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Gender, Ethnicity, and Social Class in Monica Krawczyk's Short Stories

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Abstract

According to various researchers, Monica Krawczyk (1887-1954) was the first Polish-American writer whose stories about Polish-American immigrants were published in well-known American magazines in the 1930s and 1940s, and later, in 1950, in a collection entitled *If the Branch Blossoms and Other Stories*. Most of the short stories revolve around the daily life of Polish-American immigrants in Minnesota. This essay proposes a close reading of two short stories in the collection, "After His Own" and "Wedding in the City," with a view to illustrating how gender, ethnicity, and social class intersect in the ethnic and American spaces navigated by Krawczyk's characters, and the ways in which they impact the female protagonists' identities as women, wives, and mothers.

Keywords: ethnic women writers, ethnic fiction, Polish Americans, gender roles, ethnic and American women, rural vs. urban spaces.

The mass immigration from Europe at the turn of the twentieth century left a significant mark on the American literary landscape of the first half of the century. In this multilayered literary environment, first- and second-generation immigrant women authors carved their own creative space, in which they wrote about the immigrant experience in autobiographies, semi-autobiographical fiction, novels, short stories and poems.¹ From

gendered perspectives, their autobiographical accounts and fictional narratives highlight the challenges and emotional struggles faced by immigrant women during the arduous process of negotiating ethnic and American identities as they strove to adapt to the new society and culture, including the tensions brought about by the emotional clashes between the first-generation parents' determination to preserve the ethnic culture and the American dreams of their second-generation offspring. Such ethnic women authors of European descent include, among others, Mari Tomasi (Italian American), Ariadne Thompson (Greek American), Roxanne Cotsakis (Greek American), and Monica Krawczyk (Polish American), who created an array of male and female ethnic characters straddling ethnic and American emotional spaces in an attempt to reconcile the two distinct sides of their hyphenated identities.

Krawczyk was a second-generation ethnic-American writer, born into a working-class family of Polish immigrants in Minnesota. Although her fiction has not garnered the literary attention enjoyed by other ethnic women writers, such as Mary Antin or Anzia Yezierska, several of her short stories appeared in American magazines in the late 1920s, in the 1930s and 1940s, including *Good Housekeeping*, *Country Home*, *Farm Journal*, *The Farmer's Wife*, and *Minnesota Quarterly*. At the time, she was known mostly in Polish-American circles, especially for her passionate and dedicated work to promote the Polish culture in the United States. In eleven of the twelve short stories included in the volume *If the Branch Blossoms and Other Stories* (1950), Krawczyk depicts the joys and hardships of everyday life of Polish-American immigrants in the urban and rural areas of Minnesota, from the perspective of the female characters. This essay, therefore, proposes a close reading of two short stories in the collection, "After His Own" and "Wedding in the City," with a view to illustrating how gender, ethnicity, and social class intersect in the ethnic and American spaces navigated by Krawczyk's characters, and the ways in which they impact the female protagonists' identities as women, wives, and mothers.

In the years after the publication of her collection, Krawczyk's contribution to the relatively unknown Polish-American literature at the time was acknowledged by various contributors to Polish-American journals. In his 1951 review of the collection, Edward J. Fundalewicz praised Krawczyk's "real knowledge and understanding of Poles, of native Americans, and of Polish Americans, as she aptly portrays the relationship among the three," thereby offering "an honest picture, in fictional form, of Polish Americans and their struggles" (63). In 1963, Melvin Serowiecki pointed out Krawczyk's noteworthy contribution to the preservation of the Polish culture, both through her short fiction and through her assiduous work as a teacher, a social worker, and a writer. "Monica's writings were only a small part of her desire to help the Polish people," he stated, explaining that "[o]ften, she was called upon to speak at various organizations, and always her theme was Polish culture, the rich heritage of the Poles, their history, their authors" (50-51). Like Fundalewicz, Serowiecki appreciated Krawczyk for "the literary legacy" (51) and the treasured memory she left behind for future Polish-American generations. In 1987, Krawczyk was described as an "interesting writer of Polish origin" only "modestly recognized for her fine short story collection, *If the Branch Blossoms and Other Stories*" (5) by Stanislaus A. Blejwas, during his Presidential Address, delivered at the annual meeting of the Polish American Historical Association in Washington D. C.²

Yet, although her work has not received enough attention in the realm of ethnic-American literature, Krawczyk's short stories have been the focus of several studies in the past few decades. In "Monica Krawczyk: Chronicler of Polish-American Life" (1980), Edith Blicksilver examines the gender differences between Krawczyk's female and male characters – most of them first-generation immigrants – in terms of education, acculturation, as well as gender roles in the ethnic family. Blicksilver concludes that, although Krawczyk never visited Poland, "the Old World country whose traditions she hoped to preserve," she succeeded in "record[ing], with skill and love, the transformation of that culture in the New World" (20), thereby contributing to the literary

visibility of Polish-American fiction written in the first half of the twentieth century.

