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Artistic creation as a way to realize the emancipatory paradigm

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The article relates to artistic creation of intellectually disabled people as an example of possible ways for them to reach emancipation. In this paper, I claim that artistic creation of intellectually disabled people may constitute a tool of self-expression, and as a result be a way to realize the emancipatory paradigm in special education. I have illustrated my hypothesis with some poetry written by two women affected by Down syndrome whose creation is a conscious act of formulating an autonomous artistic message.

KEY WORDS: intellectual disability, artistic creation, emancipation, paradigms of special education

Introduction

Socio-cultural changes happening in the modern world, with its ever changing norms, patterns and values, bear influence on special pedagogy that keeps track of them while undergoing transformation in the process. Modern view on the phenomenon of disability is far from the strictly medical approach of the XX century, with disability being treated as a series of factors characterizing human

condition and, also, becoming the subject of social and existential reflections. Jolanta Rzeźnicka-Krupa notices that defining disability is currently focusing on deliberations about the difficulties of struggling with the burden of existence while not being fully able-bodied and about the potential that is an inherent feature of every human being irrespective of its dysfunctions¹. According to Iwona Chrzanowska, as a result of the changes in the attitudes towards disabilities and people with disabilities that have occurred in the past decades, 'the communities with disabilities have become more active in speaking out about matters affecting them'².

In the publication I put forth the thesis that artistic freedom of people with disabilities is also a way to communicate matters important to them and, in consequence, a way, of realizing the emancipatory paradigm in special pedagogy.

Emancipation of people with intellectual disability

'The discussion about treatment of a disabled person and obtaining by him/ her, irrespective of the dysfunction, the biggest autonomy possible, brings about a broader perspective of freeing him/her from the limitations of the role that was socially ascribed to him/her'³ - stipulates Amadeusz Krause. Emancipation, according to the definition of Maria Czerepaniak-Walczak, is understood as a process '(...) changing of the conditions of functioning of the individual and/or collective, introducing intentional changes in the environment in order to go beyond the conditions of current existence. The mode of expression includes own judgements and sover-

¹ J. Rzeźnicka-Krupa, *Komunikacja-edukacja-społeczeństwo. O dyskursie dzieci z niepełnosprawnością intelektualną*, Oficyna Wydawnicza "Impuls", Kraków 2007, p. 14.

² I. Chrzanowska, *Pedagogika specjalna. Od tradycji do współczesności*, Oficyna Wydawnicza "Impuls", Kraków 2015, p. 415.

³ A. Krause, *Współczesne paradygmaty pedagogiki specjalnej*, Oficyna Wydawnicza "Impuls", Kraków 2010, p. 106.

eign decisions in conditions of oppression and limitations in undertaking actions that change the world and oneself⁴. In the context of deliberations in the field of special pedagogy, emancipation is 'both individual as well as collective liberation of disabled people from the domination of able-bodiedness, from how their dysfunction resonates with the society and from difficulties in functioning. The basis for emancipation is acquiring by them autonomy and self-awareness, and on this basis regaining freedom, which they have lost due to disability'⁵.

As far as emancipation of people with non-intellectual disabilities does not raise many doubts, emancipation of people with intellectual disability, due to the low awareness and irrationality ascribed to individuals might provoke discussions⁶. However, as noticed by Krause, regardless of limitations imposed by disability, a human being is able to reach further levels of emancipation possible to him⁷. According to Beata Cytowska, the first necessary stipulation to start a discussion on emancipation of people with intellectual disability is a departure from traditional, medical, rehabilitative and individual discourses in special pedagogy and turning to humanist approach, in which a significant role is ascribed to reflections on the topic of freedom, self-awareness and autonomy of people with disabilities. The author believes that the key issue seems also to be education and upbringing aimed at emancipation, which should include not only persons with intellectual disabilities but also the surrounding environment⁸.

⁴ M. Czerepaniak-Walczak, *Pedagogika emancypacyjna*, GWP, Gdańsk 2006, p. 29.

⁵ A. Krause, *Współczesne paradygmaty pedagogiki specjalnej*, Oficyna Wydawnicza "Impuls", Kraków 2010, p. 206.

