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## Shame or Pride? Unwanted Pregnancy and Abortion in Novels for Girls in the Polish People's Republic and Today

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### 1.

In *Bukiety wiejskie* [*Country flowers*], Ewa Ostrowska's short-story reportage dating from the late 1950s,<sup>1</sup> the new postwar political order calls for letting go of shame as a tool for exerting power over women. The setting of the story is a village in Bełchatów county, a place until recently vaguely reminiscent of Reymontian Lipce. Here, if a girl has "sinned," she is smeared with dung and banished from the village along with her bastard child. That is why the main, albeit already dead, heroine – the well-off "daughter of Józef Wróbel" – "nurtured [...] her great fear of shame, of human condemnation, and when the fear matured within her, and when she could no longer conceal it, she went there, where more than one had already ventured before her." The girl's mother was afraid as well, not calling the doctor in time as a result, and burying "this shame – a child corrupted by a village hag" underneath a pear tree. Nevertheless, "the true story of Józef Wróbel's daughter" – as the narrator of undefined gender tries

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<sup>1</sup> First printed, probably, in the Łódź-based weekly *Odgłosy* [*Reverberations*], after 1958, reprinted in Ewa Ostrowska, *Tort urodzinowy* [*Birthday Cake*] (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Łódzkie, 1965). If not otherwise specified all translations of referenced works are provided by the translator of the article.

to convince us – begins at her lonely grave. A disgraceful death has brought about positive political change. Previously, dogs were often unleashed on socialist agitators who praised, alongside education and technical civilization, liberalization from social norms (“it’s no sin to bear a child without a husband”) and informed motherhood (“one should not have too many children”). Now they find themselves before an audience that deliberates “how things really are with that shame.” The village becomes a part of the modern world. People rarely think about Wróblówna, but if not for her premature death, they would still have lived behind an invisible wall of ignorance and violence. Unnamed, mute, lonely, she has become the sacrifice that brings about progress. Shame will kill no longer.

In young adult novels for girls written in the period of the Polish People’s Republic (PRL) neither unplanned pregnancy nor (subsequent) abortion will play a central part and have a strong political significance. These events are never the fate of the novel’s primary heroine, but rather one of her friends. The former is too independent and self-aware to fall victim to such misfortune. As she is in full control of her life, she refrains from becoming sexually active and, therefore, avoids the risk of pregnancy.<sup>2</sup> This is a domain of romantics with a propensity to submit to male will. Nevertheless, the protagonist will engage in her friends cause both emotionally and practically. The help she extends to her peer will portray her as a modern girl who not only refuses to be appalled by the circumstances but is also ready to openly criticize moral absolutism. She helps a human being (of the female sex) in need.

Małgorzata Fidelis<sup>3</sup> writes that the image of a modern girl promoted throughout the long nineteen-sixties (by *Filipinka* for example) was ambivalent, at best. On the one hand, it implied an endorsement of emancipation. On the other, it stirred anxieties over whether the new possibilities, especially those brought by moral or sexual freedom, would be appropriately made use of. A girl personified innocence and progress, but she could easily become the symbol of demoralization. Therefore, there was a need to specify this modern

2 The earliest motif of anticonception, as far as I know, and very progressive at that, was featured in a small novel by Anna Frankowska, *Halina* (Warszawa: Młodzieżowa Agencja Wydawnicza, 1988), whose heroine defends her sister, who is on the pill, from their bigoted mother.

3 Małgorzata Fidelis, “Czy jesteś nowoczesną dziewczyną? Młode Polki a kultura konsumpcyjna w latach 60,” trans. Anna Rogulska, *Teksty Drugie* 2 (2015). See also Iwona Kurz on the types of girl in films after 1955 (and in Eastern-Bloc rock-and-roll): Iwona Kurz, “Dwuzłotówki w kieszeniach na kino. Elżbieta Czyżewska – dziewczyna z fotosu,” in *Twarze w tłumie. Wizerunki bohaterów wyobraźni zbiorowej w kulturze polskiej lat 1955-1969* (Warszawa: Świat Literacki, 2005).

freedom by creating a standard of limited individualism, of restrained consumption and sexuality, guided by the primacy of intellectual development. This principle also influences the novels for girls to a certain extent. It proclaims the disappearance of traditional morality with its disciplinary instrument of shame and proposes a new, far less oppressive, normativism. The themes that are of interest for the current argument are obviously related to legislative acts, such as the progressive bill on the permissibility of terminating pregnancy passed into law on April 27, 1956.<sup>4</sup> Henceforth, a teenager's pregnancy remained a disgrace only for an obsolete part of society. For modern young women, it was premature maturity, a hindrance in the realization of their educational and professional plans, an economic burden, a harm for both the expectant mother and her future child. In short, it was a greater evil, in light of which abortion seemed like a better, though tragic, choice. Let us take a closer look at various iterations of this story, its protagonists and the discourses that give it structure.