In his 1992 book *Princes, Peasants, and Other Polish Selves: Ethnicity in American Literature*, Thomas S. Gladsky offers a comprehensive analysis of the ways in which the concept of ethnicity has been defined, redefined, and transformed in Polish-American literature throughout the twentieth century.³ Referring to the literary output up to the 1950s in terms of the portrayals of Polish immigrants, Gladsky highlights the differences between the ways in which Polish immigrants were depicted in the works of “host-culture writers” (American writers) and in the fiction of Polish-American “descent writers” (225), whose main goal was to “preserve their heritage through the act of writing” (227). In addition, he states that “descent writers,” Krawczyk included, “combine the particulars of the Polish self with the characteristics of the majority culture” and “suggest that ethnicity resides . . . with a foot in both worlds and in values shared across cultures” (228). According to Gladsky, Krawczyk wrote stories about “ordinary problems and situations” (229), with characters that “are insular, ahistorical, simple, enduring, and adaptable” (230). In his opinion, one of Krawczyk’s merits resides in the fact that, “by assigning the point of view to her Poles and elevating them to major character status,” she “shifts the idea of ‘other’ from minorities to ‘majority’ Americans who must themselves consider changing to accommodate their new kin” (*Princes, Peasants* 230).

Furthermore, in “Monica Krawczyk, Victoria Janda, and the Polanie Club,” an essay included in *Something of My Very Own to Say: American Women Writers of Polish Descent* (1997), a collection of fiction by Polish-American women writers, Gladsky examines Krawczyk’s significant role as a member of the Polanie Club in Minnesota. In his opinion, this club stood out in the contemporary cultural milieu because it “emphasized literary activities” as part of its sustained activity to maintain and disseminate the Polish culture in the United States (102). Gladsky further notes the qualities of Krawczyk’s stories, stating that they “are relatively straight-forward, short, realistic glimpses into

domestic life” (104), in which she “captures the evolution of ethnicity and the particular identity of the ethnic woman,” while, at the same time, aiming “to teach both her non-ethnic and ethnic audiences what it means to be Polish” (“Monica Krawczyk” 105).

More recently, in the introduction to *Writing the Polish American Woman in Postwar Ethnic Fiction* (2019), Grazyna J. Kozaczka considers Krawczyk “the matriarch of Polish American short fiction,” who “normalized the Polish immigrant ‘other’ in a series of short stories published in mainstream American periodicals from 1931 to the early 1950s” (21). Kozaczka emphasizes the fact that “Even though her women seem firmly embedded in the traditionally female domestic sphere within its working-class, heteronormative, and racially uniform world, she grants them a voice and removes them from the realm of invisibility,” making “them fully cognizant of the restrictions embedded in two oppressive cultures – Polish and American – which conspire to limit their self-expression” (21). At the same time, similar to Gladsky, she points out women’s double role – as preservers of the ethnic culture and as agents of change/acculturation in their families: “Krawczyk’s characters work ingeniously and incessantly to liberate themselves both as new American women, empowered to bring education and innovation into their large families, and as ethnic women who keep the memory of their original Polish homeland alive” (21). Moreover, in the first chapter of her book, “Faces of Resistance: *Monica Krawczyk’s Immigrant Women*,” Kozaczka, similar to Serowiecki, underscores one of Krawczyk’s chief achievements as a second-generation immigrant, the fact that she “defied gender, ethnic, and class stereotypes to succeed as a published author, a teacher, and a social worker whose life became defined by her devotion to everything Polish” (26). Kozaczka offers an insightful analysis of Krawczyk’s short stories, stating that she “subtly embedded many radical and progressive ideas in her narratives as she wrote to reveal a process of double othering by which Polish American women were defined and excluded both by the American mainstream and by Polish patriarchy” (40).

The two stories examined in this article, “After His Own” and “Wedding in the City,” revolve around the everyday life of the Kowaleks, a family of immigrant farmers. The members of the Kowalek family include Kasia and Stas, the first-generation parents, and their second-generation offspring, Antek, Mary, Helka, Vladek, and Frankie. Krawczyk does not specify a particular place where the first story unfolds, suggesting that the Kowaleks are a typical Polish-American family living on their farm in rural Minnesota. She does not mention any specific dates or years either, but, in keeping with life in rural areas, which unfolds based on the seasons, the time references revolve around typical seasonal farm activities – autumn sprouting of winter wheat and near-harvesting of wheat in early spring in the first short story, and haying in late summer or early autumn in the second one. Apart from these references, Christmas is also mentioned as an important family holiday in the first story. In the second story, “Wedding in the City,” the time references are connected to the Polish-American parents – Stas had been on the farm for twenty years (Krawczyk 130), and the Kowaleks had been married for twenty-six years (135).

