

IWONA WĘGRZYN

(Jagiellonian University in Krakow)

BITTER ORANGES

SCENES FROM A MARRIAGE BY KONSTANCJA RZEWUSKA,
NÉE IWANOWSKA

This story offers resistance to its teller. It breaks up into biographical presuppositions and pieces of (regrettably) not-the-finest literature. And yet, it has to be told. Apart from historical literary details or the need to recall a long-forgotten work, we are facing a much more serious issue—namely, a female perspective on a story of (a mismatched) marriage, as written down in a literary form.

There is much trouble with the novel I should like to remind herein. Firstly, its title, *Wspomnienie z młodości od 1830 do 1850 r. przez K. Nehemara. Wspomnienie pierwsze. Sylwia* [A reminiscence from a youth, from 1830 to 1850, by K. Nehemar. First Reminiscence: Sylvia], appears enigmatic as it doesn't specify whether it is a diarist or memoirist record, a memoirs-style account, or a piece of romance fiction signed with a female name.¹ Little is known about its actual authorship; 'K. Nehemar' is obviously a pen-name. Does it stand for Dionizja Poniatowska (as the Estreicher Bibliography has it)², or for her younger sister Konstancja Rzewuska (as *Nowy Korbut* bibliographers see it³), is an unresolvable question.⁴ It cannot be precluded that both sisters contributed to the novel. Some biographic details, stylistic imbalance and incoherent narrative suggest that the idea of the novel and an outline of its first volume is attributable to Dionizja, whereas

¹ On the semantics of novelistic titles, see M. Piechota, *O tytułach dzieł literackich w pierwszej połowie XIX wieku*, Katowice 1992; D. Danek, 'O tytule utworu literackiego', *Pamiętnik Literacki* 1972, fasc. 4.

² Estreicher, *Bibliografia*, op. cit., p. 44.

³ *Nowy Korbut*, Warszawa 1972, vol. IX, s. 58. Agaton Giller had no doubts as to who might have been the author: in his biography of Bohdan Zaleski, he attributed the novel to Konstancja Rzewuska; see A. Giller, *Bohdan Zaleski*, Poznań 1882, p. 28 (ftn).

⁴ For more on this topic, see E. Nowicka, 'Dionizja Poniatowska - „sawantka” z Kijowszczyzny', *Pamiętnik Literacki* 2020, fasc. 3.

volume two, woven around the central character's matrimonial troubles, might have been added by Konstancja. Whatever the actual origin of the novel, however, *Wspomnienie z młodości* came out in 1874 in Lwów, 'published by the author', six years after Dionizja's death, and therefore—without losing sight of the aforementioned issues—the copyright rests with Konstancja Rzewuska today.⁵

In any case, the said issues are of really minor importance compared to the potential value of the opuscle in question. *Wspomnienie z młodości* is certainly a huge challenge to the patience of present-day reader. Annoying and dismaying, it is somehow intriguing too. The novel is unattractive in its literary aspect, stylistically pretentious, and naively infantile psychologically. Yet, as it reveals the intimacy of the household realities of the affluent Volhynian landed gentry and a very peculiar context of the 'female question', situated somewhere between emancipation and bigotry, it appears to be an outright unique testimony of its time.

The plot is set in an idyllic setting of a holiday village near Odessa, the characters being rich Volhynian landowners; the central subject-matter is the experience of devaluation of the idea of marriage and a diagnose of the disfunctions of the period's families. The plot is banal in itself, based on two young maidens entering adulthood, a group of gentlemen callers, the emergence of affection, hopes and expectations, and bitter disillusionments. Sylwia successfully evades an unpromising marriage. The fate of Olesia, the other main character, will be decided by her father, and it falls to her lot to experience a relationship with an unloved husband. Part of her experience is humiliation, emotional blackmail and physical violence. The foreseeable and strongly idealised profiles of the female characters contrast their desperate scrimmage ensuing from the sense of inability to escape one's fate: the histories of these girls exactly replicate the ones of their mothers. For all those women, marriage initially comes as a disappointment, then as an emotional disaster, and lastly, an existential catastrophe. The point is not about a sappy story of matrimonial misunderstandings and the loss of illusions bred on sentimental novels, but about home violence, financial exploitation, and woman's helplessness in face of the law: giving the father the entire power over his children, the latter deprives the mother (woman) of it.