## 2.

In novels for teenage girls, termination of pregnancy was often portrayed as the only available option for those heroines who were not fully emancipated – who were compromised more by their dependency on a man (of which their pregnancy was a result) than by the pregnancy itself. Dzidka from *Tancerze* [*Dancers*, 1961] by Elżbieta Jackiewiczowa, terminates her pregnancy to be spared the “disgrace” that would result from being a maiden with a child in the provincial town of Świebodzin. According to her, a woman without a husband is a woman without importance: “She was ashamed of loneliness as if it were a disgrace.”<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, in her flight from one stigma, she risks another. The docile stance assumed by the heroine entails a casualness of sexual relations, which she is ready to establish almost instantaneously, if only the prospective candidate introduces himself in a suitable manner. It is a form of contract. Paweł, in exile from Warsaw, is in need of a sexual partner. He therefore untruthfully introduces himself as a “delegate of the Polytechnic.” Dzidka, on the other hand, needs a husband with standing and therefore she

4 Małgorzata Maciejewska, “Aborcja w PRL-u. Ustawa o warunkach dopuszczalności przerywania ciąży z 1956 r. w kontekście feministycznym,” in *PRL bez uprzedzeń*, ed. Jakub Majmurek and Piotr Szumlewicz (Warszawa: KiP, 2010); the work has serious factual errors. Małgorzata Fidelis, “O sile społeczeństwa nie świadczy ilość. Ustawa aborcyjna z 1956 roku,” in *Kobiety, komunizm i industrializacja w powojennej Polsce*, trans. Maria Jaszczurowska (Warszawa: W.A.B., 2015).

5 Elżbieta Jackiewiczowa, *Tancerze* (Warszawa: Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza, 1977), 155.

– literally – gives herself to him. She considers their sexual relations, and the pregnancy itself, to be a guarantee of marriage. Her parents, after they recognize the high social standing of their potential son-in-law, are also a party in this contract and allow the young lovers much freedom, thus in fact playing the part of procurers.

There is a peculiar correlation between Dzikka's attitude and pregnancy. As if the fear of shame attached to loneliness is a conceptual tool and attracts the shame of unmarried maternity. Ula, the main protagonist of *Tancerze*, chooses to begin her sex life in a domestic partnership, with an accompanying positive shamelessness. She surrenders to her own desire rather than to her boyfriend; she does not even care much for romanticizing the relationship afterwards, although, as her flustered partner says: "every girl [...], to save her honor at the least, says that she loves."<sup>6</sup> In her case, sexual intercourse does not increase dependence. Ula does not think in terms of "shame" and "disgrace." And she is not threatened by pregnancy, even though there is not a word alluding to anticonception in the novel. Emancipation is more effective than the pill. Meanwhile, Dzikka's pregnancy reveals the illusory nature of the contract. The girl is not a party to, but rather an object of the agreement. Abortion is also something that is forced upon her and she "completely relies" on Paweł even in matters of organizing it. The enterprise requires secrecy and, therefore, money. What it buys is the discretion of a private practice, which would not be available in a public county hospital. The cost is not too high. And so a laborer and a clerk can afford the luxury of upholding the appearance of petit bourgeois morality. The law presupposes the agency of the woman, but social reality does not live up to that standard. Shame is still an instrument of control. Paweł, therefore, takes out a loan "from the workers union" and arranges a trip to Gorzów. The whole enterprise fills the boy with disgust and the girl with regret over her lost dreams, but this is caused by mutual disenchantment and not by the perceived transgression of anti-abortion norms. Their shame-like feelings have, therefore, a humanistic background. Dzikka, partly of her own accord, is deceived, humiliated, and objectified. This is the problem – not the pregnancy and its termination.

Maria Ziółkowska's 1972 novel, *Światła w cudzych oknach* [*Lights in Their Windows*], tells a similar tale, this time about children from foster care who come of age without any inherited capital. Can personal virtues of the girls – sexual restraint being one of them – guarantee success in life as official promises lead to believe? All of them find out, sooner or later, that they do not stand a chance. Monika gets into trouble because of her powerful need to rid herself of the blemish. Again, the fear of one shame leads to another. Socially

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6 Ibid., 281.

determined feelings of inferiority influence much of the heroines' behavior. Sensible Agata is aware of this and attempts to rid herself of her inferiority complex, but the romantic Monika is unwittingly guided by it in her actions. The former believes that Poland gives the opportunity for emancipation and improving one's social status, although only to a certain point, of course. The latter considers a relationship with a male with good social standing to be the token of achievement in life: "Because you have a boyfriend both for yourself and for showing off. This pride of having him is a part of love. I wanted to show the girls, friends, and professors that I am not some miserable poor girl from a foster home, an object of human sympathy..."<sup>7</sup> She combines romanticism with cunningness.

Upset, Agata says that Monika "softens [for the boy – E.Sz.] like warm butter." The latter does not take a university entrance exam, she concedes to a consummation of the relationship, and lives in her boyfriend's villa in a state of complete dependency. She adopts a false emancipation project laid out by this golden boy. She allows herself to be coerced by a (wrongly conceived, shameless) modernity. Sexual freedom as an argument used by a cynical Don Juan is, by the way, a frequent theme in novels for girls from the period. Monika casts aside her inhibitions and builds her pride by rejecting conventional propriety and etiquette. Her friends attempt to shame her in a benevolent way, but they fail as she overcomes her own previous doubts by confronting those very friends. Still, she does not dare look straight in the eye of her beloved teacher, the single individual who could help her properly reappraise the circumstances she has found herself in. It seems that Monika, even when she becomes pregnant, still cannot grasp her true status. She is still proud of what she should be ashamed of – of her "position as a carefree woman, spoiled by her beloved, living in relative prosperity."<sup>8</sup> Again pregnancy, just as in Jackiewiczowa's novel, is a consequence of a greater shame – dependency upon a man, which is seen by the other heroines of *Światła w cudzych oknach* as lack of honor and ambition.

In truth, the pride stemming from self-sufficiency is fragile. Hela, disenchanted by her first job, envies Monika, who "isn't an underling in some sweltering kitchen."<sup>9</sup> Satisfaction from her first paycheck disappears with the realization that it is not enough to cover basic needs. A working girl, who has nothing to be ashamed of, lives on the brink of poverty, and the shameless one lives in luxury. Appearances can be deceiving. Only the latter's pregnancy

7 Maria Ziółkowska, *Światła w cudzych oknach* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo Lubelskie, 1972), 40.