One might infer, therefore, that Krawczyk chose to depict them as a typical Polish immigrant family who entered the United States as part of the mass migration, perhaps during the first decade of the twentieth century. In an entry on Polish Americans in the *Gale Encyclopedia of Multicultural America*, Syd Jones points out that “there were two waves of Polish immigrants to the United States” in the nineteenth- and the early twentieth century: the first took place roughly between 1800 and 1860 and the second between 1860 and WWI (1447). While, according to Jones, the former wave consisted mostly of political dissidents, the latter group of immigrants left Poland for the United States “in search of a better economic life,” most of them belonging to the “rural class, so called *za chleben* (for bread) emigrants” (Jones 1447).⁴ In a comprehensive examination of Polish-American settlements in the rural areas of the United States, Dennis Koliński states that some Polish immigrants of the second wave chose to settle in the rural areas of Texas, the Upper Midwest, the Great Plains, and New

England (21-22).⁵ Referring specifically to the Polish immigrants who settled in Minnesota, John Radziłowski notes in “Out on the Wind: Life in Minnesota’s Polish Farming Communities” that “between the Civil War and World War I, most of Minnesota’s Poles settled in the Twin cities, Duluth and Winona,” establishing “some 50 communities in rural Minnesota” (18).

One of the key motifs that weaves through “After His Own” and “Wedding in the City” is Antek Kowalek’s decision to marry a non-Polish young lady and the effects of his choice on his ethnic parents. According to Robert McCaa et al., in the 1920s and 1930s, about 70% of the first-generation immigrant men were in endogamous unions, as marriages within one’s ethnic group were still expected and customary; however, during the same time period, the number of such marriages was much smaller, about half, 35-40% for second-generation immigrant men (360). In “After His Own,” Antek, a second-generation immigrant, is aware that his decision will spark tension in the family, so he decides to tell the news to his mother first, hoping that she would be more open to the idea and would support him in front of his father. Thus, on a cloudy afternoon in October, while they are watching the field of winter wheat ready to sprout, Antek tells her how he would like to build a house for his future wife on the land his father had promised he would inherit. Kasia is taken aback that Antek wants a written paper from his father that the land really belongs to him, as Antek is the first-born, and they have a verbal agreement, yet, as soon as he mentions the name of the young woman he intends to marry, she understands why. Kasia is surprised because Edith Martin, one of the teachers of Antek’s younger siblings, is “*from the city*” and “*not from the old country*” (116; emphasis added). In this context, the juxtaposition of the geographical differences between farm/rural area and city/urban space accentuates the differences in terms of ethnicity – Antek is Polish American and Edith is native-born American – and of social class – he is a farmer (working class), and she is a teacher (middle class). Moreover, Kasia is torn between feeling “frightened and at the same time proud” (116): frightened because of her husband’s reaction to such news and of the ensuing

emotional turmoil in the family, and proud because Edith, a native-born American *and* from the city, is willing to marry Antek, a choice interpreted by his mother as a sign of his acceptance into the mainstream society.

Yet, while Kasia finally agrees to have Edith over for Sunday dinner to get better acquainted, her husband simply refuses to even entertain the thought of such a marriage. He has no intention of meeting Edith and points out to Kasia, in no uncertain terms, that he had “said long ago Antek should not be mixed with a city girl,” suggesting that, if Kasia agrees with Antek’s choice, he certainly does not (117). “She is *no girl for you*,” his father states emphatically, addressing Antek, and, to his son’s reply “But *I* say she is! And *I’m the one to know*,” Stas shouts angrily: *Not as long as you are my son!*” (117; emphasis added), feeling his authority as a father threatened and undermined by his son’s attitude of defiance. Ethnicity is important to Stas Kowalek, and it matters that Edith is not of Polish origin, but his main argument against the marriage is that, in such a situation, his son would have to find work in a factory in the city in order to be with his wife; hence, he would give up being a farmer, working the land, and helping his father in his old age. In “Family Labor and Immigrant Success in a Polish American Rural Community, 1883-1905,” J. Radziłowski mentions that Polish immigrant farmers used “little machinery” to work their farms, and instead, relied “on family labor,” especially on their wives and children (59). In the story, Stas relied on his eldest son, and his adamant attitude might also hide his disappointment that his son will not follow in his father’s footsteps, perhaps further extending the farm and living a life similar to his parents in the countryside. Consequently, Kasia finds herself in the middle of the conflict, torn between her duty as a wife to stand by her husband, who “would be stubborn,” and her desire as a mother to support her son, who “would want his way” (117).