⁵ Attempts to attribute the work through comparison of the styles of both writing ladies are doomed to failure from the outset. Albeit considerable, Ponia-towska's literary, journalistic and epistolary output mostly features pieces of scholarship and works in French; Rzewuska has only left a handful of letters—too little to draw a final conclusion regarding the novel's authorship.

A pictorial herald of the novel's actual topic is the symbolical scene of offering presents to the maidens. The wish uttered at that moment, "so that each of the gentlemen bring us something from the sea"⁶, is delivered in quote a special way as one of the men brings in a basket filled with oranges fished out of the sea, once loaded onto a ship which had crashed against some rocks. Nineteenth-century culture perceived the orange as a celestial fruit, epitomising fertility and passion; the orange flower, an inseparable element embellishing the wedding dress, signalled the virginal waiting for love and submission to the husband.⁷ Here, however, bitter of seawater (salty as tears), become an ominous symbol of destiny, a sign of disappointment and disillusionment.⁸ The spellbinding image of "hundreds and thousands" of oranges floating on the sea surface exposes the deception of virginal hopes, whereas the promise of a sweet marital happiness turns into an experience of woman's bitter fate.

The novel's plot opens in a setting much desired for a sentimental romance:

The house of Mr. and Mrs. Bordecki stood in the midst of a mountain that stretched lower and lower into the valley. Although large and of a light shape, its varied architecture, taken from the nearby southern countries, gave it a form of magical dwelling, and it seemed to have been erected not by human hand. (I, 15-16)

However, happiness is absent from this beautiful world. The young ladies and gentlemen carefully orchestrate the appearance of an idyll: they read about love, dream of it and by any means seek to behave, think and speak as shown in trendy romance novels. It doesn't take much to shake this fragile order, though: suffice it for the young men to be sent to Odesa, where sentimental pageboys turn into cynical libertines. The fictional character of the meticulously created unity of the young lovers' world is debunked by Olesia:

Do you really believe, sir, that we, young girls, cannot see, feel, hear, and do not know what is happening around us, in our families; that we do not cry over the tears of our mothers, and, that we do not get overwhelmed by all this, though they

⁶ K. Nehemar, *Wspomnienie z młodości od 1830 do 1850. Wspomnienie pierwsze. Sylwia*, Lwów 1874, vol. I, p. 50. All quotations come from this edition (volume and page numbers are specified in parentheses).

⁷ Angelo de Gubernatis, *La mythologie des plantes. Les légendes du regne végétal*, Paris 1882, vol. II, pp. 267-8.

⁸ Nadia Julien, *Dictionnaire des symboles*, Belgique 1989, p. 264. Also, see Gertrude Jobs, *Dictionary of Mythology, Folklore and Symbols*, New York 1962, vol. II, pp. 1212-3.

are protecting us as much as they can? It seems a secret to you, dear sirs. You think that God and people see nothing, because you are trying to show yourselves as different from what you really are, like people in more gracious moments, particularly in the reception room and with respect to other women. Yes, it may be a secret to the reception room, but you forget that your real life, outside of it, is known. Oh! one woman knows it from another, even if you reckon that your victims must stay silent, as you tend to forget how soon enough becomes enough, where there is not enough respect, and that they have the right to reveal the wicked truth to both people and God. (I, 42-43)

This emotional tirade of a maiden reveals the common awareness of hypocrisy of premarital rituals and uncloaks the fairy tale of happiness awaiting the young married couple, whilst also smashing the myth of young women's naivety. Young women in the novel carefully observe the surrounding world and learn about their own inevitable fate from the stories of their mothers, cousins and neighbours:

