

The ‘three omissions’ principle – what is silenced by families in the novel of Positivism?*

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Reflections on conversational stylistics which describe and explain conversations that are ineffective and do not lead to understanding and a sense of community, highlight taboos as one of the obstacles to communication. In her classic study of novel dialogue, Grażyna Borkowska emphasizes the fact that a certain model of dialogue is premised on silence as a form of escape from the ‘rationalized image of the world’. She concludes:

milczenie uczestników dialogów presupozycyjnych kładzie się czasem cieniem na ich wzajemnych stosunkach. Zdarza się bowiem, że niewypowiedziane rodzi lęk, ogranicza swobodę mówienia, sprzyja powstawaniu tabu, stanowi barierę utrudniającą pełne porozumienie, akceptację, odwzajemnienie uczuć.

the silence of the participants in presuppositional dialogues sometimes casts a shadow on their mutual relations. This is because sometimes the unspoken breeds fear, limits the freedom of speech, promotes the emergence of taboos, and is a barrier to full understanding, acceptance, reciprocation of feelings.¹

The author mainly considers conversations held in a close circle: within the family or a group of friends; a feature of this type of interaction is a high degree of positive emotions between the interlocutors, which, however, does not necessarily facilitate mutual understanding. The principle of non-conflict communication is the presence of a phatic function oriented toward maintaining contact, while conflict situations weaken this function since the parties to the conflict are concerned with expressing their emotions and making their points.² In presenting

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1 G. Borkowska, “Dialog powieściowy i jego konteksty (na podstawie twórczości Elizy Orzeszkowej)” [Dialogue in novels and its contexts (based on the writings of Eliza Orzeszkowa)] in: *Z dziejów form artystycznych w literaturze polskiej* [History of artistic forms in Polish literature], vol. 52 (Wrocław: 1988), p. 40. All quotations in English in this text are translated from Polish editions.

2 I. Arctowicz-Skowrońska, “Styl familijny jako przykład dynamicznego stylu konwersacyjnego” [The

a list of research challenges of contemporary conversational stylistics aiming to describe the field of intergenerational conflict, Małgorzata Kita proposes, among other things, to establish the 'scope of taboos' (narrowed down to the field of colloquial expressivisms).³ Thus, taboo is an important regulatory element of culture, even in informal contacts, even in family conversations it influences the range of topics discussed and the way they are presented. With regard to the literature of the positivist period, a lot of attention is paid to the so-called Aesopian speech (Aesopian language), which, in terms of poetics and style, has been described in great detail,⁴ although usually one-sidedly inflating the importance of the legal and political factor, and overlooking issues of a social and moral nature.⁵ The issue

familial style as an example of dynamic conversational style] in: *Style konwersacyjne* [Conversational styles], ed. B. Witosz (Katowice: 2006), p. 96.

- 3 M. Kita, "Style komunikacji międzypokoleniowej" [Intergenerational communication styles] in: *Style konwersacyjne*, p. 83. Basic literature of the subject is included in this collective monograph. See also: *Czas i konwersacja: przeszłość i teraźniejszość* [Time and conversation: Past and present], eds. M. Kita, J. Grzenia (Katowice: 2006); *Tabu językowe i eufemizacja w dialektach słowiańskich* [Linguistic taboo and euphemization in Slavic dialects], eds. F. Czyżewski, A. Tyrpa (Lublin: 2008); *Język a kultura* [Language and culture], vol. 21. *Tabu w języku i kulturze* [Taboo in language and in culture], ed. A. Dąbrowska (Wrocław: 2009).
- 4 M. Żmigrodzka, "Dwie powstańcze legendy Orzeszkowej" [Two Uprising legends of Orzeszkowa], *Pamiętnik Literacki* [Literary Memoir] 1963, fasc. 4; A. Martuszevska, *Poetyka polskiej powieści dojrzałego realizmu (1876–1895)* [Poetics of the Polish novel of mature realism (1876–1895)] (Wrocław: 1977), pp. 205–232; eadem, "Porozumienie z czytelnikiem (o 'ezopowym języku powieści pozytywistycznej)" [Understanding with the reader (on 'Aesopian speech' in Positivist novel] in: *Problemy odbioru i odbiorcy: studia* [Problems of reception and of recipient: Studies], eds. T. Bujnicki, J. Sławiński (Wrocław: 1977); eadem, "Pozytywistyczna mowa ezopowa w kontekście literackich kategorii dotyczących milczenia i przemilczenia" [Positivist Aesopian language in the context of literary categories concerning silence and the unspoken] in: *Z domu niewoli: sytuacja polityczna a kultura literacka w drugiej połowie XIX wieku* [From the house of bondage: Political situation and literary culture in the second half of the 19th century], ed. J. Maciejewski (Wrocław: 1988), pp. 11–30; B. Mazan, "Wpływ cenzury carskiej na twórczość młodego Świętochowskiego" [The influence of tsarist censorship on the work of young Świętochowski] in: *Z domu niewoli...*, pp. 31–52. Important information on this subject is also contained in the collective book *Piśmiennictwo – systemy kontroli – obiegi alternatywne* [Writing – systems of control – alternative circuits], ed. J. Kostecki, A. Brodzka, vol. 1 (Warsaw: 1992).
- 5 The problem of Aesopic language is still viewed by the humanities through the lens of martyrological experience. Systems of state and religious censorship did not only affect Polish writing (cf. G. Kucharczyk, *Cenzura pruska w Wielkopolsce w czasach zaborów 1815–1914* [Prussian censorship in Greater Poland during the Partitions 1815–1914] (Poznań: 2001). Some ideological orientations were fought in Europe with the same zeal as in Polish lands. The oppressiveness of the partitioners towards Poles was comparable to the situations of other national minorities in empires. Too often the practices of tsarist censorship and their influence on peripatetic style was applied to literature created in Galicia, where the legal framework was at least predictable, and where realistic prose and satirical writing explicitly avoided naming the issues I abbreviate in Polish as the '3 Ps': politics, money, sex [in Polish: *polityka, pieniądze, pieć*] (see the explanation in the final paragraph of the introduction). The postulate once put forward by Anna Martuszevska that Polish realist novels should be subjected to a 'blank spots' verification test by juxtaposing them with analogous Western European novels (H. Balzac, C. Dickens) and with Polish works written outside of the conditions of censorship, is still relevant – see: A. Martuszevska, *Pozytywistyczna mowa ezopowa* [Positivist Aesopian speech], p. 30. The author suggests that the context that explains the sense of 'blank spots' is