8 Ibid., 152.

9 Ibid., 118.

becomes an irrepressible symptom of a suppressed reality, a chance for disillusionment in confrontation with the opinion of society. “I am taking my revenge for the years of misery, wandering, and trouble,” says Monika. “And maybe it is only now that your true trouble, true misery, begins? [...] people often see their sorrow only after it was seen by their friends and acquaintances. And your sorrow will start to show any moment now,” her friend replies. The shame of dependence and pregnancy is amplified by the shame of abandonment. The miscarriage and hospitalization that follow only accelerate her exposure. After reading *Tancerze* we know that a public hospital is a place where shame is exacerbated. In Monika’s case, there is just one small step from exposure into an altogether different sphere of disgrace – prostitution. If previously she overcame her inhibitions in the name of love, she can overcome them again when Hela is in need of money, especially as she herself is partly to blame for the debts. Ziółkowska, writing this new *The Wages of Sin*, implements the logic of a slippery slope and the final downfall coincides with an ultimate sacrifice; however, in this case, it is not for a man, but for a friend.

On the one hand, control through shame by public opinion is sometimes cruel and destructive, but on the other hand, it is an indispensable compass. Nevertheless, contrary to the didactic message of the novel, in the plot it is of no importance what model a girl follows. Reticent Agata, Monika’s mentor for whom a kiss equals engagement, becomes a victim of sexualization in the workplace. The intrigue takes place, all in all, only in the mind of a director’s jealous wife, who suspects her husband of having an affair with his secretary, but the heroine hands in her notice fearing a scandal. Society brings young women to a common, obscene denominator: both the abandoned pregnant mistress and a chaste hard-working girl are forced to flee from shame.

### 3.

A modern girl, aiding a friend in overcoming private troubles, appears in *Słoneczniki* [*Sunflowers*, 1962] and *Paladyni* [*Paladins*, 1964] by Halina Snopkiewicz, as well as in *Zapach rumianku* [*The Scent of Chamomile*, 1969] by Krystyna Siesicka. The plot of Snopkiewicz’s two volumes is set at the turn of the fifties, in an already historical era that was marked by the illegality of abortion. Shame and fear circle around ironic Lilka, but she herself remains untouched by them. An unwanted pregnancy and its termination is something that women discuss with each other in confidence. The heroine overhears her mother and a neighbor talk about their common acquaintance, a war widow who will be scorned because she is expecting a child. Lilka’s mother, a medic, had proposed that she will “help her sort things out,” but the women declined her offer. The two try to understand why the proposition was turned down. Maybe

she is afraid? “I was really scared when I terminated my third pregnancy,”<sup>10</sup> the neighbor reminiscences. Of the three women, one has had an abortion and another can as well, because a third is willing to help her, but it is still a matter of utmost secrecy. An extramarital pregnancy is met with societal disdain, and abortion arouses fear, probably because of its illegality. The teenager formulates her own postulate, devoid of the social and legal context, that states that the case should come down to a woman’s informed choice. Snopkiewicz, therefore, makes her heroine restate the argument for reproductive rights in terms of human rights, a perspective that was absent in the public debate at the time when the law was changed 1956.<sup>11</sup>

Lilka is surrounded by old catholic and new communist forms of puritanism, with adherents of both approaching extramarital pregnancy with great moral unease, which is completely unfamiliar to the heroine: “In class, the uproar as in Sarajevo after the Archduke’s murder. It turned out that Zosia Ogórnikówna, a plump and apathetic blonde, was pregnant. She was immediately expelled from school without explanation, so that we wouldn’t become corrupted.”<sup>12</sup> Lilka shares neither the moral panic of the prestigious high school’s administrative staff, nor her friends’ excitement (which is the opposite of official restrictions). She does not condemn Zosia, but neither does she feel sorry for her. She should be “a person” and be “rational”, but she turned out to be “a stupid brat” that now has “one in the oven.” She could have been “whatever she wanted to be,” but she foolishly condemned herself to diapers and purees. It is not only a question of morality and shame, but of emancipatory pragmatism that may well be worth “grim celibacy”, as Lilka sardonically puts it.

This harsh judgement does not stop Lilka a few years later from arranging an abortion for a friend from her college dormitory. An act of female solidarity is a part of a spontaneous project aiming to reform the official model of the women’s liberation movement. Lilka, a staunch ZMP (Związek Młodzieży Polskiej – Union of Polish Youth) activist, together with her friends, tries to use the organization as a space for emancipation, striving to gain autonomy within the imposed boundaries. She criticizes the ritualized actions and newspeak full of exalted slogans, according to which termination of pregnancy is proof

10 Halina Snopkiewicz, *Słoneczniki* (Warszawa: Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza, 1973), 136.

11 Fidelis, “O sile społeczeństwa,” 210–222. Fidelis writes that during de-Stalinization, the “previous epoch” was criticized for an overabundance of ill-conceived equality that led to a caricature of social order and to demoralization. Snopkiewicz does not yield to this tendency – she depicts current history as insufficiently egalitarian and too prudish.

12 Snopkiewicz, *Słoneczniki*, 205.

of irresponsibility. In the world of *Paladyni*, pregnancy is a form of catholic shame while abortion a form of socialist shame. Lilka is thus defeated and removed from the ZMP – one of the charges against her, not explicitly stated at the meeting, is that she has “wasted Honorka’s child.”