Her maternal instincts win, and she decides to accept her son’s decision, despite her husband’s vehement protest. On Sunday, she does her best to make a good impression on her guest, by cleaning the house, arranging a nice table, and preparing a savory

Polish meal. Nevertheless, despite her efforts, her husband's absence casts a deep shadow on this first encounter, especially for Antek, who becomes painfully aware of the emotional bind he is in. For Kasia, the dinner is very important because it allows her to meet Edith in the comfort of her own home, a private space in which she is in charge. Therefore, she wants that space to reflect her skills as a dedicated housewife, in spite of their working-class status; that is why, she is determined that "today the dinner ought to be the best they ever had" (118). As a mother, she may use this visit also as a learning experience for her younger daughters by asking them to do some of the house chores – to bring in "fresh butter" and "the crabapple pickles" saved for a special occasion, to iron the able cloth and gather flowers to put on the table, etc. (118), as a way of preparing them to pay attention to different practical aspects they should take into consideration when expecting guests.

Still, even in this familiar space, Kasia feels uncertain what to expect, given the differences between Edith and the Kowaleks in terms of ethnicity and social class. As a farmer's wife, possibly little educated, Kasia admires smart, educated young women who have a profession, like Edith.⁶ At the same time, as a housewife and hostess, Kasia feels slightly uneasy, especially as far as the meal is concerned, because food functions, in general, as a significant cultural and identity marker. When her daughter Mary, sensing her mother's discomfort, tells her that the dinner smells good, Kasia replies: "Yes, but who knows if the teacher likes our Polish cooking. It was Antek who wanted chicken soup with the home-made noodles" (118). On the other hand, the stakes are high for Edith as well, since she also wants to be liked by her future mother-in-law. She may also feel slightly awkward, at first, in the Kowalek home, especially because of Antek's disappointment at his father's refusal to meet her, but Kasia's welcoming attitude helps her to feel more at ease. On the one hand, Edith's appreciation of Kasia's ethnic meal, "the soup, the chicken with its rich cream sauce and parsley, the good home-made rye bread" (120), may be interpreted as a mere polite gesture, as her way of thanking her hostess for a savory meal. On the other hand, her statement "Do you know I think

something is missing in homes, since women don't bake bread anymore" (120) and her polite request, asking Kasia to teach her how to make such bread, might be Edith's attempt to find common ground with her future mother-in-law as women and wives, whose home is their sacred private space. It might also be a gesture from Edith to show Kasia, as a mother, that she loves her son and would like to make him feel as comfortable in their future home as he used to be in his family home. Her appreciative attitude means a lot to Kasia, who is surprised that a teacher would want to learn something from her; moreover, she truly believes that her son has chosen well, when Edith further declares "If I thought I could ever learn even half what you know, I mean *of the really important things*, . . . I would be glad" (120; emphasis added). By "really important things," Edith may refer to the skills a good wife should have in order to make the home a welcoming space for the entire family, like Kasia. At the same time, it might also express her willingness to learn more about the ethnic traditions in Antek's family so as to be considered a worthy member of their family.

However, while Edith's visit and attitude have convinced Kasia that she is well suited for her son, in spite of the ethnic and class differences, she is worried that the deep rift between her husband and her son will lead to her son's departure from home. Consequently, when Stas returns home later, after the dinner he missed deliberately, in an attempt to mediate between them, she uses ethnicity as an argument to explain to him the changed situation they are facing in the United States. "In Poland, he would have been married already . . . And where can we find for him such a girl as you want? Here is not like in the old country where the fathers find wives for their sons," she tells her husband, and praises Edith's qualities as an appropriate choice for their son: "Miss Edith is nice. A good, common girl, and healthy" (121), even if she is not Polish *and* from the city. In this context, this short story is a relevant illustration of Gladsky's assertion that "perpetuating the family through *careful marriage partner selection*" is one of the themes in Krawczyk's fiction ("Monica Krawczyk" 105; emphasis added). Stas Kowalek's attitude expresses his belief that, as the