of substitution in the plane of verbalization is a problem in the literature of realism, a detailed look at which can bring many cognitive surprises, as indicated, for example, by observations of the practices of translators forced to choose linguistic forms in accordance with the expectations of ideological or religious pressure groups.⁶ However, it is necessary to start with the most elementary, though not obvious, matters – the principle of mimesis vs. indefinite places. In Stefania Skwarczyńska's view, silence in a literary work can be either postulative, that is, demanding an active role of the recipient in completing the picture of the world,⁷ or eliminative. She thus defines the latter: Silence of this type is not a structural element; it is, if I may express myself in such a paradoxical way, a means to the creation of nothingness, non-existence. It signifies non-existence. That which is not spoken about does not exist. In reality, this silence, unlike other types of silence, counts on the recipient's ability to forget.⁸ 'Eliminative silence in regard to the world of extraliterary reality,' – she continues – 'is an expression of choice between elements'; a typical example of abbreviations and passing over of facts that in the extraliterary reality are viewed as negative is the tendentious literature.⁹ It can be assumed that the principle of mimesis, regardless of whether it is used in a primarily cognitive function or critical of the real world,¹⁰ provides a basis for inferring the representation of the features of reality in literary imagery through the category of life probability.¹¹ The picture of family and marriage in the Polish conditions of the 19th century, which we know thanks to research in fields of sociology and historical demography,¹² can be juxtaposed with its novel version to answer the question: what was talked about, what topics were kept silent in the life of the family of the second half of the 19th century? More interesting, moreover, is the second

historical consciousness, noting an interesting fact: the lesser saturation of the Polish novel with authentic historical events.

- 6 See: Z. Leszczyński, "Rażąca religijność Krasnoludków" [The jarring religiousness of *Dwarves*], *Prace Językoznawcze 19: Studia polonistyczne* [Papers in Linguistics 19. Polish Studies], eds. A. Kowalska, A. Wilkoń (Katowice: 1991), pp. 122–129.
- 7 S. Skwarczyńska, "Przemilczenie jako element strukturalny dzieła literackiego" [Silencing as a structural element of a literary work] in: eadem, *Z teorii literatury: cztery rozprawy* [Four treatises on the theory of literature] (Łódź: n.d.), p. 31.
- 8 Ibidem, p. 29.
- 9 Ibidem, p. 30.
- 10 Z. Mitosek, "Obszary i funkcje mimesis" [Areas and functions of mimesis] in: *Mimesis w literaturze, kulturze i sztuce* [Mimesis in literature, culture and art], ed. Z. Mitosek (Warsaw: 1992), p. 26.
- 11 A. Martuszevska, *Prawda w powieści* [The truth in a novel] (Gdańsk: 2010), pp. 148–149.
- 12 Extensive literature on the subject can be found in Aneta Bołdyrew's very well-documented book *Matka i dziecko w rodzinie polskiej: ewolucja modelu życia rodzinnego w latach 1795–1918* [Mother and child in the Polish family: Evolution of the model of family life in the years 1795–1918] (Warsaw: 2008).

question – what did the spouses not say to each other, what made them uncomfortable, embarrassed them, what required linguistic euphemization or even silence as a moral taboo? Whatever the spouses did not utter, whatever in family life was covered by the unwritten prohibition of verbalization, belongs to the world of culture.¹³ Positivist writing optimistically assumed the salutary, therapeutic, socializing and educational impact of dialogue between spouses. One example is Maria Konopnicka's well-known poem *Jaskółka* [Swallow], with its motif of the poet's critical view of her husband's refusal to engage in dialogue about economic and social issues. Perhaps the best expression of such a view is Edward Prądyński's courageous treatise *O prawach kobiety* [On the rights of women], in which he included a thought often found in the novels of Eliza Orzeszkowa:

Prawem społecznego bytu jest potęgowanie sił łączności; stąd dla każdej jednostki powinność przestrzegania wszelkich wykroczeń przeciw ogólnej zgodności sił złączonych, powinność przechowywania istniejących form zbiorowej organizacji i doskonalenia ich wedle zdobywanego, coraz jaśniejszego na rzeczy poglądu.

Wspólne czytanie pism periodycznych i książek treści poważnej stanie się potrzebą i jeżeli nie zastąpi, to przynajmniej na drugi sprowadzi plan dzisiejsze czcze rozrywki: karty, kieliszek i pustą gawędę, romans, żurnalowe studia i zdrożne wysoki próżności. Światły mąż i ojciec weźmie to za punkt wyjścia do sformułowania swych myśli o bieżących wypadkach, o społecznych i naukowych zadaniach; rozumna małżonka udziałem swoim ożywi, ociepli a niejedną iskierką zdrowego poglądu oświeci ten domowy parlament. W ten sposób z dziedziny myśli i wyższych człowieczych obowiązków zaczerpnięte wspólne dla małżonków łączniki skojarzą ich dusze węzłem silniejszym od wywołanych pięknocią ciała zachwytów, silniejszym także od świętokradzko łamanych przysiąg.

The law of social existence is the intensification of forces by means of communication; hence the duty of each individual to observe any transgression against the general conformity of the united forces, the duty to preserve the existing forms of collective organization and improve them according to the acquired, increasingly clear view of things.¹⁴

The common reading of periodicals and books of serious content will become a necessity, and if not replace, then at least relegate to the background today's empty amusements: cards, drinking and empty storytelling, romance, journalistic studies and the reckless leaps of vanity. An enlightened husband and father will take this as a starting point for formulating his thoughts on current events and social and scientific tasks; a sensible wife will enliven, warm and enlighten this domestic parliament with her participation and with more than one spark of a healthy view. In this way, the links drawn from the spouses' spheres of thought and higher human duties will bind their souls together with a knot stronger than the raptures induced by the beauty of the body, stronger also than sacrilegiously broken oaths.¹⁵

Marriage was conceived as a partnership, to which the contracting parties contribute some value as common working capital (material resources, labor, knowledge,

13 'I call the communication of people with each other, taken as a specific activity, a cultural behaviour. In other words, for me, culture is the way of being of people, consisting in their communication with each other. In this way, culture is connected to language' – A. Zaporowski, "Kulturowy kontekst komunikowania się" [The cultural context of communication] in: *Szkice z filozofii kultury* [Sketches on philosophy of culture], ed. A. Pałubicka (Poznań: 1994), p. 78. For more on the social and cultural rules governing conversation and the role of context, see: U. Żydek-Bednarczuk, *Struktura tekstu rozmowy potocznej* [Structure of text of a colloquial conversation] (Katowice: 1994), pp. 137–145.