Ah sir, don't you ever count on a young girl's being happy. Her first years are a preparation for the second act, hundredfold worse, because they are robbed of motherly heart and care, the only source of happiness in this world, which the husband tries to steal from them as soon as he can, but what will he give in return? (I, 44-45)

The climax of the novel, marked by Sylvia's broken engagement and the beginning of Olesia's marital ordeal, is the point at which the plot clearly loses its pace. A tiring enumeration of male offences begins, a kind of catalogue of nineteenth-century misandry. It includes complaints of men's selfishness, immaturity and lack of empathy, and rebels against the cult of masculinity, which gives bachelors permission to 'sow their wild oats' before marriage and thus foils any attempt to keep later family fathers from indulging in gambling and drinking sprees. Repeated complaints about husband's friends can be read as refusal to accept social exclusion of the women isolated in their homes, but also as a recognition of progressive disintegration of intimacy and trust, which were supposed to be the foundation of marriage.

Rzewuska, in her accusatory passion, has no scruples about breaking the taboo, and exposes stories of physical and mental violence against wives, instrumental treatment of children becoming hostages in conflicts between their parents, even sexual perversions:

[...] years ago, as he was going out, apparently for a walk, he took with him the three-year-old Sylwia and, instead of strolling, took her with him to one of his lovers, a woman of a character much like his own, under the impression that she would

educate her the best. The miserable mother could not see her or get her out of there, and she only regained her when he gave credence that she'll really leave him.

(I, 46)

She would not hesitate to debunk sexual perversions, either:

This gentleman (...) wanted me to find and recruit girls for him, aged from eight, ten, to fifteen years, supposedly as home and household servants, in order to deceive my mistress and deprave these poor girls, seemingly keeping watch on their good conduct, until I offer them to him.

(II, 133)

Rzewuska tells a story of an unceasing ruthless battle of the sexes, hidden in the privacy of households. The pages are filled with episodes of this war, as told by women—usually silent victims of a world designed for men's purposes and desires:

A man is a woman's inherent enemy, he will even deny her the right to humanity as much as he can. [...] He is happy to only see her as a servant, a slave, a toy, often without regard for her life, never caring about her dignity, her feelings and sufferings.

(II, 30)

Wspomnienie z młodości is astonishing in its accumulation of anger, extreme emotions, but also helplessness and, in a way, lack of conclusion. Rzewuska offers no social diagnosis, nor does she openly reject the oppressive patriarchal culture or postulate to redefine women's social roles. Her diagnoses of the crisis of the institution of marriage, recognition of the actual decay of the traditional family model and desperate ascertainment of the gaping chasm between romantic ideals and reality are reduced to pointing out men as the guilty party and descriptions of religious ardour as women's reaction to a reality which cannot possibly be accepted. Her findings could be paraphrased by saying that men are sinners, and then they 'take revenge' on women for their higher spiritual maturity. Men portrayed by Rzewuska cannot anymore rise to the traditional role models of fathers and guardians, but they also fall short of the modern ideal of romantic lover and friend. In this world, women are both missionaries and martyrs: missionaries, as Rzewuska sees their activities as a kind of evangelic mission, and martyrs, because their fates effectively appear as forming a hard-hitting social-and-moral novel and/or a record of women's sacrifice for the common good (the latter aspect seems to be the actual purpose behind the novel).