⁶ B. Cytowska, *Trudne drogi adaptacji. Wątki emancypacyjne w analizie sytuacji dorosłych osób z niepełnosprawnością intelektualną we współczesnym społeczeństwie polskim*, Oficyna Wydawnicza "Impuls", Kraków 2012, p. 343.

⁷ A. Krause, *Współczesne paradygmaty pedagogiki specjalnej*, Oficyna Wydawnicza "Impuls", Kraków 2011, p. 206.

⁸ B. Cytowska, *Trudne drogi adaptacji. Wątki emancypacyjne w analizie sytuacji dorosłych osób z niepełnosprawnością intelektualną we współczesnym społeczeństwie polskim*, Oficyna Wydawnicza "Impuls", Kraków 2012, p. 343.

Artistic creativity as one of possible ways towards emancipation

'The drive of communities of the disabled to speak about matters relevant to them is becoming more important' - notices Iwona Chrzanowska⁹. Voicing opinions in your community, known as self-advocacy, is specified as 'direct representation of own interest of people with disabilities'¹⁰. Situation of people with intellectual disabilities in this scope might seem special, because they are thought to 'frequently not being able to creative cohesive narration and in conscious reflection can not refer to the surrounding reality as well as own existence'¹¹. Dorota Podgórska-Jachnik, quoted by Chrzanowska, counters such thesis by pointing out that most people with intellectual disability can benefit from the right to influence their own life and talking about it¹². The Key seems to be regaining the lost voice and considering this voice as socially significant and, in consequence, to be perceived as an entity able to formulate autonomous messages¹³.

⁹ I. Chrzanowska, *Pedagogika specjalna. Od tradycji do współczesności*, Oficyna Wydawnicza "Impuls", Kraków 2015, p. 414.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 414, as cited in: D. Podgórska-Jachnik, *Ruch self-adwokatów jako rozwijanie kompetencji rzecznictwa własnego osób z niepełnosprawnością intelektualną*, in: *Problemy rzecznictwa i reprezentacji osób niepełnosprawnych*, eds. D. Podgórska-Jachnik, WSP, Łódź 2009, p. 180-182.

¹¹ J. Rzeźnicka-Krupa, *Niepełnosprawność i świat społeczny. Szkice metodologiczne*, Oficyna Wydawnicza "Impuls", Kraków 2009, p. 221.

¹² I. Chrzanowska, *Pedagogika specjalna. Od tradycji do współczesności*, Oficyna Wydawnicza "Impuls", Kraków 2015, p. 414, as cited in: D. Podgórska-Jachnik, *Ruch self-adwokatów jako rozwijanie kompetencji rzecznictwa własnego osób z niepełnosprawnością intelektualną*, w: *Problemy rzecznictwa i reprezentacji osób niepełnosprawnych*, edit. D. Podgórska-Jachnik, WSP, Łódź 2009, p. 180-182.

¹³ E. Godlewska-Byliniak, J. Lipko-Konieczna, *Publiczne-prywatne: teatralna gra z niepełnosprawnością*, in: E. Godlewska-Byliniak, J. Lipko-Konieczna (eds.), *21 myśli o teatrze*, Fundacja Win-Win, Warszawa 2016, p.12.

Artistic creativity, serving as an element building their identity, might be considered 'a place where the disabled are socially visible and audible'¹⁴.

In the volume *Therapy and theatre. Around the problem of people with disabilities (Terapia i teatr. Wokół problematyki teatru ludzi niepełnosprawnych)*, Rafał Zięba, notices that silence, seen as the deprivation of the right to voice opinions, is a consequence of a traditional approach to their problems, and was clearly broken by artistic creativity¹⁵. This is what gives the disabled 'possibility to break the psychosocial attitudes isolating them, the possibility of liberating them from the sense of alienation, loneliness and haplessness'¹⁶. It's message will be a form of 'speaking' with one's own voice, on one's own behalf, but solely on the condition, that they are given a chance to build their artistic world from their own personal experiences and their style, often being an original form of expression and a different interpretation for the world¹⁷.

A special manifestation of artistic creativity, in which there is a possibility to shape own expressions is artistic creation. A question comes to mind if it is accessible also to people with intellectual disabilities.