14 E. Prądyński, *O prawach kobiety* [On the rights of women], 2nd edition, supplemented (Warsaw: 1875), p. 218.

15 Ibidem, p. 251.

views, feelings, aesthetic qualities). The manager of the partnership, by property law, was the husband. He made decisions, he was responsible for the well-being of the family and his wife's property entrusted to him, and he was also the director in the theater of family roles – if he didn't initiate conversations, he usually interrupted them at a moment convenient to him. In the novel *On the Niemen*, Benedykt Korczyński either ends every dialogue with his wife with some generalizing phrase or with a gesture or nod, silently closing the issue. Conceptualizing the separation of roles in a marriage according to the rules of the partnership made it possible to define the partner's expectations. Julian Ochorowicz, in his *Listy do przyszłej narzeczonej* [Letters to a bride-to-be], a collection of premarital guidance tips, treats marriage as an association (elsewhere, he speaks of a 'spiritual partnership'), in which the man represents strength and abilities relating to (mostly) extra-domestic relations, while the woman represents identical values, but relating to the scope of (mostly) home. The common goals of both boil down to: the selfish enlargement of one's own happiness and the easier fulfillment of social and general human duties, which are man's destiny.¹⁶ This is, of course, an idealizing assumption, much like Prądzyński's position, but a very modern direction of thought, one moving toward partnership. The clearly defined separation of roles in marriage is the foundation of Orzeszkowa's 1872 novel *Wesoła teoria i smutna praktyka* [Merry theory and sad practice]. The protagonist, a young, respected, community-minded doctor who makes a decent amount of money, plans marriage as a two-way arrangement uniting opposites, complementing each other:

– Tak, tak! – potwierdził z zapalem młody doktor – kobieta powinna wyobrażać w małżeństwie żywioł estetyczny, słowem: powinna być połową jego, radością i pięknem, gdy mężczyzna przedstawia sobą stronę surową i poważną... My szczególnie, pracownicy, my zwłaszcza lekarze, [...] my więcej niż ludzie innych zawodów potrzebujemy na żony istot radosnych, uśmiechnionych, pięknych, artystycznych, przy których boku wracałyby ku nam, choćby na chwilę, słodkie złudzenia i marzenia, przynębione nieubłagany realizmem nauki, których muzyka czarowna, śmiech swobodny i beztroski, postać zachwycająca, zakryłaby przed nami, kazałyby nam zapomnieć o tych tragicznych, bolesnych, a częściej jeszcze brzydkich i nudno-prozaicznych rzeczach, na które patrzeć rozkazuje nam zawód nasz.

– Yes, yes! – confirmed the young doctor with enthusiasm – the woman should represent the aesthetic element in marriage, in a word: she should be one half of him, joy and beauty, while the man represents with himself the austere and serious side... We especially, the workers, we especially doctors, [...] we, more than people of other professions, need as wives joyful, smiling, beautiful, artistic beings, by whose side we could return, if only for a moment, to sweet illusions and dreams, depressed by the inexorable realism of science, whose lurid music, free and carefree laughter, the delightful figure would cover from us, would make us forget those tragic, painful, and more often still ugly and dull, prosaic things that our profession commands us to look at.¹⁷

16 J. Mohort [Ochorowicz], *Listy do przyszłej narzeczonej* [Letters to a bride-to-be], K. Junosza, *Listy do cudzej żony* [Letters to someone else's wife], with the foreword by T. Jeske-Choiński (Warsaw: 1898), p. 40.

17 E. Orzeszkowa, *Wesoła teoria i smutna praktyka: opowiadanie* [Merry theory and sad practice. A short story] (Warsaw: 1966), pp. 15–16.

As expected, the protagonist is deeply disappointed, as his wife – a beautiful music lover – does not sweeten and beautify his life but actually hinders his professional duties. She does not respond with arguments, but rather ‘keeps silent, laughs or cries’, as a result of which doctor Władysław reaches this belated conclusion:

Biada mężowi, którego żona z lekkomyślnym śmiechem wymówi: „I coś mnie może obchodzić, kim ty jesteś!” Kim jesteś? Czym się trudnisz? Co miłujesz? Jakie spełniasz powinności? – w pytaniach tych spoczywa główna treść jego życia, lepsza połowa jego istoty, praca całej młodości jego, wartość jego człowiecza, tajemnica jego siły moralnej, z pomocą której idzie przez świat nie z próżnymi rękami, z sercem pełnym.

Woe to the husband whose wife says with reckless laughter: ‘And what could I care who you are!’ Who are you? What do you do? What do you love? What duties do you fulfill? – In these questions rests the main content of his life, the better half of his being, the work of all his youth, the value of his humanity, the secret of his moral strength, with the help of which he goes through the world not with idle hands, with a full heart.¹⁸

Władysław experiences the same disappointment with marriage as other characters from Orzeszkowa’s works: Benedykt Korczyński, Darwid from *Argonautci* [The Argonauts], Suszyc from *Na dnie sumienia* [At the bottom of conscience], the father of the protagonist of *Pamiętnik Wacławy* [Wacława’s diary]. None of them has a conversation partner in his wife; family members, bound by their common children and daily problems, do not communicate with each other in the most important matters of their shared life. Sometimes, the lack of shared concepts is due to mental differences, as in Orzeszkowa’s short story *Bracia* [The brothers]. Still, more often, the underlying reason boils down to the cultural, customary and legal separation of male and female roles in conjugal life. It is evident to such an extent that it carries over to the right to raise children, which was divided according to the gender of parent and child. It is visible in *On the Niemen*, where Orzeszkowa shows the different upbringing of male and female children – Witold is educated in a practical profession, Leonia stays at a boarding school, as Mrs Korczyńska feels too weak to cope with the hardships of parenthood, moreover, her wish is that her daughter should develop artistic talents. Even Witold notes that his sister is growing up to be ‘a doll’ and a ‘worldly magpie’.¹⁹

In Natalia Korwin-Szymanowska’s novel *Galatea* (1911), written a quarter of a century later, the identical situation is highlighted by the parents’ emphatic declarations about which of them is responsible for their son’s education and which for their daughter’s. The results are the same as those depicted by Orzeszkowa: the son, though wealthy, attends school with his peers, later prepares for a practical profession and becomes his father’s successor and the head and protector of the

18 Ibidem, p. 227, pp. 241–242.

19 E. Orzeszkowa, *Nad Niemnem*, ed. J. Bachórz, BN I 292 (Wrocław: 1996), vol. II, p. 67. In the manuscript, the writer crossed out a sentence about the daughter’s musical education (vol. I, p. 43, footnote 34).

family. The daughter – educated in the likeness of her mother – delights people, but she is a selfish doll who only awakens to a socialized life under the influence of suffering, like Galatea, but she will not live to see her own happiness. The principle of the novels of the second half of the 19th century is the dominance of the motif of trying to get married over the motif of married life; the dialogues between the characters deal with various matters of a general nature, with love turmoil in the background. After the marriage takes place, the conversations stop. Even during the honeymoon period, as in Henryk Sienkiewicz's *Rodzina Połanieckich* [*Children of the Soil*], the content of conversation about new impressions and new acquaintances creates a community between them; even in moments of marital crisis, as in Orzeszkowa's *Pan Graba* [Mr. Graba], the spouses' dialogues concern personal matters; later, even in idyllic images of the happy holiday of the whole family, all the spouses are puzzlingly reticent. Klemens Junosza in *Listy do cudzej żony* saw the lack of open conversations between spouses as the source of family crises. From the moment his protagonist, bored with a marriage in which she did not express the slightest interest in the joint property, asked her husband from the off about the number of oxen and the profitability of breeding, a radical change takes place in their lives, culminating in a complete spiritual transformation of the protagonist and the realization that she had fallen in love with her own husband after several years of living together.²⁰ Most of the problems that are not raised in marital conversations, over which there hangs some unwritten prohibition on verbalizing, dictated as if by an involuntary fear of bringing something evil, boils down to three categories. The principle of tabooing uncomfortable issues, which I refer to as the '3 Ps' are: politics, money, gender (in Polish: *polityka, pieniądze, płęć*).