Honorata, although she has no money, decides to discontinue her studies, give birth to and raise the child on her own. The internalized shame of Honorata, and her heroic declarations, arouse Lilka’s resistance. The language used is euphemistic, but still pointedly accurate. Lilka is ready to support Honorata, “whatever her decision.” Finally the distressed victim asks: “Your mother is a doctor, right?” Lilka knows that they are talking about “what is forbidden by the law.” For her, “a week of virtuous emotions” is more than enough, and she promises to help. Honorata’s ethical scruples is brought on by the ZMP code of conduct: “I despise myself, but I don’t have the strength. Lilka, if you only knew what a price I pay for all this!” In turn, Honorata is rebuked by Lilka with a play on words: “If mother agrees to negotiate, it will cost you nothing.” She treats the whole affair as a purely organizational and financial endeavor, and with her humanistic cynicism annuls the oppressive shame and feelings of guilt. She ends the letter to her mother, which she writes in a similar tone, in the following way: “If some friend of yours finds himself in possession of an ethical code corresponding with these needs – please write to me soon, at once.”<sup>13</sup> She also asks her mother to treat the whole thing as if it “was happening” to her, because she could also “find herself in such circumstances.”<sup>14</sup> This identification of solidarity with Honorka is political in character, and not in any way sentimental.

The heroine is annoyed by the aura of illegality, prudery, and concealed condemnation – by the pathos substituting the discourse of reproductive rights. The problem is not in the paragraphs, but in the silent disapproval against a member of the Union who has helped another member regain control over her life. According to the chairwoman, Honorata had wanted to do what was “right” and now she is “sad” as Lilka has “turned her into Justyna straight out of a Nałkowska novel.” What the heroine views as restoration of dignity is considered a degradation from the official perspective. The collective condemns, but not in an open manner, as if in fear that part of the shame could fall onto the accusers. It is a matter that is not discussed publicly, but which has consequences in the public sphere – removal from the organization. This may be the reason why Lilka ignores other allegations and in her final political act addresses just the one that was never explicitly stated. She aims

13 Halina Snopkiewicz, *Paladyni* (Warszawa: Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza, 1964), 32.

14 *Ibid.*, 100.

to confront the oppressive shame and disclose<sup>15</sup> her abortion, although she has not had one. She intends to justify her absence from class with a forged medical record. A doctor refuses to issue a falsified document due to the illegality of abortion. Nevertheless, Lilka gets a stamp that reads “gynecologist” and an illegible Latin name of some random disease. The heroine sends this document to her university hoping that it will be read as confirmation of an “induced miscarriage.” She stages this self-disclosure as a denouncement of the allegedly impartial politics of the state.

Lilka resists the pedagogy of heroism, which limits freedom of choice through shame. Kasia, the heroine of Siesicka’s novels, denounces for the same reason the right to life as an absolute value. The heroines argue differently, but both are pragmatists. Idealistic standards only multiply the suffering of the woman and the child born out of an unwanted pregnancy. In *Paladyni*, what puts a stop to scruples associated with abortion is a vision of a young mother trapped between diapers and puree’s, in *Zapach rumianku*, a vision of a foster home full of children suffering from lack of emotional warmth. The events taking place in the second novel are contemporary, with access to abortion easy and free of charge, the only problem lying in the public disapproval that is presupposed, something that can be avoided through a trip to a voivodship hospital. Discretion costs as much as a short journey, and is not even worth mentioning. The real subject of the novel are the relationships within a group of young people who have been brought together by Renata’s personal secret. This abortion support group forms beyond the sphere of intimacy. The narrator, Rafał – Kasia’s boyfriend, reluctantly becomes a part of the endeavor which seems to him, at first, somebody else’s problem.

There is mention in the novel of shame felt before the parish priest, which bars Renata’s parents from accepting the child, although their financial standing is good. Nevertheless, the primary embarrassment, though masked by anger, is depicted in the discomfort and anxiety Rafał experiences when he is introduced to girly matters. Kasia and Pola (co-opted due to her status as future nurse) do not mind his unease and anger; they suggest a different set of emotions and an altogether different language when they oblige the boy to act “honorably” and donate blood for use in the procedure. The word honor in the context of “this affair” arouses his protest, but finally Rafał reluctantly decides to “give blood.” Before this happens he will impress Kasia by insisting on an (impossible) marriage, which would shield Renata from the social degradation resulting from her

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15 Snopkiewicz’s idea predated by seven years the act of French and German women who collectively incriminated themselves in the press in 1971, therefore expediting the abolishment of the abortion ban in their respective countries. See Kazimiera Szczuka, *Milczenie owieczek. Rzecz o aborcji* (Warszawa: W.A.B., 2004), 58–61.

shame. Kasia values this unattainable ideal, but she thinks and acts realistically – the potential father disappeared, and the potential mother is unfit for the trials awaiting her. Rafał must understand that she is not motivated by cynicism and that his girlfriend, if she were to find herself in Renata's shoes, "would do the same." From a neutral observer's point of view, he becomes an unsettled passive participant. Afterwards he acts as a moralist outraged by relativism ("a child is a child, that's it, period. [...] for me the value of life is beyond question"<sup>16</sup>). At this stage, he falls back on the argument, also reiterated in *Paladyni*, according to which abortion equals irresponsibility. Finally, partly comprehending the girls' viewpoint, he declares himself as an unconvinced ally, ready to grant physiological legitimacy to the cause.