With all her radicalism, Rzewuska resolutely declares that her intent is not to contest the God-given order; in fact, she repeatedly emphasises her traditionalism. Yet the paradox is that the more she speaks of her respect for tradition, the more she exposes its dysfunctionality. In this nov-

el all attempts to update old rules and appeal to traditional ‘safety fuses’ meant to guarantee the durability of marriage turn out to have no effect anymore.⁹ “When you marry, you will love each other” (II, 52): this naive declaration of Olesia’s father is meant to break her resistance against the arranged matrimony. Tradition is supposed to protect women and, if the ‘sentimental model’ fails, guarantee her the stable happiness of family life, as it always was. It is supposed to guarantee but, as Rzewuska shows, it does not guarantee anything anymore. The modern woman has no model to look up to – the apotheosised tradition of Polish noble household is now a void myth, a doleful memory. The young girls in Rzewuska’s novel see a reflection of themselves in their mothers’ stories and, instead of consolation, they only find a confirmation that a marital disaster is inevitable. The author sees all this interdependence, states it as a fact, and desperately repeats her trust in the everlasting, sanctioned by religion and tradition, ideal of relationship between a woman and a man. This intellectual helplessness becomes most apparent in the finale, which is marked by Olesia’s death, Sylvia’s rejection of marriage, and religious reformation of the wooers, who are ‘sentenced’ by the author to penance for their sins in a theological seminary.

The history of Polish literature remembers Konstancja Rzewuska’s elder sister, Dionizja Poniatońska. It is reportedly her who inspired the figure of Julia Horyńska in Zygmunt Krasiński’s novel-of-manners *Herburt*¹⁰; Zoryna and the Ukrainian Beatrice, the inspiration and character in Józef Bohdan Zaleski’s poems, was also ‘her’. A tuberculosis victim marked by melancholy, the object of the poet’s platonic affections, a ‘devotee and bluestocking’¹¹, as many of her contemporaries would call her, ideally fitted the English template of nineteenth-century femininity.¹² Neither Poniatońska’s family nor the admirers of Zaleski’s works cared about asking embarrassing ques-

⁹ For a discussion of a broader social background of the problem, see Sławomira Walczewska, *Damy, rycerze, feministki. Kobiety dyskurs emancypacyjny w Polsce*, Kraków 1999, p. 128.

¹⁰ See Józef Treściak, *Bohdan Zaleski na tułactwie 1831-1838*, Kraków 1913, p. 135.

¹¹ See, for example, Eliza z Branickich Krasińska, *Listy*, ed. by Z. Sudolski, trans. by U. Sudolska, Warszawa 1995, vol. I, p. 183. Also, see Elżbieta Orman, *Tahańcza Poniatońskich. Z dziejów szlachty na Ukrainie w XIX wieku*, Kraków 2009 (a monograph of the Poniatoński family, rich in material).

¹² Seweryna Duchńska, *Wspomnienia z 29cio-letniego pożycia z mężem moim 1864-1893*, Paris 1894, pp. 25–6. Agaton Giller put it thus: “she was an angel immersed in prayer, in the pains and longings in his roving Thebaid”; after A. Giller, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

tions about the long-lived relationship between him and his muse. Dionizja's relations with her husband were not investigated, either, though everybody knew that a prenuptial agreement was the only confirmed link between them. It was only Józef Tretiak who, working on J.B. Zaleski's legacy, revealed the tragedy of Dionizja Poniatowska: in moment of exaltation, the poet's muse considered herself dead for life, and described herself as a 'deep grave'.¹³

It was so different with Konstancja Rzewuska, once known for a notorious social scandal. Tadeusz Bobrowski and Wirginia Jezierska asserted that the marriage history of Mr. and Mrs. Rzewuski of Kiczka was followed with bated breath by Volhynian people for years. It was a tempestuous story, with twists and turns. Initiated as a perfect marriage of Konstancja's impressive dowry and the magnificent family affinities on the part of Count Ernest Rzewuski, it soon turned into a story of never-ending domestic disturbances. As Bobrowski wrote, "Rzewuski brutalised his wife, and, since she was quite a violent person, they would quarrel and reconcile, approach each other and part way several times, stealing the children from each other; the lady reciprocated her husband whenever and however she could"¹⁴. The marital war between Mr. and Mrs. Rzewuski was for some time the beloved story among Volhynian gossipers. Wirginia Jezierska gathered a handful of those stories:

Countess Rzewuska, married to Ernest, is a very original person. After an all-day-long argument with her husband, she would come to visit him late in the night. Dressed as a sultana, he would apologise to him, and then ask whether he had said his prayers before going to bed. Incredulous to his replies, she'd kneel at his bed and say the prayers for a whole hour, whilst her weary husband would join her, smoking his cigar.