POLITICS

Politics, broadly understood as the totality of state affairs that determines the relationship between the rulers and the ruled, affects every person. The consequences of foreign policy can manifest themselves in the form of dramas of families whose children have fallen victim to wars; the consequences of legal and administrative regulations set the rhythm of daily work, ideas, hopes and fears about the fate of one's own and one's family. Meanwhile, family life mapped out in positivist

20 In Anna Wereszczyńska's factographically excellent work, "*Ostatni Mohikanin drobnej szlachty*" i "*niezrównany monografista Żydów*": *życie Klemensa Junoszy-Stępowskiego* [The 'last of the Mohicans of the petty nobility' and 'the incomparable monographer of the Jews': The life of Klemens Junosza-Stępowski] (Lublin: 2008), p. 212; the author interprets this work overly vaguely as dealing only with 'the problem of deficient marriages'.

novels goes on as if without realizing that the course of everyday affairs is determined by politics. Yes, we know from many chronicles and short stories by Bolesław Prus the comical types of small-town politicians who decry newspaper news, predict the moves of governments and specific politicians (especially Bismarck), discuss the future of countries, but at the same time we know that the author viewed this kind of neighborly storytelling with indulgent forbearance as a quirk of men who waste time deliberating about something over which they have no influence and which they conceptualize falsely, their own and/or national wishes being mistaken for premises of inference based on facts (Rzecki in *The Doll*). In the works by Prus and Jan Lam, only men engage in politicking, forming discussion groups unrelated to family life.

A characteristic dichotomy is noted in Orzeszkowa's novel *Maria* – perhaps her most 'exemplary' tendentious novel. Maria Iwicka explains that the idea of having her husband's employees dine with their breadwinners will make it possible to 'solve the great and dangerous question of labor and capital'.²¹ She is – as we can tell – of above-average mind, and sees the connection between general issues and the small things of everyday life. The same Maria also conducts educational activities among the workers. After meals, a group of young men surrounds the mistress of the house, and the conversation revolves around the 'albums and pamphlets' in the living room, as well as around 'office and family matters'. At this time Iwicki, surrounded by senior citizens, debates 'about grain and timber prices at foreign fairs, about the exchange rate of domestic money abroad'.²²

Maria surpasses her husband in intellect, but the world of men reserves discussions of politics for themselves. Orzeszkowa went very consistently in the direction of euphemisms, using an excess of pronouns and pseudonymous proper names even where she probably didn't have to do so for reasons of censorship. In *Rodzina Brochwiczów* [The Brochwicz family], when depicting the situation of the country after the enfranchisement reform, she first uses the terms 'Vilnius district', 'Jagiellonian city', 'institution of serfdom', only to indicate the time and place of the plot in a moment using generalities and an excess of pronouns ('Who does not know what is going on here and there, in this and that spot of the globe; what mental consequences result from the various conditions in the midst of which society spends its life').²³ Similarly, she builds up the historical and political background in the short story *Za doliną róż* [Past the valley of roses], where the war in

21 E. Orzeszkowa, *Maria. Powieść* [Maria. A novel] (Warsaw: 1886), p. 129.

22 Ibidem, p. 144.

23 E. Orzeszkowa, *Rodzina Brochwiczów* (Warsaw: 1885), vol. 1, p. 13.

the Balkans is mentioned in a series of allusions and periphrases, using only one proper name, 'Turkey'. The communication of siblings, one of whom stays in their native land and the other leaves and goes deep into Russia to pursue a professional and financial career, is presented in such a way that the reader can infer where they live only from some of the exotic toponyms (*Pierwotni* [The originals], *Bracia, Nad Niemnem, ... I pieśń niech zapłacze* [...Let the song weep]). Politics does not exist in these conversations, although the brothers recognize that they already have a system of concepts about the world that is extremely different ('so great a difference in beliefs, in aspirations, in the speech prevailing on the lips of one of the brothers and under the pen of the other [...]').²⁴ This system of using pronouns to avoid words that describe political realities was used exceptionally often by the author. In the novel *Jędza* [The witch], a poor daughter-seamstress, maintains herself and her mother with the work of her hands because the two sons do not help the mother. There are almost no cordial conversations between the bitter mother and the busy daughter.²⁵ Very unfavorable news about the fate of her sons is given to her by her friends euphemistically, toning down the brutal truth about their moral and national degeneration:

– Cóż on?... – zaczęła znowu i nagle, z uniesieniem dokończyła: – Cóż on teraz robi, kiedy biuro porzucił? Śmierć! niedola!

– Pokąt... – zaczynał już Stanisław.

Ale Aleksander bystro na niego spojrzał i prędko przerwał:

– Prawnym doradcą został... interesami zajmuje się, babuniu!

Ze spuszczonymi powiekami milczała chwilę, a potem bardzo cicho zapytała znowu:

– A Józio?

– Czyż babunia nie wie?... – wyrwał się znów Stanisław, ale Jadwiga znowu za poję surduta go pociągnęła, a Aleksander głośno zagadał:

– Babunia przecież wie, że Józio pięć lat już temu ze swoim pułkiem w dalekie bardzo strony wyszedł...

– What is he... – she began again and suddenly, with elation, she finished: – What is he doing now that he has abandoned the office? Death! Misery!

– Since... – Stanisław was already starting.

But Aleksander looked at him sharply and quickly interrupted:

– He became a legal advisor... he takes care of business, grandmother!

With her eyelids down she was silent for a while, and then very quietly asked again:

– And Józio?