#### 4.

The two final decades of the Polish People's Republic (PRL) were marked by a change in the official rhetoric, which was motivated by concern with the falling birth rate and by the expansion of pro-life discourse of the church, pressuring the state to limit access to abortion.<sup>17</sup> The rules of the literary genre of interest to us were dictated in the 1970s and 1980s by Małgorzata Musierowicz. Her Mila Borejko, in contrast to the novelistic mothers from the sixties, had not one or two, but four children (which she all loved). The topic of unwanted pregnancy did not fit into the both entertaining and idealized model of such novels. And it was also rarely mentioned in other works, rather as an afterthought, and what is more, two different registers were employed in its depictions. For example, in the year 1979, two novels were published. The first was Anna Frankowska's *Przecież to wszystko* [*That's It*], the second was Maria Józefacka's *Dziewczyna nie ludzie* [*The Girl and Not the People*]. A significant discrepancy between the two novels is evident. In the first, the conflict between a mother and her teenage daughter is laid to rest when the older heroine confesses to the younger that she did not want to give birth to her and contemplated terminating the pregnancy. Overcoming shame is proof of trust, admitting to fear and helplessness initiates a previously unachievable intimacy and partnership. In the second novel, the most admirable heroine, an old wise woman from the lower classes, lends her voice to a fully developed pro-life discourse. She illuminates feebleminded Ewa

16 Krystyna Siesicka, *Zapach rumianku* (Warszawa: Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza, 1972), 114.

17 Fidelis, *Kobiety*, 267–268, 329, n. 106. See also Agata Chałupnik, "Legalizacja aborcji: dwa tysiące na skrobankę," in *Obyczaje polskie. Wiek XX w krótkich hasłach*, ed. Małgorzata Szpakowska (Warszawa: W.A.B., 2008), 181.

that by planning this “procedure,” she is attempting to “kill a human being.” For the mentor, “every life is sacred,” and one should “pay” for their “mistakes.” The only way to act responsibly, and therefore to avoid shame, is to decide to give birth, never to have an abortion, as it would be an even greater, irredeemable shame.

The above mentioned rule will return in novels intended for teenage girls, with even greater force, at the time of the public debate on the prohibition of abortion. Since the early 1990s, several books have been written which explore the consequences of an unexpected and inconvenient teenage pregnancy, discussing it much more openly than had ever been done before.<sup>18</sup> The picture of modern immodesty was constructed primarily in opposition to the logic of shame and insincerity, associated with the PRL period, that was embodied by the heroines’ mothers. They are the ones who are concerned with what people will say. They slap and berate their daughters, call them whores, yell: “Such shame! Such shame!” Their incessant screaming shakes the foundations of the homes they live in, which the young mothers plan to leave as soon as possible, to begin their life according to modern norms. Nevertheless, the more the authors try to persuade the reader that an extramarital pregnancy is no shame, the more suspicious those rebuttals sound. A fervent negation of one shame not only demonstrates its power, it is also supposed to divert attention from other shames that are simultaneously being constructed. Almost all of these novels represent pro-life ideology and omit the discourse of women’s right to choose, which was abandoned at the end of the 1960s. They execute a simple narrative scheme governed by a concealed abortion taboo. The legal prohibition should have softened the moral panic, which nevertheless had grown to such a degree that abortion vanished almost completely from the genre’s repertoire. Generally, the heroines do not even consider having a procedure. The attention of the reader is diverted by a symbolic uproar around substitute issues, discordant and contradicting the plot’s shameful core.

Some writers, like Rodziewiczówna in *Macierz* [*Mater*, 1903], have their heroines build their self-esteem on illegal motherhood. Pregnant women present their state as if they were saying proudly: let them see us. Magda – the eponymous heroine of Marta Fox’s novel – after giving birth hangs diapers and bodysuits on the balcony like a “bloodied sheet after consumption.” To her mother’s disparaging warning that she will be “a girl with

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<sup>18</sup> I will analyze the novels: *Magda.doc* and *Paulina.doc* by Marta Fox (1996 and 1997, respectively), *Małe kochanie, wielka miłość* by Ewa Nowacka (1997), *Ono* by Dorota Terakowska (2003), *Język Trolli* and *Żaba* by Małgorzata Musierowicz (2004 and 2005), as well as *Niechciana* by Barbara Kosmowska (2013).

a child,” she answers: “I am a girl with a child, whichever way you want to look at it.”<sup>19</sup> The mother in Dorota Terakowska’s novel *Ono* [It] frantically advises her pregnant daughter: “cover IT with something [...] anyone can see that you’re pregnant!” Ewa asks: “And aren’t I?” and she walks in the middle of the street to show the neighbors that “IT exists. Because IT exists. And that I am not ashamed of IT. IT do you hear me? I am not ashamed of you.”<sup>20</sup> In Barbara Kosmowska’s *Niechciana* [Unwanted], Kasia opens up on an internet board for underage mothers, she shares her decision of giving the child up for adoption: “Unfortunately, I neither want to raise it, nor be a mother to it. I don’t feel ready. And I am not ashamed that I can speak this out loud”; underage mothers “don’t need to feel ready for everything that is to come.”<sup>21</sup> Confession-confrontation always relates to pregnancy and maternity, never (as is the case in Snopkiewicz’s novel) abortion. Unpreparedness for the role of mother and the right to choose are declared only by Kosmowska’s heroine, who, nevertheless, does not even consider abortion. Providentially, a beloved aunt offers to adopt the child. Probably giving the child up to someone beyond the immediate family would be too great a transgression against the norm.