She is a very romantic woman and of excessive views, whereas her husband represents a sober positivism [...] as a result, divorce is on its way.¹⁵

Bobrowski had much more empathy for Rzewuska, seeing in this „nice and educated person, lamentable in an unmatched marriage”, a victim of her mother's ambitions and of her husband's madness—the latter “was no good, in the whole meaning of the word. Having married her for dowry, thus making, as he believed, a mésalliance, he treated his wife roughly and

¹³ Tretiak, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 48.

¹⁴ Tadeusz Bobrowski, *Pamiętnik mojego życia*, ed. by Stefan Kieniewicz, Warsaw 1979, vol. I, pp. 103–4.

¹⁵ Wirginia Jezierska, *Z życia dworów i zamków na Kresach 1828-1844*, Poznań 1924, p. 98.

rudely, doing all sorts of dirtiest scandals at home, in her presence”.¹⁶ With all his compassion for Konstancja, this memoirist identified the repeatability of women’s fates in that family:

Just like her mother [...] had speculated rich and apparently-aristocratic marriages for her daughters, Ernest’s wife, the Countess, married her elder, Maria, off to Count Kazimierz Stadnicki, a boring and infirm man, albeit with the bones of a decent man; and the other one [...] to Feliks Meleniewski, a Maltese commander, of non-aristocratic lineage or tradition as he was a usurer’s son, but affluent and basically good man, even if ridiculous with his commander’s title and store-bought orders.¹⁷

The history of a forgotten novel is strangely tied at this point. Literary histories of speculated marriages come across their real archetypes. The diarists’ enunciations reveal the dependence between the novelistic and biographies of the Iwanowski sisters. If Bobrowski is to be trusted, both maids were heartbroken while getting married—just like the young girls in the novel; both wrestled with everyday odds in their relationships with unloved men. While such entanglement of literature and life is nothing out of the ordinary, it seems that the novel under discussion is not a sort of fictionalised diary but an element of a game where taking control over the images prevalent in the public space was in fact at stake. Sylwia, possibly Dionizja’s literary (self-)portrait, was used to record her intellectual and spiritualised image and persona; Olesia was meant as a ‘tool’ used by Konstancja (involved in a real-life scandal, humiliated by her husband and the gossiping public opinion deriding her) to force her own interpretation of events through. Rzewuska turns a personal story into one of a female victim, domestic drama, and the effort to build a space of sisterly freedom, using literature as the instrument of her fight. And, she wrote in a way that was opposite to the pattern prevalent in her time—namely, those of Balzac, an ironist, and Mrs. Sand, the ‘romance she-writer’ she considered immoral. Rzewuska was guided to this end by Ida *Gräfin* von Hahn-Hahn as the author of *Doralice. Ein Familiengemälde aus der Gegenwart*¹⁸, regarded as a “romance story more

¹⁶ Bobrowski, . *cit.*, vol. I, p. 258.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 259–60.

¹⁸ Translated into Polish (possibly by Paulina Chalecka, née Plater) as Ida de Hahn-Hahn, *Doralisa. Obraz rodzinny z dzisiejszych czasów*, Berlin and Poznań 1863. For more on the author, see *Women Writers in German-speaking Countries. A Bio-Bibliographical Critical Sourcebook*, Greenwood Press 1998, pp. 189–98; also, Monika Bednarczuk, ‘Madame Bławatska jako czytelniczka i autorka’, in A. Zawiszewska and A. Galant (eds.), *Czytanie. Kobieta, biblioteka, lektura*, Szczecin 2015, pp. 403–430. On Ida’s London success story, see Alethea Hayter, *A Sultry Month. Scenes of London Literary Life in 1846*, London 1965.

serious than usual [...] as it touches upon all the central issues of our age, so judiciously, so clearly, and so plainly discussing every single thing” (I, 61).