– Doesn't grandmother know?... – again Stanisław broke out, but Jadwiga again pulled him by the front of his frock coat, and Aleksander spoke loudly:

– Grandmother knows that Józio left five years ago with his regiment to very distant places...²⁶

24 E. Orzeszkowa, *Anastazja. ... I pieśń niech zapłacze* (Warsaw: 1977), p. 196.

25 During the scene with the Christmas Eve wafer, an image of the symbolic transfer of the gift of warm feelings, there is a culmination of an impossible agreement in dialogue: '– I wish you... Jadwisia... – she began and could not finish; her lips and hand with the wafer began to shake like leaves swept by the wind. Jadwiga looked at her with unmoving eyes, from the depths of which, one by one, drops flowed out and hung on her eyelashes, glistening in the abundant light of the lamp. With her fingers she touched the wafer and quietly began: – I wish you, mother... I wish you, my beloved mother.... – and she could not finish' (E. Orzeszkowa, *Jędza. Pieśń przerywana* [The witch. An interrupted song] (Warsaw: 1939), p. 53).

26 Ibidem, p. 66.

Finally, the mother, eavesdropping on her daughter's conversation, learns the truth formulated without euphemisms – one son is marrying the daughter of a Russian merchant, the other is in jail for fraud. The reaction of the semi-conscious mother is expressed in words that avoid naming legal and political realities:

ze złodziejami i rozbójnikami... sądzić go będą, do katorgi skazają... [...] Żeni się tam... z tą... Jezus, Maria, za pieniądze honor i duszę sprzedają...

with thieves and robbers... they will try him, they will condemn him to *katorga*... [...] He marries there... with this... Jesus, Mary, for money he will sell his honour and soul...²⁷

Benedykt Korczyński (*Nad Niemnem*) is so accustomed to concealing his political views that in a social chat he asks questions that can only be understood by knowing the cultural and economic context well: 'whether in the present times even those of us who do not waste money and work like oxen will manage to... this... you know...'. But also in his conversation with his son, in the scene in which Witold is being fitted as a successor to the ideals of his father's youth (vol. III, Ch. IV), he is no longer able to speak other than in code ('The Korczyński men cannot be... you know... lack of ideals, lack of love for... for... – Old habit tangled his tongue. He stammered. – For... you know... – he mumbled.'²⁸).

Politics is avoided in conversations within the closest circle; and if it appears, it is reserved for the world of men. One example is Orzeszkowa's short story *Złota nitka* [Golden thread]. In a burgher's living room, a family is conversing, playing cards, having fun and relaxing. A retired professor reads the newspaper and from time to time is enlivened by 'important news,' such as that MPs in Constantinople expect Porta to make concessions to Greece. And right next to him, at arm's length, in the same living room, a drama of human hearts is taking place. Two different worlds.

MONEY

Family law placed the onus of ensuring the family's material existence on the man. Finance was his domain. Women were not required to know the laws of the market or financial matters, even though it was left up to them to run the household, which required handling cash. Novels of the second half of the 19th century sometimes depicted in caricature form the separation of daughters from matters of household finances, as a result of which they entered married life completely unprepared, not knowing the basic prices of food products or services (Gabriela Zapolska, *Z pamiętników młodej mężatki* [From the diaries of a young married

²⁷ Ibidem, pp. 138–139.

²⁸ E. Orzeszkowa, *Nad Niemnem*, vol. III, p. 449.

woman])). Satirical portraits of ladies who considered it a virtue to be ignorant of the elementary principles of the social economy were portrayed by Orzeszkowa, for example, in the characters of Izabela Odropska from *Pierwotni*, Luiza Wielogrońska from *Pani Luiza* [Mrs. Luiza], Mrs. Przyborska from *Szara dola* [Bleak fate]. Some of them, moreover, were well versed in family and financial law but preferred to play the roles of the naive in order to strengthen their positions in negotiations (e.g. the heroine of Natalia Korwin-Szymanowska's novel *Psyche*; Emilia Korczyńska from *Nad Niemnem*). Indeed, however, some women found themselves in very uneasy situations because until now the world of their finances had been managed by men. In Waleria Morzkowska's novel *Zaklęte siły* [Enchanted powers], a would-be brother-in-law wants to help a woman in a foreign place, but she doesn't know how to behave in a simple situation:

Podniósł telegram, który leżał na ziemi, rzucony w chwili wstydu i rozpacz przez Eufemię, położył go na stole i przycisnął portmonetką, w której znajdowało się paręset reńskich. Tym sposobem zabezpieczył ją od natychmiastowych kłopotów i zostawił możliwość udania się, gdzie by zechciała. [...] Pierwszą jej myślą było wyrzucić je przez okno jako rzecz wstrętną. [...] Nie miała życiowego doświadczenia, by zrobić ogłoszenie w pismach i za ich pośrednictwem uwiadomić właściciela o tym, że nie dotknęła się sumy przypadkiem u niej zostawionej. Kazała przywołać rządcę hotelu i złożyła u niego portmonetkę z pieniędzmi, jako rzecz Marcela. [...] Sposób jednak obmyślony przez nią nie był wcale praktycznym, rządcą nie uczynił żadnych kroków, ażeby zwrócić własność poszkodowanemu i Marceli pozostał w przekonaniu, że pieniądze jego użyte przez nią zostały i posłużyły do wykonania dalszych zamiarów, chociażby powrócenia do Jagodny.

He picked up a telegram that was lying on the ground, thrown in a moment of shame and despair by Eufemia, placed it on the table and pressed it with his purse, which contained a couple of hundred Rhenish gulden. By doing so, he secured her from immediate trouble and left her with the opportunity to go wherever she wished. [...] Her first thought was to throw it out of the window as a distasteful thing. [...] She did not have the life experience to make an announcement in the press and through it make the owner aware that she had not touched the sum accidentally left with her. She had the hotel manager summoned and deposited the purse with the money with him as Marceli's property. [...] The method devised by her, however, was not at all practical, the hotel manager did not take any steps to return the property to the injured party, and Marceli was left with the belief that his money had been used by her to carry out further intentions, if only to return to Jagodna.²⁹

The well-known dialogue of the Korczyński couple metaphorically contrasts 'bread' and 'body' with the needs of the 'soul'. Bread is the material sphere, in which one cannot live without money. Other dialogues of spouses written by Orzeszkowa and her contemporary female writers show frequent asymmetry, disconnectedness, bipolarity, incoherence of the topic of conversation whenever it touches financial matters. Here is a dialogue of spouses:

– Pawle! – krzyknęła – Pawle! Pawle!
– A co, Kociu? – spytał nie podnosząc głowy ani oczu.
– Czy ty człowiek, czy kamień? Czy mąż, czy kat?

– Pawle! – she shouted – Pawle! Pawle!
– What is it, Love? – He asked without raising his head or eyes.
– Are you a man or a stone? Are you a husband or an executioner?

– Sztuk sześćset osiemdziesiąt jeden po rubli dwa kopiejek siedemdziesiąt... – wyszeptał. [...]
 – Pawle, Pawelku! – chlipiąc i jęcząc mówiła – ja ciebie tak kocham, a ty dla mnie taki obojętny.