PRL novels have accustomed the readers to condemnation and compassion towards the victims of their own carelessness, docility, or of insufficient sexual education. Contemporary heroines are, usually, not ashamed of these traits. Previously, a modern girl did not become pregnant because she was too independent and enlightened for that. Now, a modern girl gives birth no matter the cost, without giving too much thought to the causes of her predicament. A harsh self-critique is formulated only by sixteen-year-old Kasia (Kosmowska), who uneasily divulges “her greatest secret. Measured in kilograms of stupidity,”<sup>22</sup> that is her conviction that the first intercourse cannot lead to conception. Those who have real reason to feel ashamed are unfaithful partners. The “whole” blame is theirs, or it otherwise falls on the family of the perpetrator, which dissociates itself from the whole affair. This is the basic thesis in *Język Trolli* [Troll’s Language] and *Żaba* [Froggy] by Małgorzata Musierowicz. Fryderyk, not minding the state Róża found herself in, decides to take up a prestigious fellowship in Houston, for which he is severely criticized. His brother and sister are dismayed by his actions, and they feel a kind of embarrassment by proxy, which is therefore multiplied and seems almost physiological: “Froggy felt that shame is choking her. She sweated and felt sick.

19 Marta Fox, *Paulina.doc* (Wrocław: Siedmioróg, 1997), 77.

20 Dorota Terakowska, *Ono* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2003), 229–230.

21 Barbara Kosmowska, *Niechciana* (Łódź: Literatura, 2013), 179.

22 Kosmowska, *Niechciana*, 128.

She had to lean against a wall. Oh, how deeply she was ashamed of him.”<sup>23</sup> Symptomatically, the Borejkos do not expect Fryderyk’s family to offer any financial support (this would be shameful), but hope for their cheerful acceptance. In turn, the faithless hero of *Niechciana* is faced with societal rejection. His friend breaks with him (“I don’t keep with filth. I have a rule”), he is shunned by acquaintances (“And another sad fact. Nobody decent will invite you to a party. People now know what you are. You’ve been nicknamed ‘daddy-o’, if you want to know!”<sup>24</sup>), another potential victim of this high school Don Juan will be informed about his deed.

## 5.

Juxtaposing contemporary novels with those from the PRL period exposes a fundamental difference between the two. Whereas before an untimely pregnancy brought with it the risk of degradation, now it almost instantly turns into maternity, considered a prestigious social role, to which one can, and should, mature rapidly. The heroines are not deprived of anything, on the contrary, they mature, develop, broaden their horizons, and increase their assets. “A child” in the womb brings out the best in the girl and in her benefactors. In the beginning she has nothing besides debts and obligations – in the end, after a miraculous metamorphosis, she triumphs.<sup>25</sup> A novel turns into a catalog of gains and achievements. Nevertheless, beyond this obtrusive affirmation there hides an inglorious reality.

Magda (Fox), a perfect daughter, is dependent on a toxic mother. She will never overcome guilt, but pregnancy’s therapeutic value is greater than years of psychoanalysis. “Negative experiences” can “be detrimental” to a “child’s development,” therefore Magda breaks with her mother and the model she represents. The decision to give birth is the sign of positive egoism, a modern mother will not burden her offspring with her sacrifice. Magda despite/ because of her pregnancy passes Matura with flying colors and gets into college, so that in the future she will not blame her child for not completing her education. She also achieves financial independence. Her beauty grows, her figure improves: “my waist became even more defined, because it was

23 Małgorzata Musierowicz, *Żaba*, (Łódź: Akapit Press, 2005), 105.

24 Kosmowska, *Niechciana*, 174.

25 This is not a story of emancipation in a modern sense as the transformation of the heroine occurs because of her future child, which seems like a variant of Klementyna Hoffmanowa’s argument of women’s education as better training for traditional roles.

emphasized by my bosom, which was bigger than before.”<sup>26</sup> She still attracts the attention of boys. Therefore, she embodies the ideal defined by magazines for women, though she is too sophisticated to read them. Spontaneously, she also takes care of proper nutrition. In short, she is the best of mothers, which is confirmed by Paulinka’s development and her good nature. Magda breastfeeds without problems, “proud” that she “fulfills her maternal duties as Nature intended.”<sup>27</sup> Because she does not know pleasure, she remains a virgin. Therefore, she can experience a proper sexual initiation. Beside passion and fulfillment, she also feels the need to make her sexual satisfaction public: “I wanted very much to be among people, so very marked by sex, so that no one would have any doubt what I did, and why.”<sup>28</sup> The catalogue of her achievements is completed by marriage to an ideal man – mature, but boyish; wealthy, but not overworked; passionate, but a patient businessman who not only loves unconditionally, but also knows how to make a proper vegetable salad with a remarkable dressing. In contrast to Rodziewiczówna, who while restituting her heroine’s proper social status endowed onto her with a highly atypical family, Fox pays tribute to conventionality. Access to the middle class is marked by a great social event (marriage, baptism, and the child’s first birthday), but it is sealed earlier, when Magda and Elder Łukasz set out on their great pre-holiday shopping. The new family is re-aligned with the mainstream by a shopping cart overflowing with “everything.”

In Terakowska’s novel, Ewa’s achievements during pregnancy are not as impressive, though they include certain financial gains. The heroine leads a miserable life of an outcast, which she inherits from her mother and grandmother. Small-town aspirations, lack of education, a job behind a counter, an unfinished house (a remnant of the past generation’s aspirations), trashy television. A world filled with ugliness, humiliation, violence – a world linguistically and morally degraded. Finally, rape. Ewa will eventually free herself from all of these stigmas thanks to pregnancy, although it initially seems to be a confirmation of matrilineal fatalism. If she were not raped, she would still be waiting for some miraculous change of fortune. It is I T, the fruit of rape, that teaches its bearer a new way of life. Ewa begins to think, to notice the beauty in the world, she develops a taste for higher culture, educates herself, finds a nuanced language, and ends with falsehoods and irresponsibility (“You must become better than you are”<sup>29</sup>). I T, a cosmic sage, does not require some

<sup>26</sup> Fox, *Paulina.doc.*, 20.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

<sup>29</sup> Terakowska, *Ono*, 365.

formal advancement such as passing Matura exams. Simply relinquishing external symptoms of exclusion is enough – gone are ignorance, resentment, entanglement in affairs, and a propensity for unobtainable tokens of prestige. Ewa appreciates what she has, looks for the meaning of life, and works on her independence so that she can pass on this attitude onto her child, therefore breaking the intergenerational reproduction of humiliation. Differently than in the case of Fox, Terakowska does not wed her heroine, but she arranges an opportunity for Ewa to decline marriage (similar to Rodziewiczówna's heroine who steadfastly declines the grace of legalization). Marriage would be a sign of fear, and that is a trait of outcasts.

