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The Secret of the Dulskis' Establishment

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The choice of *The Morality of Mrs. Dulska* can seem surprising in the context of discussing the problem of “masculinity.” As Felician is – very meaningfully if truth be told – silent and only once do we hear his voice: “The devil take the lot of you!!!”¹ Dulski’s silence places him in a stereotypically feminine position. In a vacant space within the text (society) – a space of suppression. And it can be expected that this placing will affect the way Dulski’s gender identity will be shaped. Nevertheless, the author provides us with certain information: some characteristic is provided in the production notes, which register Felician’s body language. He usually shrugs off his wife’s naggings, which are supposed to provoke him to make up his mind. Each day he is sent by Dulska, who is convinced that she cares for his health, on a fictitious stroll – fictitious, as the road leading up to the Great Castle is replaced by walking in circles around the room – in an “automatic” motion “he closes his eyes and moves like

1 Gabriela Zapolska, *The Morality of Mrs. Dulska*, trans. Teresa Murjas (Bristol: Intellect, 2007), 70. All subsequent quotations from this edition are marked in the text with the letter M and a page number.

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a marionette.” At the same time, Zapolska adds, he paces “like an animal in a cage,” (M, 39) under Aniela’s vigilant and controlling eye. The restricted basic drives find release through automatisms, as if Dulski existed and functioned between two worlds: the mechanical world and the organic world. The former refers to his status of a middle-level functionary, who is just a cog in a machine; the latter to the status of an animal in a zoo. This animalism is underscored by the peculiar noises that Dulski makes (“mutters” M, 41). Both these ways of being are actualized within the domestic space.

Dulski’s silence, among other things, obliges me to undertake some interpretative decisions. “Masculinity” cannot be reconstructed in disregard of “femininity,” because gender traits, positions, the roles of Dulski and Dulska result from the interrelations of these two predicates. And the fact that these are relative terms is an important one. Having in mind the established tradition of reading this drama,² I choose an interpretative path that will take into account some of the dominant propositions. Among them the one which leads to questions of morality. I do not refrain from them, as Bożena Karwowska did,³ because I consider the gender perspective to require the activation of different than previously explored aspects of the text, such as those related to the body. And although I do not contest her argument that “moral questions” are “associated with the intellectual sphere, and therefore symbolically masculine,”⁴ I nevertheless hope to hear them resound in a novel way, in juxtaposition with questions that go beyond gender. The broad question that will be at the center of my enquiry relates to the processes of producing

2 Today, Dulska’s personality does not seem to hold any secrets before us. And, as we can imagine, numerous interpreters – with more or less disdain – refer to displays of Dulska’s boorishness and to her hypocrisy in particular. A break with this interpretative line comes rather early with the words of Karol Irzykowski, who in a substantial study “Problem obłudy – Początek (Tartuffe świadkiem przeciw Boyowi),” in *Pisma (Walka o treść, Beniaminek)*, ed. Andrzej Lam (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1976), paradoxically defends a certain kind of hypocrisy and, therefore, revises the very notion itself. See also Julian Krzyżanowski, *Neoromantyzm polski 1890-1918* (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1963); Tomasz Weiss, introduction to *Moralność pani Dulskiej*, by Gabriela Zapolska (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1966); Stefan Lichański, *Cienie i profile* (Warszawa: PIW, 1967); Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński, “Moralność pani Dulskiej,” in *Pisma*, vol. 19 (Warszawa: PIW, 1963); Roman Taborski, introduction to *Moralność pani Dulskiej*, by Gabriela Zapolska (Warszawa: WSiP, 1975); Włodzimierz Maciąg, “Za co panią Dulską szanować winniśmy...” *Życie Literackie* 438 (1960); Józef Rurawski, *Gabriela Zapolska* (Warszawa: Wiedza Powszechna, 1987).

3 Bożena Karwowska, *Ciało i śmiech w Moralności Pani Dulskiej Gabrieli Zapolskiej*; http://www.wuj.pl/UserFiles/File/Wieloglos%2010%202011/13_Karwowska%20Bozena%20-%20Cialo%20i%20smiech.pdf, accessed March 14, 2015.

4 *Ibid.*, 4.