– Six hundred eighty-one pieces, each two roubles seventy kopecks... – he whispered. [...]
 – Paweł, Pawełek! – she moaned in between sobs – I love you so, and you are so indifferent to me.³⁰

In Korwin-Szymanowska's novel *Pasierby* [Stepchildren, 1907], the husband, the head of the house, devotes most of his time to social matters, neglecting his own property. Whenever his wife wants to talk to him about the family's material existence, he dismisses her with a short 'Some other time, love, some other time'.³¹ What's more, once he is fully aware of the shakiness of the family's existence, when he borrows the family jewels from his wife to pay off his obligations, he also cuts off the conversation: 'Another time, my Marcia, another time'.³² And he does so despite the haunting image of his daughter, who turns to him: 'Father, why did you conceal our fate from me? Why did you bring me up in false splendours? What will become of us today?'³³ Money is a taboo subject in the family. It is only discussed when there is no longer any chance of obtaining it through loans or selling off whatever is left of the wealth. Wives are sometimes aware of financial trouble and try to solve it by the simplest means, i.e., by saving and taking on some of the household chores, but they do so in secret from their spouses.

However, the martyrs and victims of their husbands' lack of business talent do not bring up the subject of money shortage in their conversations. In *Anielka* by Prus, the master of the house is unaware that meat is not being bought as a saving measure, and later on he sells off the property, their only livelihood, without telling his wife. Mrs. Marta from Szymanowska's *Pasierby* mends her children's underwear and feeds them bread with butter for afternoon meals, which surprises the neighbour ('But this is nearly poverty! Every labourer eats almost the same thing, and he was told so much about the wealth at the Zaliwski palace'³⁴). The protagonist of Stanisław Grudziński's *Żona artysty* [Artist's wife] spends most of her time alone. The ever-declining funds she receives from her husband force her to save the remnants of her dignity from her servant, so she invents plausible excuses for saving, which her husband learns about by accident:

– Czy dawno pani wyszła? – zapytał.
 – Będzie może z półtorej godziny.

– Did the lady leave a long time ago? – he asked.
 – An hour and a half ago or so.

30 E. Orzeszkowa, *Pierwotni* (Warsaw: 1949), pp. 37–38.

31 A. Krzyżanowski [N. Korwin-Szymanowska], *Wybór pism. Tom pierwszy: Pasierby* [Selected writings. Volume one: Stepchildren], introduction by H. Sienkiewicz (Lviv–Poznań: n.d.), p. 29.

32 Ibidem, p. 134.

33 Ibidem, p. 127.

34 Ibidem, p. 69.

– Więc chyba bez obiadu?
 – Tak, proszę pana, bez obiadu.
 – Kazała sobie zostawić?
 – Nie, proszę pana, był tylko przygotowany befsztyk dla pana. Sama pani pości. Zgotowałam tylko kartofle. [...]
 – I często pani tak pości? – zapytał jeszcze, jakby od niechcenia, służąca.
 – Jak czasem, proszę pana; zwykle gotuje się cały obiad, jeżeli pani nie jest proszona do pani generalowej albo do pani hrabiny.

– So she didn't have lunch?
 – That's right, sir, she didn't.
 – Did she ask you to leave it for later?
 – No, sir. There was only a beefsteak made for you. The lady is fasting. I only cooked potatoes. [...]
 – Does the lady fast often? – he asked the servant again with ostentatious casualness.
 – Sometimes, sir. Normally a whole lunch is cooked, unless the lady is invited to eat with the general's wife or with the countess.³⁵

The husband's logic (or rather, lack of it) tells him that his wife should not know privation. Therefore, it must be her fault that her system of saving (not eating enough) keeps him from getting a loan. 'The worst thing is' – he said to himself – 'when women take on things that are not theirs. It wasn't up to her to take care of the household needs'.³⁶ The wife, meanwhile, seeing her husband's trepidation, asks simply:

– Powiedz mi tylko jedno, mężu! idzie o pieniądze?
 – Tak, o pieniądze.
 – Więc będę spokojna. – Powiedziała to tak stanowczo i naturalnie, że Horski spojrzał na nią z podziwem.

– Just tell me one thing, husband! Is it about money?
 – Yes, it is about money.
 – In this case, I shall remain calm. – She said this so firmly and naturally that Horski looked at her with admiration.³⁷

And he had plenty to admire her for. She was the one who, without waiting for anyone, saved the family's livelihood, saved marital love and changed the world for the better. The husband can only impress others with his gallows humour with which he informs his entourage of his bankruptcy. The marriage is saved when the topic of money finally comes up in conversation. From now on, both spouses share responsibility for the family. The conversation restored the shaken community.

35 S. Grudziński, *Żona artysty* (Cracow: 1891), vol. 2, p. 10. Of course, the protagonist was not invited to lunch at anyone's house... Moreover, she had to pawn her possessions, mend underwear, and did so without complaints.

36 Ibidem, p. 15. Similar male pride and annoyance at his wife's emotional reaction, anticipating misfortune, is felt by the protagonist of Szymanowska's *Pasierby*: 'His wife, who, after all, lacked nothing for happiness, sat at night, hidden in a corner with her work and cried. What could this mean? He was a different story; he had a great many troubles on his shoulders, but she? What could sadden her? Could she have guessed the real state of affairs?' (*Pasierby*, p. 131).

37 Ibidem, p. 110.

SEX

If it weren't for Gabriela Zapolska's *Przedpiekle* [Hell's kitchen], *Kaśka Kariatyda* [Kate Caryatid], *O czym się nawet myśleć nie chce* [What one doesn't want to think about], if it weren't for her various *Małaszkas* and *Żabusias*, we'd be left to assume that women depicted in novels of the second half of the 19th century have no bodies or at least no awareness of their biological sex.³⁸ A woman is a finished bio-aesthetic product, a sculpture, a statue, a portrait. She is rarely shown doing physical labour, so physiological manifestations of the body's reaction to exertion are also rare. For the most part, male characters can be similarly assessed – moral conventions removed matters of corporeality into the realm of shame, care was taken to shield the body, the rule was to avoid talking directly about disease symptoms. From today's perspective, the medical discourse with regard to women seems interesting; medical textbooks and manuals, especially on pregnancy, puerperium or menstruation, did not bring many important thoughts and concepts, avoided specific names and in reality, only in the area of breastfeeding did 19th-century medicine have a real impact on society.³⁹