The choice of ‘the German Mrs. Sand’, as Countess Hahn-Hahn was commonly called, as the master of female writing was a meaningful gesture, absolving Rzewuska from the association with a scandal and moral provocation under the sign of Mrs. Sand, whilst allowing the novelistic plot to make ambitious excursions into philosophy, spirituality, and moralistic. With all the similarities between Mrs. Sand and Mrs. Hahn-Hahn, they had a lot in common. Amédée Pichot thus pointed to the differences between them:

Quelques femmes de talent, et beaucoup de femmes très-vulgaires, trouvant des bornes à leur essor, et des restrictions gênantes au développement des facultés éminentes qu’elle supposaient leur être échues en partage, ont attaqué avec plus ou moins de raison les institutions iniques qui s’opposent à l’affranchissement de leur sexe. Quelques-unes ont poussé la révolte jusqu’à se faire hommes. Madame Dudevant, par exemple, qui, non contente de rivaliser avec les philosophes barbus, a pris quelquefois les habitudes et le costume du sexe dont elle jalouse les prérogatives. La statuette qui a fait connaître ses traits à l’Europe, nous la présente en cheveux courts, en pantalons plissés, et dans tout le laisser-aller que comporte une redingote du matin. Madame Hahn-Hahn, au contraire, se montre femme aussi bien dans ses habitudes et ses goûts que dans ses sentiments aussi bien dans ses faiblesses que dans sa force; nous ne la croyons nullement tentée de soutenir que ses pareilles ont qualité pour disputer aux hommes les palmes de la science, des arts ou de la philosophie¹⁹.

Dismayed with *Doralice/Doralisa*, a *Tygodnik Ilustrowany* weekly reviewer had a very different take on the issue: “What is this, after all? A ro-

¹⁹ “Some talented women, as well as a number of very common women, seeing the borders to their development and troublesome limitations to their talents, which they otherwise should like to share with others, have, more or less legitimately, attacked the institutions that opposed their emancipation. Some of them got so overwhelmed by their rebellion that they forgot they were becoming like men. For instance, Mrs. Dudevant, who, unsatisfied with her rivalry against the bearded philosophers, took over the habits and the attire of the gender whose privileges she envies. The portrait that has made Europe acquainted with her features shows her short-haired, in plicated trousers and nonchalantly wearing a smoking jacket. In contrast to her, Mrs. Hahn-Hahn presents herself as a woman, be it in regard of her habits and preferences, feelings, weaknesses, as well as her strength; we do not believe that she might have ever been tempted by the statement that persons similar to her are given a chance to argue with those knowledgeable in sciences, arts, philosophy.” A. Pichot, ‘La Comtesse Ida de Hahn-Hahn’, in Ida Hahn-Hahn, *La Comtesse Faustine*, trans. A. Pichot, Paris, 1864, p. 27.

mance story, or a theological treaty? A novel, or a Little Office?”²⁰ His annoyance confirms, however, that Rzewuska intended to seek for a novel addressing female experience a form that would differ from the established romance convention. In the circle of Polish conservative landed gentry, the popularity of Ida von Hahn-Hahn, perceived as *la grande dame*—writer, moralist, and thinker, offered an opportunity to depart from a simplified association of women’s emancipation with the rebellious challenging of the tradition, with the attitude incarnated by George Sand. Ida Hahn-Hahn’s biography distinctly echoed with that of Mrs. Sand (divorce, long-lasting illegal relationship, travels, bluestocking in common perception, successful career as a writer); however, two things seem to have been key for its Polish perception: her cause-celebre conversion to Catholicism and consistently emphasised elitism. The author’s religiosity and her declared need to preserve the traditional social order made her works so popular among European aristocratic circles—in spite of most of her works being badly written and, escaping the etiquette of romance novel, aspiring to the rank of philosophical meditations over spiritual dimensions of the female fate. It is worth emphasising that Ida von Hahn-Hahn was not perceived as an alternative to Mrs. Sand, but rather, as her more acceptable conservative version.