patriarch of the family, he is the only one capable of selecting the most appropriate marriage partner for his son, and Edith Martin is not because she would make him leave the farm and give up a familiar lifestyle on the family farm. Moreover, Stas points out that she, as a woman and a mother, may react more emotionally, in general, including in this situation, “*You let him do anything,*” but, given his authority as a husband and father, according to the traditional gender roles upheld in the ethnic family, he is entitled to decide what is best for his son: “No! I say no! . . . and *I am the man of this house. And what I say he must do!*” (121; emphasis added). Shortly after, in a heated discussion with his son, he wields his paternal authority by denying Antek his inheritance, the land he had been promised, should he decide to go on with the marriage. As expected, Stas’ unshakable attitude in this matter puts Antek in an extremely difficult position, having to choose between his family and Edith. Nevertheless, he stands up to his father, saying that, in choosing a marriage partner, “each man must decide for himself” (121), and, although he feels miserable about it, he decides to leave the farm and find work in the city in order to be closer to Edith. This gesture of defiance angers his father, who decides to cut him off from the family; yet his mother is profoundly affected by this situation, especially since she likes Edith and, above all, wants her son to be happy, despite his decision to marry “a city girl, and a stranger” (120).

In “Family, Women, and Gender: The Polish Experience” (1997), Thaddeus Radziłowski explains that “despite the family’s patriarchal forms, sometimes re-cast and actually strengthened by the immigrant experience, and despite a division of labor, resources, and support that was often unequal and disadvantageous, most Polish immigrant women, like their counterparts in other ethnic groups, probably found their identities and most of life’s satisfactions in their families” (71). He further states that, for Polish Americans, the “home environment” represented “a pillar of ethnicity” (74). So far, the Kowalek home used to be a private space where Kasia was in charge, perhaps finding some satisfaction in taking care of the daily chores, cooking, cleaning, and raising the

children, besides occasionally helping her husband with the farm work. However, her son's unexpected decision and her husband's inflexible attitude to it have turned their home into a space of emotional turmoil and loss, shaking the steady "pillar of ethnicity" (T. Radziłowski 74) their home used to be.

Antek's job in a factory, though, is more restrictive than work on the farm, and as he has only one day off for Christmas, and it is too far way to get home, he accepts Edith's invitation to spend it with her family, in the city. This decision brings more distress in the Kowalek family, as, especially in first-generation immigrant families, Christmas represents a religious holiday to be celebrated with the family; it is a festive occasion to keep up the ethnic traditions, to gather around the table laden with ethnic food, attend the church service together, sing ethnic carols, etc. Therefore, upon finding out that his son will not be with his family for Christmas, a festive moment imbued with ethnic flavor, Stas voices his disappointment by referring to him as an "automobile maker," a derogatory term opposed to farmer, expressing his outward indifference to Antek's decision: "Let him be there. *City man, city house*" (123; emphasis added). On the other hand, Kasia, visibly heartbroken after reading her son's letter about his decision, reminds Stas how, at the Christmas table in Poland, at the "solemn *Vilia* suppers," they used to break "the holy wafer" (123) and leave an empty chair for the family members who had emigrated to America. Christmas would not be a joyous occasion this year, as Antek's chair would be empty, a loss affecting the entire family, even his father, but who would not show it. Yet, despite their opposing attitudes regarding Antek's decision, both Kasia and Stas feel nostalgic for the happy Christmas gatherings they enjoyed in Poland before emigration. In the United States, Kasia may feel the fact that their son is not physically present more poignantly, as preserving the ethnic Christmas traditions and celebrating it with the entire family has been an important part of her identity as an ethnic wife and mother. Particularly as a mother, inhabiting the private space of her home on such a festive occasion might not bring her the usual satisfaction as Antek's empty chair at the family

table reminds her that, to a certain extent, despite her efforts, as parents, they have failed to support their son in his marriage choice.

In spite of the disheartening news from Antek, the younger children ask their mother to join them at the festive Christmas party at school, organized by their teacher. This time, in the public space inhabited by Edith in her capacity as a teacher, she reaches out to Kasia, as a woman and a future daughter-in-law, explaining to her that Antek would have liked to spend Christmas with his family, emphasizing that he “is lonesome, especially for you” (124). It is Edith’s way of trying to assuage Kasia’s emotional pain as a mother, and, by inviting him to her house, she wants to reassure his mother that, as his future wife, she will do her best to alleviate his feelings of homesickness, an attitude that makes her even more endearing to Kasia.