The external portrait of a woman is a metonymy; she is represented by her dress. Very frequent are motifs of visits to milliners and seamstresses, motifs of looking at herself in the mirror, planning or buying outfits or fabric for dresses. Women dress up, transform themselves, change shapes and colours; they are in a constant striving for the effect of a particularly attractive butterfly. It could just as well be said they are mannequins, subjected to treatment by someone from the outside. Against this background, the motifs of taking off parts of an outfit, undressing, taking off the protective covering, the path towards nudity and carnality, take on special significance. In the rather austere, puritanical atmosphere, any image of

38 For more, see: I. Gubernat, *Przedśionek piekła: o powieściopisarstwie Gabrieli Zapolskiej* [Hell's kitchen: On the novels by Gabriela Zapolska] (Słupsk: 1998); K. Kłosińska, *Ciało – pożądanie – ubranie: o wczesnych powieściach Gabrieli Zapolskiej* [Body – desire – clothing: Early novels by Gabriela Zapolska] (Cracow: 1999); A. Chałupnik, *Sztandar ze spódnicy: Zapolska i Nałkowska o kobiecym doświadczeniu ciała* [Banner made of a skirt: Zapolska and Nałkowska on the feminine experience of body] (Warsaw: 2004). The experience of naturalism, of course, contributed to breaking taboos in this area, women began to write about erotic coercion and physical violence suffered from husbands – cf. A. Krukowska, *Kanon – kobieta – powieść: wokół twórczości Józefa Kisielnickiej* [Canon – woman – novel: Around the works of Józefa Kisielnicka] (Szczecin: 2010), pp. 173–174.

39 In the novel by W. Marrené (Morzkowska) *Mąż Leonory* [Leonora's husband] (Warsaw: 1883), pp. 46–47), the author emphasizes the activity of breastfeeding her child as a natural, biological and emotional bond between the mother and a part of her own body: 'This child received by me with a beating heart, drenched in tears of joy, beloved before it saw the light of day, this child did not awaken in her stony womb any feeling, I did not see on her pale face that inner radiance which enshrouds the torments of mothers, no, Leonora was incapable of being either a wife or a mother; her heart did not accept, did not love either of these duties, her son's cries did not reverberate in her bowels and only bore her, she did not desire to feed him with her milk.'

undressing can signal erotic senses (*Bez dogmatu* [*Without Dogma*], the scene in which the fur coat is taken off Anielka's shoulders; *Nad Niemnem*, the scene of Justyna undressing before bedtime, where the motif of the mirror and the accentuated slow movements of the girl and then the remark about her bare feet and loose kaftan reveal the heroine's carnality). In Szymanowska's *Psyche* we can find the following sentence: 'Having taken off her riding habit, Wanda stood before the dressing table when Mrs. Orlińska appeared on the threshold with an open letter in her hand'.⁴⁰ The dialogue between mother and daughter is a kind of fight between them for the maiden's right to choose her fiancé, apparently, the daughter – incompletely dressed during the conversation – seems to the mother an easier opponent, so she thinks she has won the skirmish, which she emphasizes by 'fastening a turquoise necklace around her daughter's neck'.⁴¹ This gesture combines physicality ('neck') with the symbolism of material prestige and emphasizes the mother's right to decide the child's fate in biological terms as well. The daughter here is a luxury commodity, which the mother skillfully exposes in order to draw the attention of the preferred candidate. But mother-daughter conversations concern only matters of securing the future materially; mothers do not impart any knowledge of joint marital life to their children.

The few scenes illustrating male desire are lexically sparing. The aforementioned Wanda almost becomes the victim of harassment by her mother's regular assistant. The girl's reaction seems to show that she is prepared for similar situations, although we do not know how she came to this knowledge.

Spojrzenie jego paliło, całowało nieledwie, nadając mu wygląd wstrętnego, lubieżnego satyra. [...] Ujął jej rękę i przytulił do ust, całując zbyt długo, po czym starcze, pomarszczone jego wargi skorzystawszy z półkrótkiego rękawka, zabłąkały się wyżej, ku łokciowi. Zrozumiała. Wyrwała dłoń z purpurą gniewu na licach. Uważała to za policzek nieledwie, za obelgę, za bezceństwo. A jednak pohamowała się siłą woli, przyzywając całą równowagę, cały spokój na pomoc.

His gaze was scorching, feeling as if he was kissing with it, giving him the appearance of a foul, lewd satyr. [...] He took her hand and pressed it to his lips, kissing for too long, after which his senile, wrinkled lips, having taken advantage of her short sleeve, strayed higher, towards her elbow. She understood. She jerked her hand away with a crimson of anger on her face. She considered it a slap in the face, an insult, an impertinence. And yet she restrained herself by force of will, summoning all the balance, all the calm to her aid.⁴²

The young maidens of positivist and post-romantic novels are already able to make the first confession of love to their partner; the words 'I love you' quite easily broke the taboo of customs ordering a woman to be the passive party, to be the

40 A. Krzyżanowski [N. Szymanowska], *Wybór pism. Tom drugi: Psyche* [Selected writings. Volume two: Psyche] (Lviv-Poznań: n. d.), p. 254.

41 Ibidem, p. 255.

42 Ibidem, pp. 272–273.

prize in the tournament for the hand of the princess. Heroines in *Pasierby* and *Psyche* by Szymanowska declare their love to men. Szczęsna Zaliwska from *Pasierby* even initiates the crossing of the boundary separating the sphere of emotional and verbal intimacy into the carnal one ('And you never feel like kissing me? – She asked lifting her long eyelashes'⁴³). Married women are almost exclusively silent in matters of erotic contact. They are passive, surrendering to male activity, which, by the way, they seem to be limited to kissing hands and lips and touching the waistline, passionate hugging and 'embraces' (*Mąż Leonory* by W. Marrené). Physical intimacy between spouses, resulting in common children, is carried out in silence, and the shared bedroom does not open the mouths of married couples. The high degree of formality between wife and husband is emphasized by the kisses the husband places on his wife's forehead. It is a gesture of patriarchal supremacy and emotional closeness, of asexual acceptance; a gesture more fitting in the case of a child than a lover. Korczyński kisses his wife on the forehead, Ludwika from Orzeszkowa's *Wesoła teoria i smutna praktyka*, who kisses her husband's forehead, is exceedingly daring. She is, indeed, in love with her husband, although her love gestures express the asexual tenderness of close friendship more than marital eroticism.

Pani Ludwika poskoczyła żywo i rzucając się na szyję mężowi zawołała ze śmiechem radości i rozczulenia:

– Jesteś najdoskonalszym adwokatem z całego chrześcijaństwa!

Pan Witold zaśmiał się wesoło, częścią z powodu przyjemności, jaką sprawiały mu radość i uznanie żony, częścią z powtórzonego przez nią własnego jego przysłowia. Małżonkowie uściśliły się serdecznie i usiedli obok siebie na kanapie.

Mrs. Ludwika jumped vigorously and, throwing her arms around her husband's neck, called out with a laugh of joy and tenderness:

– You are the best lawyer in the Christian world!