Róża Borejko claims that if she does not finish university because of pregnancy, then she will happily become a toilet cleaner: "Work performed with love brings satisfaction [...]. You can feel happiness and pride even mopping floors."<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, the novels of Fox, Terakowska, and Musierowicz herself are funded on a completely opposite thesis – what really counts is social and material status. Little Mila is given a brand new cart, even though there are several used ones in the family's possession, because "it's so nice to buy new things for the child."<sup>31</sup> The extramarital stage turns out to be temporary, and the newly-wed parents leave for England, where Fryderyk, as "a distinguished young astronomer," finds work at Oxford.<sup>32</sup> According to all three authors, shame is not the result of a premature, illegal pregnancy as such, but of (an incessantly denied) degradation that comes with it – weakness,<sup>33</sup> helplessness, dependency, limited opportunities, partial education, financial difficulties, bodily deformation, lack of physical and psychological hygiene; all of which will also burden the child. A shameful opposite of the heroines' success is the erroneous fulfillment of the most prestigious of feminine roles, which is determined by the now waning ideal of the Polish Mother and by the firm neoliberal ideal of a woman as manager of daily life.<sup>34</sup> A mother is one who

<sup>30</sup> Musierowicz, *Żaba*, 154.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 150.

<sup>32</sup> Małgorzata Musierowicz, *Wnuczka do orzechów* (Łódź: Akapit Press, 2014), 38.

<sup>33</sup> Fox's heroine fantasizes of powerlessness: "If someone were to see my tears. I think I would scorch in shame and bury myself underground. I won't give'em the satisfaction! [...] I don't need pity, compassion, and all that shit." Marta Fox, *Magda.doc* (Wrocław: Siedmioróg, 1999), 75.

<sup>34</sup> On the PRL and capitalist requisition of the Romantic ideal of Polish Mother see Agnieszka Mrozik, "Kobiety pod presją. Rekonstrukcja mitu kobiety w kulturze polskiej," in *Akuszerki transformacji. Kobiety, literatura i władza w Polsce po 1989 roku* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IBL PAN, 2012).

(finally without sacrifice and not for the benefit of the community) passes her time of tribulation because she is industrious, fearless, and ambitious.

She simply has money at her disposal, and does not need it at the same time – “she is not some seduced maid, straight out of *Moralność Pani Dulskiej* [*The Morality of Mrs. Dulska*]. [...] She is a courageous and proud woman who can take care of herself in any circumstance.”<sup>35</sup> Receiving aid is humiliating, although scenes in which it is fervently turned down are set beside scenes of its acceptance. When Fox’s heroine finds ten million zlotys left for her by Łukasz, she reflects upon the same negative model: “I felt terrible. As if I were Hanka from *Moralność Pani Dulskiej*.”<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, when the very same man suggests moving into his apartment without paying rent, she accepts the offer readily. It seems that material support can be accepted without discredit only from a person representing a particular set of values, especially from a family member, but not exclusively. For Magda, remaining dependent on her monstrous mother would be disgraceful. Terakowska’s heroine does not adhere to this rule only on the face of it, as she takes money from the rapists without regret and she even considers a disgraceful proposal of one of their mothers, who wants to bribe her and thus remove her from her son’s life. Nevertheless, this lack of boundaries, Ewa’s combative pronouncements (“And I took that money. And I will take more. I will take all they will give. Why shouldn’t I take it?”<sup>37</sup>) paradoxically only confirm the odium, even more so as there is a “pure” inheritance left by her grandmother to fall back on.

## 6.

This tale of a pregnant Cinderella<sup>38</sup> promptly became an object of a fierce literary polemic, which has, however, remained isolated. The narrator of Ewa Nowacka’s<sup>39</sup> novel *Małe kochanie, wielka miłość* [*Little Love, Great Romance*] reads *Magda.doc*, which was published in the previous year, but she loses patience: “I don’t like cuddly tear-jerkers, extraordinary coincidences, rewards gained

35 Musierowicz, *Żaba*, 150.

36 Fox, *Magda.doc*, 133.

37 Terakowska, *Ono*, 390.

38 “I feel like Cinderella in the fairytale, and there everything ends well, though its starts pretty badly.” (Fox, *Magda.doc*, 150).