Taking inspiration from *Doralice*, Rzewuska tried to tell the story of her matrimonial conflict from the victim’s standpoint, as the victims usually remained silent, fearing scandal and public humiliation. Referring to *Doralice* and making use of its proposed solutions as to the plot and fiction, she tried to alter the rank of the victim’s voice: now, it is not a son or whining of a harmed female character demanding compassion, but a voice of a serious moralist, spanning through the story: rendering her story universal, she makes the female experience of a matrimonial disaster part of a pessimistic diagnosis of the time she lives in. Konstancja Rzewuska’s *Wspomnienie z młodości*, another poorly written novel, thus became not only a literary record of a woman’s yet another private history but also an (unacknowledged) trope and clue of certain unevident routes in the history of emancipation, a desperate and uncompromising attempt at linking the search for a space of female freedom to religious devotion (if not religiosity) and traditionalism.²¹

²⁰ ‘Doralisa. Obraz rodzinny z dzisiejszych czasów przez I. de Hahn-Hahn [a critical review]’, *Tygodnik Ilustrowany* 1863, vol. VIII, no. 211, p. 400.

²¹ As it seems, the appropriate interpretive context for the combination of pietism or zealotry and emancipation, somewhat astonishing today, should be the religious revival observed among the intellectual elite of Polish 19th-century émigrés. Consideration of female freedom in relation to deepened spirituality, as

Rzewuska's novel can also be seen as an intriguing supplement to the history of a tangled Polish reception of George Sand's output in Poland.²² Although by her choice of Konstancja Rzewuska as her artistic patron Idy von Hahn-Hahn enabled her to consistently cover up the traces of her other experiences as a reader, it is impossible that she wouldn't know Sand's works. By her marriage to Ernest Rzewuski, she entered a family strongly associated with literature. Suffice it to remark that her husband's sister was Ewelina Hańska, née Rzewuska, second married name de Balzac! The years she spent in France, where she sojourned 'in order to recuperate', along with Konstancja's European travels, deny by themselves that they might not have known George Sand's works, such as *Indiana* or *Valentine*, the novels that approached the issue of matrimony as a sort of metaphor of woman entrapped in the social convention. Every nineteenth-century writing woman was, to an extent, indebted to Sand. Having said that, it is hard to resist the impression that as literary historians (of either sex), we tend to err as we overly trust the democratic criterion of literary value of the works of our interest. Yet, nineteenth-century female literature followed its own peculiar principles, one of them being, apparently, the need to reconcile the model of female emotionalism as developed within the sentimental tradition, and the idealised pattern of romantic love, with deeply experienced religious orthodoxy. Consequently, it sought to combine the ill repute of love stories and the upright profile of moralising intentions, for the promotion of which romances were meant to be used. Putting it otherwise, the search for a novel structure which, basing on the popularity of the romance pattern, would possibly be of use in 'disarming' the fatal phenomenon that years later was called bovarism (after the name of the character in Flaubert's masterpiece) and to neutralise the negative destructive potential as ascribed to the novel with respect to the traditionally paternalistic order. One example of such *double écriture*²³, making a pedagogical treatise fitting in a novelistic 'frame', is *Karolina* by Klementyna z Tańskich Hoffmanowa [Klementyna Hoffman, née Tańska], the intent behind which is revealed in the introduction:

For *Karolina* is no romance, after all; it is just a feminine and domestic novel, a meticulous one, with no fantasising and no innovation at all, the almost-inexist-

postulated by the author, is identifiable with the current of awakened religiosity as shared also by major literary figures such as Adam Mickiewicz and Józef Bohdan Zaleski.