Mister Witold laughed merrily, partially because of the pleasure his wife's joy and appreciation gave him, and partially at her repeating his own saying. The couple embraced each other warmly and sat side by side on the couch.⁴⁴

Sex and the female body begin to be perceived and described first in aesthetic terms when a significant number of artists, such as painters, sculptors and art connoisseurs are introduced in the novel following the January Uprising (1863–1864).

43 N. Szymanowska, *Pasierby*, p. 204. One can also encounter a variant of the Endymion myth; the explicit admiration for the partner's physical beauty and desire is then masked by a cultural context suggesting a purely aesthetic experience, although at the same time the description of sensations here introduces a clear biological discourse: 'Eufemia perceived that he had fallen asleep and, drawn by a magnetic force, approached him on tiptoe. A beloved being always possesses a beauty peculiar to himself, a beauty that has nothing to do with any aesthetic principle. This beauty is intensified at certain moments by an expression that corresponds more deeply to mutual affinities (!), speaks more strongly to certain qualities. [...] She stood for a moment gazing over him, her heart beating faster and faster, vibrating beyond asceticism, a more concrete feeling slightly took over, the blood rushed to her brow, her temples pulsed, until, pushed by a force incomprehensible to herself, she leaned over him, leaned more and more, until her lips touched his hair...' – W. Marrené (Morzkowska), *Zakłęte siły*, pp. 293–294.

44 E. Orzeszkowa, *Wesoła teoria i smutna praktyka*, pp. 92–93.

They are accompanied by motifs of posing in painters' studios and of mirrors that reflect the female beauty. This is the case in works by Sienkiewicz (*Na jasnym brzegu* [On the bright shore], *Ta trzecia* [The third one], *Rodzina Połanieckich*, *Bez dogmatu*). It is to him that we owe the descriptions of the bodies of married women, mature, aware of their biological allure, enticing men with eroticism, masked by forms of *bon ton* dictating physical distance from the opposite sex. But Sienkiewicz also reveals something very characteristic of those times – the husband treats the wife as a child, to whom he owes care and for this reason he directs her steps. Sienkiewicz's heroines are to a large extent 'Lolitas', metaphorical figures combining sexual maturity with social immaturity, women and children rolled into one. As children, they are not and cannot be conversation partners, at most – toys in the hands of men who know the world better. Horski – a painter, returns home to his wife as a spurned lover:

Z wrażeniem dotąd nieznanym wbiegł Horski na schody swego mieszkania, nieśmiało otworzył drzwi i, zrzucając z siebie odzienię wierzchnie, po cichu wszedł do sypialni. Lampka wisząca przed obrazem Matki Najświętszej rzuciła blade światło na pokój. – Dobrze się bawiłeś? – spytała nie otwierając oczu Halina.

– Dobrze, moje dziecko – odrzekł machinalnie, lękając się obudzić śpiącą. Rozbierając się, patrzył na nią z uwielbieniem.

Spała, zwrócona twarzą do pokoju, z głową opartą na rękę. Błady rumieniec igrał na policzkach, wpół-otwarte usta żywszą czerwienią się barwą. Spod białego czepeczka wymykały się niesforne pasemka złocistych włosów na czoło; pierś wznosiła się wolnym oddechem... Pięknie jej było z tym wszystkim i musiał to uznać artysta, [...] Przy migotliwym świetle lampki ujrzał nóżkę wytwornych linii, wyzierającą spod kołdry. Opanowała go nieprzecieżona pokusa. Zbliżył się na palcach i usta do niej przytulił, jak lud pobożny całuje stopki kamienne – podobna była w tym pocałunku cześć i pokora. Nóżka schowała się pod kołdrę, dał się słyszeć uśmiech cichutki i biała ręka wyciągnęła się, szukając ręki Henryka; znalazłszy ją, chciała podnieść do ust, ale on nie pozwolił na to, ucałował sam żonę w rękę i czoło i rzekł:

– Dobranoc, Halu! Śpij spokojnie.

With a sensation hitherto unknown, Horski ran up the stairs of his apartment, timidly opened the door and, having thrown off his outer garments, quietly entered the bedroom. The lamp hanging in front of the picture of Holy Mary cast a pale light on the room.

– Did you have a good time? – Halina asked without opening her eyes.

– I did, my child – he answered automatically, fearing he would wake her up. Undressing, he looked at her adoringly.

She was asleep, facing the room, with her head resting on her hand. A pale blush glistened on her cheeks, her half-opened lips reddened more vividly. From under the white cap slipped unruly strands of golden hair on her forehead; her breast rose with the slow breath... She was beautiful with all this, and the artist had to acknowledge it, [...] By the flickering light of the lamp he saw a foot of refined lines peeking out from under the quilt. An insurmountable temptation possessed him. He approached on tiptoe and pressed his lips to it, as pious folk kiss stone feet – similar was the reverence and humility in this kiss.

The foot hid under the quilt, a quiet laugh could be heard and the white hand stretched out, seeking Henryk's hand; having found it, she wanted to raise it to her lips, but he did not allow it, he kissed his wife's hand and forehead himself and said:

– Good night, Hala! Sleep soundly.⁴⁵

As an artist, the hero sees the beauty and allure of a woman's body; as an unfaithful husband, he bows before a woman without sin who is being watched over by the Mother of God. But he treats his wife like a child, plays with her, conveys signs

of tenderness and speaks to her in a peculiar way. In the family rooms and marital bedrooms, there is no dialogue on the issues most important to the families' existence. Customary taboos could not keep up with social and mental changes in the age of steam and electricity. Perhaps this is why there are so few images of happy and serene marriages.

*Translated by Maja Jaros
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ABSTRACT

The article raises the problem of avoiding certain topics in family conversations, which images were written by Polish novel of the second half of the 19th century. Documentary materials were taken from the works of the following authors: Stanisław Grudziński, Natalia Korwin-Szymanowska, Waleria Marrené-Morzkowska, Eliza Orzeszkowa, Bolesław Prus, and Henryk Sienkiewicz. Among them are very acknowledged authors, as well as secondary and forgotten ones. Due to such selection of sources, the phenomenon described in the article can be considered as an objective state of affairs.

The nineteenth-century novel was subjected to rigours of censorship, forcing authors to cipher (Aesop's speech). The author proves that a moral taboo was more important in regulating the topics of conversation, which excluded speaking on some of them. The article justifies a thesis that it hindered dialogues within the

family circle. This concerned mainly three areas: politics, money, and sexes (3 Ps in Polish). These areas of social life were dependent on legal regulations, which treated men preferentially. The absence of these topics in the conversations proves that the marriage did not have the democratic status of a partnership.

KEYWORDS: Polish novel – 19th century, Positivism, family, taboo