The knowledge about linguistic sphere of functioning of this group is built by information pointing to 'negative properties of the language they use and their speech, remaining dependant and affected by the intellectual deficit'¹⁸. In scientific literature, frequent

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 12.

¹⁵ R. Zięba, *Milczenie ciała (szkic)*, in: I. Jajte-Lewkowicz, A. Piasecka (eds.), *Terapia i teatr. Wokół problematyki teatru ludzi niepełnosprawnych*, Poleski Ośrodek Sztuki, Łódź 2006, p. 30

¹⁶ I. Jajte-Lewkowicz, *Słowo wstępne*, in: I. Jajte-Lewkowicz, A. Piasecka (eds.), *Terapia i teatr. Wokół problematyki teatru ludzi niepełnosprawnych*, Poleski Ośrodek Sztuki, Łódź 2006, p. 7.

¹⁷ R. Zięba, *Milczenie ciała (szkic)*, in: I. Jajte-Lewkowicz, A. Piasecka (eds.), *Terapia i teatr. Wokół problematyki teatru ludzi niepełnosprawnych*, Poleski Ośrodek Sztuki, Łódź 2006, p. 30.

¹⁸ D. Krzemińska, *Język i dyskurs codzienny osób z niepełnosprawnością intelektualną*, Oficyna Wydawnicza „Impuls”, Kraków 2012, p. 9.

stipulations appear regarding the manner of expression of the disabled, that refers to them as 'having difficulties in expressing their thoughts and understanding the utterances of others'¹⁹. People with intellectual disabilities are considered as unable to create complex expressions and a conscious reflection of the surrounding environments and own existence²⁰.

However, as observed by Rzeznicka-Krupa, the most important barriers lie in the difficulty in convincing ourselves (people who consider themselves as able-bodied) to the fact that 'the people whose cognitive and communicative skills seem uncertain, also have their own inner world and exist in the space of specified interpersonal and social relations'²¹.

The irrational convictions regarding both impoverished language abilities and low self-awareness of people with intellectual disability are broken by two women - Justyna Matysiak and Barbara Lityńska. Both women are affected by Down Syndrome. They are also very creative personalities who are able to write about their own issues in a very honest and compelling way.

'Nina a 100% woman'²²

Justyna Matysiak is primarily known as author of drawings. Since 2000 she has been participating in the Workshops of Krzemień Occupational Therapy in Poznań. In 2008 she started her creative work in the Open Workshop of the Tak Gallery in Poznań. As the only Pole in 2007, she received the Insita grand prix, awarded as part of the 8 Triennale of art brut/outsider art by the Slovak National Gallery in Bratislava. Her works are located in many interna-

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 15, as cited in: J. Sowa, *Pedagogika specjalna w zarysie*, FOSZE, Rzeszów 1997, p. 144.

²⁰ J. Rzeznicka-Krupa, *Niepełnosprawność i świat społeczny. Szkice metodologiczne*, Oficyna Wydawnicza „Impuls”, Kraków 2009, p. 221

²¹ Ibid., p. 223.

²² Caption featured in one of Justyna Matysiak's drawings.

tional collections including: Musée de la Création Franche in Bègles in France, Slovak National Gallery Bratislava, The Museum of Everything in London, Museum of Modern Art in Ołomuniec, National Ethnographic Museum in Warsaw, Silesian Museum in Katowice, Ethnographic Museum in Kraków and many other private collections including Leszek Macek collection in Kraków²³.

An element that is uniquely fascinating in the artist's creative works, that appears besides drawings is the auto-referential text²⁴. Malgorzata Szafer, not only the artistic caretaker of Matysiak, but also a person close to her, observes: 'Her recent paintings resemble matrimonial announcements, the woman is praising her womanly attributes and waits until some men becomes interested in her (...) she creates paintings which constitute a conversation with herself (...). Do you know what she writes most eagerly in the painting-drawings? She writes about what to cook the husband for dinner. Something that would not seem fascinating for most women would give freedom to her'²⁵. Szafer believes that marriage is for Matysiak a perfect, yet unreachable territory.