Like many stories in the collection, “After His Own” ends on a positive note. During the following spring, on a Sunday in April, Kasia and Stas are looking at the growing wheat on the land that should have been Antek’s, thinking about his skills as a farmer, about the much-needed help he could offer as they start getting older, and wishing he were there to tend to the land. At this moment, Edith comes for an unannounced visit, and Stas, who silently blames her for the fact that Antek had to leave the farm, sets out to leave in order to avoid seeing her or talking to her. Again, Edith is “the stranger” (120) who enters the private sphere of the Kowalek home, uninvited, this time of her own accord, more confident than before, even if now she addresses both parents (not like during her first visit, when only Kasia was there, and Antek, for moral support). Edith explains to them that Antek is not happy working in the factory and admits that “He belongs on the land. . . . His life is here” (126), on the farm. Therefore, when Stas asks her whether she would be willing to live with his son on the farm if he chooses to come back, she simply replies: “My life is where his life is happiest” (126). Kasia considers Edith’s statement “the wisest thing . . . a woman could say” (126), since Edith has understood that, since Antek had left the farm because he loves her and wants to be with her, she can reciprocate his feelings and support his

unspoken wish to return to farm life by agreeing to move to the farm with him. This is the good news Stas and Kasia have been waiting for; Stas is finally content and shakes Edith's hand as a sign of accepting her into the family. "A man should look after his own land," he declares, as both parents exclaim happily: "tell Antek to come home" (126).

The title of the short story, "After His Own," lends itself to various interpretations. After reading through the first two pages of the story, one might argue that *his own* refers to Antek's decision to marry a non-Polish young woman of *his own* choice, regardless of his family's wish, going against the traditional ethnic custom to find a wife from the same ethnic background. Secondly, the title can also be interpreted as what happens *after* he has taken *his own* decision, regarding the effects and consequences of the decision on Antek and on his father, as well as on his mother and Edith, who, each in her own way, have functioned as catalysts who gradually negotiated family relationships to persuade Stas Kowalek to accept his son's choice. Thirdly, at the end of the story, Stas' statement, "A man should look *after his own* land" (126; emphasis added), suggests that *his own* might also refer to the land and its important role in the lives of Polish-American immigrant families residing in rural areas. In this interpretation, it sets up the contrast with the urban area, the city, in the title of the second short story about the Kowalek family, "Wedding in the City," a rather straightforward title, which encapsulates the main event and the setting of the story.

Like in "After His Own," in "Wedding in the City," the city where Edith's family lives is not mentioned by name, but there is a brief reference of the Kowalek farm being about a hundred miles away from the city; so, it may be a typical town in Minnesota in the late 1920s or early 1930s. While ethnicity is one of the key motifs in the first story, social class, tied to the geographical features as well, plays an important role in the second one. Life in the rural areas is juxtaposed, indirectly, to life in the city, reflected mainly in the implicit comparison between the homes of the Martin and the Kowalek families, their lifestyles, and their social status. The story begins on the farm, the setting where "After His Own" had ended,

perhaps in late summer or early autumn, according to the references about haying and harvesting of the wheat. In their ethnic space, Kasia and Stas have to take another important decision, whether or not to go to Antek and Edith's wedding in the city. This time, Stas is reluctant to leave the farm, using the busy haying period, in addition to the many daily chores on the farm, as excuses to avoid going to an unfamiliar, urban space.

When Kasia and Antek suggest solutions, Stas admits that the main cause of his unenthusiastic attitude is that he had not been away from his farm – his own ethnic space – “even one day these twenty years” (130). Therefore, to mask his discomfort at leaving the space where he feels most in control, Stas proposes a celebration with their neighbors in the community “pavilion” (130) when Antek and Edith move to the farm. Yet, Antek and Kasia are determined to persuade him to go: his son appeals to Stas' role as a father and head of the family who cannot miss the wedding of his eldest son, “the first in *our family*” (130; emphasis added). His wife Kasia, on the other hand, sympathizes with Stas on ethnic grounds, confessing that, she too, would have liked “better . . . if Antek could get married here in our own church” (131), but she also appeals to Stas' future role as a father-in-law, whose city-born, non-Polish daughter-in-law, Edith, has agreed to move to the farm in order to avoid, among others, any tensions or conflicts between Antek and his father. “After all,” Kasia points out, “Edith's home is in the city. Should we not go?” (131), thus supporting Edith's wish to have the wedding in the city. As expected, Stas gives in to his son's and wife's emotional arguments and is rewarded by being called “a good father” (131), an acknowledgment of his role as the patriarch of the family. At the same time, Antek has been aware all along that his mother has done her best to persuade his father to agree to his marriage and to accept the invitation to the wedding. That is why, his heartfelt “Thank you for everything! Everything!” (131), before his departure to the city, brings tears to her eyes, as he has appreciated her important contribution and support, as a mother, in these sensitive matters.