²² See Regina Bochenek-Franczakowa, *Présences de George Sand en Pologne*, Frankfurt am Main 2017.

²³ Michela De Giorgio, *La bonne catholique*, w: *Histoire des femmes en Occident*, red. Georges Duby et Michelle Perrot, Plon 1994, s. 182.

ent intrigue is nothing new, whilst it abounds pretty much with morality lessons and with palavers. This is a novel which, please keep this in mind, I have written not for use of children or studying maidens, but instead for mothers, for maids of the marrying age; in a word, for mature women.²⁴

Contrary to what this author declared, her novel was still a love-story one, to a considerable degree. Opposing the rules of the genre, it took advantage of them in order to tell a story that could become a guidepost for women experiencing the odds of mismatched marriage and an 'illustration' from Klementyna's treaty 'on the obligations of women—*O powinnościach kobiet*²⁵.

Unsuccessful marriage, decaying family and emotional disaster experienced by women thus turned out to be a tough issue to tackle as it provocatively infringed the cultural taboo and could not assume an appropriate form. Novel, still genetically dependent upon the romance convention, seems to have been the worse of all possible formulas; however, it proved to be the most efficient one, owing to its popularity. The female novel, targeted at life-experienced women—as opposed to love stories for impassioned misses—posed a special challenge as it forced the (female) author to write a literary piece against the 'rules' of literature, and, to write based on well-tested literary patterns. Thus, Hoffmanowa's *Karolina* challenged the works of Balzac, George Sand and Frédéric Soulié. Yet, as its author admitted, *Karolina* was directly inspired by a French remake of a work by Charlotte Bury.²⁶ I should think that the choices made by Rzewuska were analogical: writing in opposition to the 'cynical' Balzac and the 'immoral' Mrs. Sand, she was directly inspired by the works of a German comtesse, who built her own literary career upon a play of similarities and differences in reference to the French mistress. As a result, in *Wspomnienie z młodości*, Mrs. Sand would encounter—paradoxically enough—Ida von Hahn-Hahn as her menacing rival and an unexpected ally, possibly also a continuator.



²⁴ K. z Tańskich Hoffmanowa, *Karolina. Powieść*, Lipsk 1839, t. I, [b. s.]

²⁵ Klementyna z Tańskich Hoffmanowa, *O powinnościach kobiet*, Warszawa 1845, vol. II, pp. 142–3.

²⁶ Charlotte Campbell Bury, *A Marriage in High Life*, London 1828. The French translation used by K. Hoffmannowa came out in 1830 in Paris, under the title *Un mariage du grand monde, traduit de l'anglais de Miss Baillie*.

BITTER ORANGES

Iwona Węgrzyn (Jagiellonian University in Krakow)
ORCID: 0000-0001-6591-9449, e-mail: iwona.wegrzyn@uj.edu.pl

ABSTRACT

Overlooked by the history of Polish literature, the novel *Wspomnienie z młodości od 1830 do 1850 r. przez K. Nehemara. Wspomnienie pierwsze. Sylwia* [A reminiscence from a youth, from 1830 to 1850, by K. Nehemar. First Reminiscence: Sylvia] marks a point-of-departure for a literary and biographical investigation. Encrypted in the plot, the family (hi)stories of the sisters Dionizja Poniatowska and Konstancja Rzewuska enable to reconstruct moral scandals of yore and provide a pretext for reflecting on the intricacies of the reception of George Sand in Polish culture. Inspired by the works of Ida von Hahn-Hahn, 'the German Mrs. Sand', the novel in question appears to be an interesting example of the relation between emancipation and devotion/religionism.

KEY WORDS

Ida von Hahn-Hahn, the German Mrs. Sand, emancipation and devotion/religionism/zealotry, conservative feminism