I WANTED TO HAVE A BOYFRIEND (...)/I WANTED TO HAVE A LOT OF LOVE/HAPPINESS/JOY/FAMILY/I WANT TO BE PAWEŁ'S WIFE/MY WIFE MY HEART/MY DARLING/MY FLOWER/MY TREASURE ^{26,27}

In the catalogue of the exhibition *I am not a dog anymore (Nie jestem już psem)*, presented in the Silesian Museum in Katowice, entirely

²³ M. Szafer, *Ja cała czarna. Nie mogę znaleźć chłopaka. Na znak czarne serce. Nie mam chłopaka*. <http://galeriatak.pion.pl/justyna-czarna/> [accessed: 30.05.2017].

²⁴ 'Nie jestem już psem' online exhibition catalogue. Muzeum Śląskie, 1.04-10.09. 2017, <http://niejestemjuzpsem.muzeumlaskie.pl/all/justyna-matysiak/> [accessed, 30.05. 2017].

²⁵ I. Meyza, *Pokochaj mnie jak Pierre Cardin*, in: *Twarze sukcesu. Zespół Downa, Bardziej Kochani*, Warszawa 2014.

²⁶ Captions by Justyna Martysiak come from drawings displayed in the Silesian Museum in Katowice at the 'Nie jestem już psem' exhibition.

²⁷ Original spelling in all capital letters highlights the handwritten character of Justyna Martysiak's texts. I aimed at preserving the original syntax and spelling, but owing to the intelligibility of the message this was not always possible.

devoted to the creations of outsiders, the exhibition's curator Zofia Czartoryska and Katarzyna Karwinska notice that the recent texts by Justyna with growing intensity express frustration and opposition towards her own existential situation.

NINA'S HISTORY/SAD LONELY/BROKEN(...)JUSTYNA DOES NOT
WANT KRZEMIEN'/WORKSHOPS (...)/NO NO/ NO NO
I HAVE TO GO BACK/HEALTH/I WILL REST ON THE
COUCH/DRINK HOT TEA/TELEVISION/I WATCH/NEWSPAPER/I
WATCH/COFFEE/WARM SOCKS/I AM NOT HAPPY YET/BRO-
KEN/J.M.
HISTORY/JUSTYNA/IT IS OVER FOR ME/I CAN NOT FIND A
BOYFRIEND/MARK ENCHANTMENT/JUSTYNA'S HEART/BLACK
MARK/HEART/J.M/I DO NOT HAVE A BOYFRIEND/I DO/NO
HAVE/A BOYFRIEND

What draws attention is that in recent works, the motif of woman's rebellion is visible that provokes a remark that 'Matysiak's art is a feminist art - a fight for the right to independent shaping of own womanhood, own style, own life'²⁸.

JUSTYNA/BLACK HEART/BLACK PROTEST/MY BLACK PRO-
TEST/WITHOUT A HEART/WITHOUT HAPPINESS/WITHOUT
LOVE /J.M

MY JUSTYNA'S/BLACK PROTEST/I DO NOT WANT/TO
KRZEMIEN TO WORK/TO WORK/I WANT TO GO TO THE GAL-
LERY YET/GOSIA SHFER/EVERYDAY (...)/I WANTED TO HAVE A
BOYFRIEND (...)/J.M

Complex, multi-thematic text by Matysiak revealing her emotional states govern her work. Her narrative, as notices by Małgorzata Szafer, are a pre-formative text, which is revealing the emotional

²⁸ 'Nie jestem już psem' online exhibition catalogue. Muzeum Śląskie, 1.04-10.09.2017, <http://niejestemjuzpsem.muzeumslaskie.pl/all/justyna-matysiak> [accessed, 30.05. 2017].

status of the artist²⁹. 'The works of J.M. constitute art that fully corresponds with life itself, art that not only draws on reality, but is reality itself. Art that does not exist without textual layer or meta-textual layer, the text fulfils an explanatory role, becoming a reference and medium for Justyna Matysiak's voice. To me, a defenceless, unadulterated campaign towards own happiness'³⁰- Shaefer concludes.