The wedding prompts Kasia and Stas Kowalek to leave the

comfort of their ethnic home, their farm, and their rural surroundings, in order to travel to an unknown space, the city. The Kowaleks' physical journey to the city reflects the differences between urban and rural areas. On their way, they admire the large open spaces of the farms they pass by, the peaceful and idyllic natural landscape, which makes them think about the simple, pragmatic, yet unsophisticated lifestyle, marked by hard physical work in the rural areas. Slowly, the landscape changes and gives way to the loud hustle and bustle of the city, busy traffic, houses close to one another, throngs of people in the crowded streets. Krawczyk captures the emotions of the Kowaleks in this unfamiliar urban setting by using the adjective "strange" repeatedly. For instance, at the bus depot in the city, while waiting for Antek and Edith to take them to her house, Kasia, in particular, feels that "everything and everyone was strange" (133). Away from their ethnic home, the main physical and emotional space in "After His Own," Kasia and Stas Kowalek feel like strangers in "Wedding in the City," where the main setting is the house of the Martin family.

Particularly in the private space of the Martin house, the difference in social class becomes more obvious, not only in terms of material possessions, but also in terms of the lifestyle and social status brought about by Mr. Martin's job in a bank, possibly in a middle-management position. The Kowaleks are impressed by the "big white house on a lawn like green velvet," but, like before, Kasia feels out of place, as the houses on the street and "the people going by" are "all strangers," including Edith's mother, "smooth, youngly-dressed, and tall," albeit polite and "kind," like her daughter (133). Moreover, upon entering the "big front room, all carpeted, with large deep chairs standing about" (133), Kasia is surprised how comfortable her son is in Edith's home, "this big strange house," while Stas is pleasantly surprised that Edith calls him father (134), perhaps her way of trying to make him more comfortable, as he has been the one more reluctant to come to the city and the wedding. This is also where Krawczyk includes the only concrete place reference in the two stories, in order to motivate the absence of Edith's father when the Kowalek family

arrives – he has driven to Duluth to bring some relatives to the wedding.

Yet, despite the warm welcome and the savory dinner – “lamb chops and baked potato and new peas . . . cake and very good coffee,” Kasia still felt uncomfortable – “it was not like sitting at their own table” (134) – perhaps because they ate alone, since the members of Edith’s family were busy with the wedding preparations. This unfamiliar space makes Kasia think about the comfort of her own home, where she is the homemaker – wife and mother –, wondering whether her younger children have already eaten “on the farm” (134). By juxtaposing the synonyms “house” and “home,” Krawczyk captures the differences between the spaces inhabited by the two women, Kasia and Mrs. Martin. Kasia cannot “feel at home” in “this house,” which, despite being tastefully decorated, is “too quiet and empty” (134). Furthermore, the fact that the lady of this house is not mentioned by her first name, only as Mrs. Martin, or, occasionally, Edith’s mother, may also point to the difference in social class between the two women. As a middle-class woman, Mrs. Martin has a maid who helps her with housekeeping, allowing her to have more time for personal and collective activities outside the home. Moreover, in terms of geographical differences and ethnicity, in urban areas, middle-class families of native-born Americans, like the Martins, would have fewer children (maybe one or two), and that also influenced the women’s roles as mothers, since they had more time to devote to their children’s upbringing, education, etc., as Mrs. Martin seems to have done with Edith.

Life in rural areas, on the other hand, was more difficult. Families, including the ethnic ones, often had many children (four or five) because they needed them to help them with farm work, and, at least when the children were little, the women, including the immigrant ones, prioritized the needs of the family members and the constant housework, that is, their responsibilities as wives and mothers, over their own needs as women.⁷ Moreover, being accustomed to doing all the house chores by herself, for the most part, although a guest in Mrs. Martin’s house, Kasia wants to help

with washing the dishes, making the bed in the morning, etc., not being used to having someone else do all these for her. In addition, she feels awkward when she and Stas are left to spend the evening alone in the big house, as they do not belong to or fit in this environment, which makes Kasia doubt the decision to go to the wedding, after all.

Yet, on the morning of the wedding, over breakfast, Mrs. Martin and Kasia start bonding as women and mothers. In a way, this “tête-à-tête” mirrors Edith’s first visit in the Kowalek home, when she was the stranger in Kasia’s ethnic domestic space. This time, however, it is Kasia who is the stranger in Mrs. Martin’s private sphere of the home. She is impressed by the delicious rolls they have for breakfast and asks Mrs. Martin for the recipe, and, after agreeing to do so, Mrs. Martin, like her daughter during her first visit in the Kowalek home, praises Kasia’s cooking skills, confessing that she knows about “the wonderful Polish dishes” prepared by her, and adding that “we will have to learn from each other” (136). Being again treated like a woman who has something valuable to share, such as ethnic recipes, this time by Edith’s mother, a woman close to her age, a native-born American, and from a higher social class, makes Kasia feel important and slightly more comfortable in Mrs. Martin’s presence and in her house. Moreover, Kasia discovers that, as women, they both enjoy crocheting/sewing. She is pleased to see among the wedding gifts a handmade spread crocheted by Edith’s mother, just like their American teacher had taught Kasia to do during the women’s club meetings she attended in their rural area. To a certain extent, Kasia looks up to Mrs. Martin as a woman, possibly because of her education and more sophisticated middle-class lifestyle, but she is also content that they have some interests in common, like baking and crocheting. Furthermore, as a wife, Kasia is also happy that Kowalek and Mr. Martin get along well, and she is surprised when Edith’s father asks her husband to help him with some farming advice for the bank he is working.