39 The career of Ewa Nowacka as an author of popular (historical and social) literature for teenagers began at the onset of the 1960s. The pinnacle of her fame came with the superb *Małgosia contra Małgosia* from 1975 (adapted for television and radio).

by turns of fortune.” She introduces herself sarcastically as a “good fairy,”<sup>40</sup> a mother to a teenager, also named Magda, who has decided to keep her unplanned pregnancy without giving anything up at the same time. The second Magda, like the first, proudly displays her growing belly and her role of a young mother. She passes the Matura exams with distinctions, and goes off to work in England, where she continues her studies and marries an Englishman who is an academic. The price of the daughter’s upward mobility is paid by the mother, who assumes care over the child. The emotions, effort, time, and money that are not expended by the young women are borne by the older one. As the former progresses through her studies, the latter falls into intellectual regression; while the former flourishes, the latter sees in the mirror a prematurely aged reject; while the former finds a glamorous husband, the latter goes out with a Mr. Zygmunt, if she can get her friend to stay with the child that is. Magda is enthusiastic, her mother is anxious. The first takes pride in her assertiveness and independence, the second conceals before her acquaintances her atypical status of a single (grand) mother and her own sacrifice, as she knows that “work likes the foolish.”<sup>41</sup> In time, she finds out that her case is not isolated, but she decides not to reveal herself as an abused mother. Shame is therefore a debt noted in an iron ledger, and it must be settled by somebody.

The generous offer of state and church support for single mothers that is offered by the “proponents and defenders of conceived life,” and publicized by the media, turns out to be merely symbolic. There is a legal obligation of alimony, but Magda proudly ignores the legal path. She employs the discourse of independence, industriousness, and honor. The pragmatic mother represents a different system of ideas: “a money order once a month does nothing to diminish the feeling of independence.”<sup>42</sup> Nowacka depicts Magda’s pride as superficial and only partly justified – influenced by new cultural trends. The young mother seems appealing to herself and her friends in a role glorified by popular culture: “they treated Magda as if she were the hero of a television show because Magdas exactly like her are the stars of such shows, they make rebellious and perilous decisions, which upend the status quo. [...] they zestfully championed Magda, ready to defend her if the need arose.”<sup>43</sup> Nevertheless, such pride fades away quickly.

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40 Ewa Nowacka, *Małe kochanie, wielka miłość* (Wrocław: Oficyna Wydawnicza Foka, 2009), 115.

41 Nowacka, *Małe kochanie*, 30.

42 Ibid., 73.

43 Ibid., 59.

Only Nowacka suggests that the teenager's decision to have the child is partly forced, made under the influence of pop-cultural clichés. She also mentions, quite dismissively, the pressure of the pro-life discourse – “proponents and defenders of conceived life” communicate through the media, a priest “torments” a high school principal with “lectures on the sanctity of conceived life,” so that he allows a pregnant senior to continue her education. All in all, this is of little consequence. Magda, like all of the aforementioned heroines, gives birth because she wants to. She makes an individual, psychologically justified decision; she does not experience any real or symbolic pressure (of the law, Church, physician, economy, language, or morality). Therefore, the problem is stripped of its political and ideological dimensions. The strongest fear is associated with violence, which determines the choice. Its traces must be concealed, its influence must be denied. The novel omits the power of both the state and Church. The heroine of *Magda.doc* argues deceitfully that even though she is a believer, she will give birth not because someone, for example the Church, makes her do it. Priests are oftentimes even anti-heroes of the pro-life fairytale. In Fox's case a priest expresses his disapproval for the pregnant schoolgirl, he persuades her to confess, but she places the word “sin” in quotes, because she feels “at peace with God and Fate.”<sup>44</sup> In Kosmowska's novel, an embarrassed priest bars a future mother from attending religion classes.

There is no mention of the illegality and high cost of abortion. Everyone, in turn, points to it as the easiest solution. Therefore, it starts to seem as an antithesis of choice, an evasive move that is suggested by others, an act of irresponsibility. At the same time even the most impoverished heroine can afford it. Pro-life discourse is not being recognized as oppressive. A gynecologist who performs the procedure is one of its advocates, still he only asks mildly persuasive questions about considering other options (*Ono*). The discourse of abortion rights is the one that is depicted as violent – it sanctions acts of aggression and depersonalization. Terakowska's heroines repeat ad infinitum the vicious and demeaning terms, such as “coat hanger” and “scrubbing.” They were used previously in verbal attacks by the grandmother: “you're not a carrot, to scrub yourself each season.”<sup>45</sup> This expression is later embraced by the mother to express her anger and punish the daughter, and later on by the daughter herself to relieve her initial hostility towards the fetus. A rational language of choice in its neutral form is heard only in Nowacka's novel. Kosmowska's heroine resorts to it only when it comes to entrusting the child to the aunt. Also, here is where the single anti-abortion phantasm appears.

44 Fox, *Magda.doc*, s. 179.

45 Terakowska, *Ono*, 132.

The authors mostly avoid illustration. Nevertheless, a visit in a gynecological practice and the examination on the gynecological chair, seem to serve as metonymy for the procedure of termination of pregnancy itself. Extreme discomfort, humiliation, shame, fear of invasive medical utensils, all suggest the immediate closeness of a strong cultural prohibition, which the heroines do not intend to violate.

## 7.

The comparison of the ways in which shame functions in PRL and contemporary novels for girls, exposes a fundamental differences between the two models – the latter novels are an element in the system of symbolic violence directed at women, while the former attempted to unmask and criticize that system. A didactic genre, determined by the epoch's dominant discourses, previously pointed to shame as a mechanism of power. If it was substituted with some other shame, then it was emancipatory. Its greatest achievement in this respect is undoubtedly the immoral language of the right to abortion (Snopkiewicz), its blind spot is (an embarrassed?) omission of the topic of birth control, which is inseparable from sexual freedom. Illegal pregnancy and abortion were framed as a social, economic, and political problem. Presently, they are mostly a question of morality, which practically restricts venturing beyond the oppressive logic of shame. The best method of perpetuating power is concealment of traces, hence the amplified compensation within literature, substituting shame with pride reframed in neoliberal and therapeutic terms. If previously novels for girls were a space of public debate, presently one can only rarely find in them anything besides symptoms of its absence.

*Translation: Rafał Pawluk*