'I am just as you are, only different'³¹

Barbara Lityńska lives in Warsaw. She is an actress of 'Theatre 21', whose actors are persons with Down Syndrome and autism. She has already played a role in a documentary movie ('Rendez-vous' by M.J. Krawczyk) and a series ('Gleboka woda', directed by M. Lazarkiewicz). She is also the author of three volumes of poetry. The last of those was published in 2016. She considers herself to be a poet, 'not a grand one, but a small one'³². Poetry of Lityńska 'is simple and crystal clear, without pretending, unnecessary formal backflips' - as observed by Sylwia Szewd in an article about the author featured in the book *Faces of success. Down Syndrome (Twarze sukcesu. Zespół Downa)*³³. The characteristic feature of her poetry is simplicity and directness of expression. In her poetry she names emotions and feelings which she experiences in her relations with those close to her: mother, sister, assistant, theatre director³⁴.

²⁹M. Szafer, *JA CAŁA CZARNA. NIE MOGĘ ZNALEŹĆ CHŁOPAKA. NA ZNAK CZARNE SERCE. NIE MAM CHŁOPAKA*, <http://galeriatak.pion.pl/justyna-czarna> [accessed: 30.05.2017].

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Excerpt from Barbara Lityńska's poem quoted from: S. Szweda, *Taka jak ty, tylko inna*, w: *Twarze sukcesu. Zespół Downa*, Bardziej Kochani, Warszawa 2014, p. 43.

³² S. Szweda, *Taka jak ty, tylko inna*, w: *Twarze sukcesu. Zespół Downa*, Bardziej Kochani, Warszawa 2014, p. 42.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Lityńska's publisher, Franek Wygoda (Franek L. Vigoda), made an attempt at interpreting her poetry on his YouTube channel (<https://www.youtube.com/>

* * *

my mom works even at home/ this is difficult/and is affecting me/she is constantly tired/

I have to deal with her moods/and when I beg her / to stop working/she yells at me³⁵

'Olga's departure'

I am sad because Olga/frequently leaves home/it is not pleasant to me/because I miss her/I like her/I like when she tells funny jokes/I like when she smiles

An important theme of the poetry by Lityńska is the story about being different and about disability. Down Syndrome in her poetry is treated as a sickness, health is somewhere in the distance, at the opposite pole, according to the poet. Poetry is an attempt at confronting the world of healthy people, it is a type of trampoline between these two worlds³⁶. The poems epitomize an attempt at finding one's place in the society, where Lityńska, in the beginning, in order to survive, assumed different masks. After some time, as written in her poem, she decided to take them off. She wants to live among people 'in a normal way', without being given a head start which is by default given to those handicapped.

'Masks'

I put on masks/behind which I hide fear/fear of my sickness/(...)/and it is all about going foreword towards people and oneself/I know that you can also have a wonderful life with this sickness³⁷

* * *

watch?v=dDgoRjzGnoo [accessed: 30.05, 2017]). Throughout this work I make use of his interpretational guidelines.

³⁵Poems come from the poetry volume by Barbara Lityńska: B. Lityńska, *Wiersze nowe*, VigodaPress, Warszawa, 2016.

³⁶ S. Szweda, *Taka jak ty, tylko inna*, in: *Twarze sukcesu. Zespół Downa, Bardziej Kochani*, Warszawa 2014, p. 43.

³⁷ Poem quoted from: S. Szweda, *Taka jak ty, tylko inna*, in: *Twarze sukcesu. Zespół Downa, Bardziej Kochani*, Warszawa 2014, p. 42.

I am sick / the sickness is called Down Syndrome/You can achieve much with this sickness/You can learn a lot/I am able to be a person/completely healthy/if I learn mathematic

In Barbara Lityńska poems, just as in the texts by Justyna Matysiak, one can discover the themes of rebellion against her fate. The poet expresses her protest against the situation of exclusion in which a disabled person finds her/himself.

* * *

I am like a fish in the sea, discarded and lonely/I do not know what to do/I seek the shore/ where I can rest/ and dream about professional life/this is my happiness/than I earn money

‘Independence’

I am a grown person/I have an independent life/ I have the right to think/ differently than others/nobody can take that right away from me/I have the right to enjoy life and build it the way I want to

The poetry is not deprived of positive elements. The author has mastered the art and wisdom of finding joy in everyday things and situations³⁸. In the poems we can find traces of her belief in her own abilities and determination to change her fate into a better one.