This story also ends on a happy note, with the American-style wedding taking place in a grand church in the city. Spotting

tears in Mrs. Martin's eyes when Edith and her father walk down the aisle, Kasia empathizes with her and her husband, understanding how difficult it is for them, too, to have "their only daughter, their only child, being given to Antek forever, to go away from her home, – to a *strange people*, to a *strange life* . . ." (138; emphasis added), suggesting her awareness of how the Martins might perceive them, as ethnic Americans with an ethnic lifestyle. Still, she is comforted by the thought that she has raised a son she can be proud of, who will make a good husband, as he is "a good man, clean, and kind" (138). As her son repeats the vows after the priest, which "sounded strange to Kasia, not being in the Polish tongue" (138), she prays for the well-being of the newlyweds, her husband, "their children, – Edith's father and mother. *They were a family now*" (138; emphasis added).

The story ends with Stas and Kasia's return journey to their own ethnic space. On the way, they fondly remember the respectful way in which they were treated by Edith's parents, as well as their kindness and generosity. Kasia, ever the practical mother, expresses her appreciation and pride at having such a self-assured and understanding daughter-in-law by promising to sew some bedding "of the lightest goose down" (18), so that Edith and Antek would be warm and comfortable during the cold winter nights on the farm. In turn, thinking about his initial adamant refusal to accept his son's choice for a wife, Stas Kowalek admits that he believes "it will be a good marriage. . . . I would not have thought I could feel so good about it" (139), an expression of his complete acceptance of his son's decision to marry outside his ethnicity and social class.

As a result of their second-generation son's decision, the first-generation parents undergo a complex emotional journey in their own ethnic space in the first story, and a physical and emotional one, in the second story, which results in them being accepted, like their son, into the mainstream society. At the same time, the stories illustrate how, for complete and successful social and cultural recognition, acceptance is necessary in both spaces: the ethnic and the American one. In "After His Own," the native-born American, Edith, although a representative of the mainstream

society, is “the other” in the Polish-American family, and, as such, needs approval from Antek’s parents to be accepted into the ethnic family. On the other hand, in “Wedding in the City,” the Kowaleks represent “the other” in the Martin family, and their cultural/ethnic difference needs to be accepted by Edith’s family as a positive trait, so that native-born Edith and second-generation immigrant Antek can form a successful union. However, the positive outcome – the two families united as one, with accepted ethnic and class differences – is owed, to a great extent, to Kasia, the female protagonist, who, although in a position of subordination in the ethnic family, managed to bring about significant change, by encouraging her son’s assimilation into the American society. At the same time, by connecting with the women in the Martin family, Edith and her mother, Kasia facilitated her ethnic family’s access into the mainstream society, thereby paving the way for her younger daughters to have more freedom of choice and better chances for education and jobs as second-generation Polish-American women. Gladsky rightly suggests that “Ethnicity also means shedding old world gender roles in order to assume new world identities. Ethnicity equals change even within the family” (106), and the two short stories examined in this essay illustrate the masterful way in which Krawczyk managed to capture “not only the evolution of ethnicity but the pivotal role of the ethnic woman in steering the process toward change” (“Monica Krawczyk” 106).

Notes:

¹I will refer to first-generation immigrants as those who emigrated as adults and to second-generation immigrants as those who emigrated as children or were born in the United States to immigrant parents.

²The Presidential Address was published in 1988 under the title “Voiceless Immigrants.”

³For more on the history of Polish-American literature, see Lyra (1985) and Napierkowski (2005).

⁴For more on Polish-American immigration, see Carlisle (2011) and Daniels (2002).

⁵For more on family life and immigrant success, see J. Radziłowski, “Family Labor and Immigrant Success” (1994).

⁶According to Joanna Dmuchala, “traditional patterns and duties taken from the old country to a large extent determined the behavior of Polish immigrant women in the United States. In peasant families, for example, formal education was not considered to be something girls needed, because the necessary skills, such as sewing and cooking, could be learnt at home, continuing the work of their mothers” (69).

⁷For a comprehensive analysis of life in the rural areas of the United States, including women’s roles in the family, see Alexander (2007).

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