and Komuda there is also their reserved attitude towards women portrayed in their narratives". However, this attitude changes when it comes to the she-wolves, as they are either presented in a neutral manner (as Anna Łahodowska, an episodic character in *Diabeł łańcucki* [*The Łańcut Devil*]) or even portrayed

in a way that inclines the reader to identify with their fate, as is the case of Eufrozyna, the protagonist of *Wilczyca* [*She-Wolf*]. Her actions, such as facing overwhelming enemy forces and overcoming adversities are supposed to awe the reader, resulting in an appropriate emotional reaction – which, as Eile had it, is key to influencing the reader and to the author's presenting the worldview contained in the novel. The narrative of *Wilczyca* is conducted in such a way that a reader would first try to understand Eufrozyna's motivation, then "root" for her when she overcomes subsequent obstacles appearing in her way as the plot unravels. Indeed, in this short story the aforementioned distance of the author towards the characters can be felt not towards the eponymous heroine, but towards male characters who attempt to take away an escorted prisoner in infamy from her or avenge themselves on her for (real and imagined) harm.

A closer look ought to be taken at those women placed at the top of social hierarchy. Five examples can be listed (four from literature and one from an RPG), some of those have already been mentioned:

1. Konstancja Dwernicka (*Diabeł łańcucki*): this character is actually half a Borderland she-wolf, and half – a typical noblewoman, and depending on the needs of the plot at the given moment she can display features of the highest societal category: fight with sabers, reject a candidate for her husband, decide the fate of the protagonist, Jacek Dydyński – as it is for her sake that he changes sides in the conflict between the Dwernicki family and the eponymous devil; or features of the medium stratum, becoming, in the end, entirely subordinated to Jacek, who finally leaves her at the altar (Komuda 2007).
2. Anna Łahodowska (*Diabeł łańcucki*): she leads during a foray into church property, trying to force friars to pay baksheesh, and during this event, fights with one of the novel's protagonists, Gedeon. Simultaneously, she does not allow for the law to limit her personal liberty, as the narrator mentions – she has already received several sentences (Komuda 2007: 3–6).
3. Eufrozyna Gintowt (*Wilczyca*): a noblewoman who swore revenge on the nobleman Białskórski. The man must bow to her will, as he becomes her prisoner. What is more, even when Białskórski saves Eufrozyna's life, she does not give up on her revenge. She participates in fights three times, succumbing only to Jacek Dydyński, who is also the protagonist of several of Komuda's novels and short stories. However, it should be noted that he does not take the prisoner from her only by means of physical violence. Instead, he makes different attempts, including via blackmail, at convincing Gintowt to agree to cede Białskórski to him – in this way, the author emphasizes how important the will of Eufrozyna herself is (Komuda 2011d: 7–90).
4. Stanisława Kruszewska (*Kuzynki*): a Polish noblewoman born in the 17th century who, due to being initiated into alchemical arts is able to live until the 21st century. As has been mentioned in the introduction, unwilling to subordinate to the will of her husband who sold her to a slave trader, she killed him in a fight; she was also able to cut out her way to freedom

through a crowd of peasants (Pilipiuk 2018a: 17–18, 30–31). As Aleksandra Kacianowska (2017: 429) notes, although Stanisława cares for people who work for her in order to rebuild her family fortune, she does so only due to her desire for profit, taking into account mainly her own comfort. This demonstrates her status in the imaginary Neo-Sarmatian social hierarchy as high enough for her to be able to direct the actions of other people (including men).

5. Borderland She-Wolf: is one of the classes of characters available to players in the *Dzikie Pola* [*Wild Fields*] RPG. In the description of this class, the authors highlight the independence of she-wolves, referring, among others, to historical Anna Łahodowska, who was the model of the character described above, and to their military abilities and courage: taking part in battles and forays (Komuda 2008: 24).

The features presented above: bravery, causing the she-wolves to solve conflicts in an open way, and the ability to self-determine, which realizes the principle of self-ownership, are, on the one hand, in accordance with the myth of a Borderland woman, present in literature since the 19th century (Korybut-Marciniak 2023: 179), while, on the other, they make it possible to put the she-wolves at the top of the Neo-Sarmatian social ladder. They will find themselves there between the Cossacks and the noblemen of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, as a third category of characters who can “look at people of baser condition from above” (Komuda 2008: 165).

## Conclusion

In radical right-wing Neo-Sarmatian writing the Borderland she-wolves are these characters who are put in the highest position in the social hierarchy among women – equal to noblemen. These women are characterized by the same two features as noblemen or Cossacks. They are, thus, capable of self-determination and of solving conflicts in an open, and, therefore, honorable way.

In the context of the idea of liberty it is worth noting that their presence in this kind of literature can be interpreted as a manifestation of Neo-Sarmatian individualism, as mentioned by Bohuszewicz. In the eyes of radical right-wing Neo-Sarmatians, these women, capable of fighting for and defending their self-ownership in a way worthy of a nobleman, become equal to men. Simultaneously, in this way, the creators emphasize the role of social hierarchy – indeed, the aim of she-wolves is to find their place at its highest rung.

To conclude, Borderland she-wolves in Neo-Sarmatian literature are complex characters; although based in noble tradition, they stand out due to their strong, independent character and the ability for self-determination. They constitute a kind of a liberated archetype of female power which, while still fitting within Neo-Sarmatian social hierarchy, offers a new, more dynamic and complex vision of women than peasant, townswomen, or ordinary noblewomen within the Neo-Sarmatian image of the world.

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