* * *

I love my heart/which helps me find good solutions/and make good decisions/I am brave and courageous and wise/intelligent/that is how I see myself/I have own ideas for life/nobody can tell me /how to live

Barbara Lityńska in her poetry in a spontaneous way expresses states and feelings which we all feel, although we can not or do not want to admit to them. She bears witness also to the fact that people with intellectual disabilities are capable of having a ‘sensible grasp of reality and to grant meaning to this reality, which we might deem

³⁸ Frank Wygoda’s interpretation tip on the YouTube channel, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dDgoRJzGnoo> [accessed: 30.05.2017].

as 'right and proper'³⁹. Lityńska's poetry is a manifest, its every verse is a call for normal and equal treatment⁴⁰.

'Will you accept me?'

(...) acknowledge that I will not be different/either you accept me/ or you will find it difficult to be in my company⁴¹

The question 'will you accept me', is a question thrown at the reader, hitting the core of the problem. With this question every recipient is left alone and has to answer that question on his own.

Conclusion

People with intellectual disabilities, just as other members of the society, have the right to their own expressions and are able to take part in the social processes and everyday life. They can not be refused equal right to express personal meanings, also through literary creativity. 'Words spoken or written are a symbol and an interpretation-ready image of a given theme, they are point of view of the world. They have creative power also when their author is a person with lighter or heavier intellectual disability' - remarks Beata Borowska-Beszta⁴².

Poetry of people with intellectual disabilities gives the reader a chance to listen to their voice. The fact that the quoted texts were written by authors with intellectual disabilities allows us to postulate, as rightly observed by Dorota Krzeminska, that 'there is unity of feelings and emotions towards life, death, life, suffering, joy faith

³⁹ J. Rzeźnicka-Krupa, *Niepełnosprawność i świat społeczny. Szkice metodologiczne*, Oficyna Wydawnicza "Impuls", Kraków 2009, p. 223.

⁴⁰ S. Szweda, *Taka jak ty, tylko inna*, in: *Twarze sukcesu. Zespół Downa, Bardziej Kochani*, Warszawa 2014, p. 42.

⁴¹ Poem quoted from: S. Szweda, *Taka jak ty, tylko inna w: Twarze sukcesu. Zespół Downa, Bardziej Kochani*, Warszawa 2014, p. 42.

⁴² B. Borowska-Beszta, *Echa ekspresji. Kulturoterapia w andragogice specjalnej*, Oficyna Wydawnicza "Impuls", Kraków 2008, p. 104.

in God, everyday and trivial matters'⁴³. Thanks to it, we can learn how and what the people with intellectual disabilities consider important, how they build the world around them and what meanings they ascribe to themselves and to the experienced reality⁴⁴. The showed examples have revealed that the senses are not hidden in complex and convoluted sentences, but are to be found in honest and direct expressions, regardless of their level of complexity. They carry the richness of meanings and a huge load of knowledge about the world of the authors. 'The reader who look at the world through the prism of grammatical and orthographic correctness will never understand the effort put by the disable people in writing them, as well as the truth intrinsic to the transferred thoughts or feelings'-observes Borowska-Beszta⁴⁵'.

If People with intellectual disabilities are considered as entities capable of formulating an autonomous artistic expression, then, the field of art will become a place of their social visibility and audibility and, in consequence, a realization of an emancipating paradigm in special pedagogy. Persons with disabilities obtain, then, 'the right for their voices to be acknowledged as socially important' and the transfer exceeds the borders of what is merely aesthetic, and it becomes a political message⁴⁶. The art with an intrinsic experience of disability becomes a return to own normality, logic and truth of its creators.

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⁴³ D. Krzemińska, *Język i dyskurs codzienny osób z niepełnosprawnością intelektualną*, Oficyna Wydawnicza "Impuls", Kraków 2012, p. 12.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁴⁵ B. Borowska-Beszta, *Echa ekspresji. Kulturoterapia w andragogice specjalnej*, Oficyna Wydawnicza "Impuls", Kraków 2008, p. 108.

⁴⁶ E. Godlewska-Byliniak, J. Lipko-Konieczna, *Publiczne-prywatne: teatralna gra z niepełnosprawnością*, w: E. Godlewska-Byliniak, J. Lipko-Konieczna (eds.), *21 myśli o teatrze*, Fundacja Win-Win, Warszawa 2016, p.12

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