Dulska's and Dulski's genders and, therefore, what role determinants of class, economy, and socio-cultural norms play in this process – in what way do they shape the inner (and also moral) life of these *dramatis personae*?⁵

The fundamental shift from the previous interpretations will come as a consequence of recalling an unknown – or even if known to scholars then previously unpursued – interpretative context. I am referring to Zapolska's outline for a novel *Śmierć Felicjana Dulskiego* [*The Death of Felicjan Dulski*], which was written approximately at the time of *The Morality of Mrs. Dulska*. This context will allow me to unmask some stereotypes that have entangled the figure of Dulska: those relating to her asexuality, irreproachable maternal love, frugality – both precautious and responsible; but will also give me a chance to investigate Dulska's relations with her son, daughters, fellow men, and, most of all, the relationship with her husband. It will grant insight into the secret behind Dulski's silence. In this new context hypocrisy will gain new companion in the form of stupidity and cruelty. The alliance of cruelty and stupidity will in turn rearrange the accents in the discourse: instead of focusing on the second predicate of the subtitle: “-farce,” I will concentrate on the leading “tragic-.”⁶ What is more, Zapolska's own correspondence invites this kind of reading. In her letter to Feldman, she attempts to persuade him of the play's merits by underscoring its tragic aspect. She writes:

I wanted to give in this boorish tragic-farce a picture of bourgeois villainess. When that girl [Mela – K.K.] calls at the end: “they have killed someone here” – that is exactly what happened. The human soul was murdered there. Pray, consider this. You will feel it! You will understand it!⁷

In her correspondence with Lorentowicz Zapolska reiterates:

Look at her closely, not through the laughter of people, who are amused by a series of jokes. The very ending is laden with meaning – Mela's scream

5 Georg Simmel, to whom I will often refer, pointed out an important interdependence of economy and spirituality. He perceived an economic basis in the forms of spirituality of a certain period, and conversely – e.g., in fiscal policy – he found the expression of a spiritual project, even if the extreme worship of money, observed in his time, automatically diminished the metaphysical or religious needs of individuals. Georg Simmel, *Philosophy of Money* (London: Routledge, 2011). All quotations from this editions are henceforth given in the text with the letters GS with page number.

6 I choose a different way of looking than Karwowska, who focused on Zapolska's strategy of constructing the farcical aspect of the play.

7 Gabriela Zapolska, *Listy*, ed. Stefania Linowska, vol. 2 (Warszawa: PIW, 1970), 235.

of horror when she calls: “they have killed someone here...” Pay attention to how seamlessly monstrosities occur in that world.⁸

1. Class and Economy

Dulska represents the bourgeoisie, or rather the petite bourgeoisie. And this social setting constitutes a vital determinant in her practice of everyday life. In a classic dissertation *Moralność mieszczańska* [*Bourgeois Morality*] Maria Ossowska characterizes the late nineteenth-century bourgeoisie as “a group which constitutes in the cities the so-called society, and which does not belong to the aristocracy. This group is labile – one can enter into it and fall out of it just as easily – and membership is based on a certain level of education and the way of life.”⁹ This group is also characterized by its inner stratification. In *The Death of Felicjan Dulski* Zapolska meticulously notes the scale of humiliation that is experienced by Dulska in conflicts with her daughter-in-law, née Brajbur, who comes from the elite of Lviv bourgeoisie – the Matura exam at-tests to her education, her family is elevated by kinship with the Rector. The Brajburs – owners of a townhouse and long-standing members of the city council – have clearly aristocratic ambitions:

Often they were the Masters [Król kurkowy – translator’s note] of the Marksmen’s Guild and you should see how a Brajbur, having won for himself the crown [at the shooting range], led a procession of townsfolk with a silver cock hanging at his bosom.¹⁰

Meanwhile, Dulska answering the provocative questions of the Brajbur girl, who looks for connections “of Dulskis’ bourgeois family branch” with “good, old aristocracy,” must, “choking,” resort to lies to defend the family’s reputation. The social status of bourgeois Brajburs is safe due to their assets; that of petit bourgeois Dulskis is uncertain. Hence Dulska’s horror of losing social status and the pauperization that would follow. This fear is masked by outward gestures, which – by giving the outward appearance of prosperity – hide the undergoing struggle for every penny. As the owner of a townhouse Dulska takes care of its façade, the appearance of the staircase, and she does all of

8 Zapolska, *Listy*, 242–243.

9 Maria Ossowska, *Moralność mieszczańska* (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1985), 16.

10 Gabriela Zapolska, “Śmierć Felicjana Dulskiego,” in *Dzieła wybrane*, vol. 10 *Szkice powieściowe* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1958), 283. All quotations from this edition are marked in the text with the letter D.

it because her privacy, which is held on public display, is supposed to attest to the Dulskis' financial capacity, and therefore to their social status.

In *The Death of Felicjan Dulski* Zapolska adds a new element to the inter-relation of economic and social status. She describes the "saucepan epopee" of Dulaska, whose "kitchen was her pride and joy":

No one in the neighborhood had as much tin and copper as she did. The tenants were also graded by Dulaska by the number of saucepots they possessed. If they were copper saucepots then you knew that this was someone "swell." Other dependable people had also an assortment of enamel saucepots. Below them were those of whose honesty, integrity, and morality as such Mrs. Dulaska would rather not speak about. She only grimaced slightly. (D, 317)

When the saucepot inventory was becoming depleted, the lady of the house revitalized it by lowering the maid's wages. Dulaska treats objects as signs of status and means of self-presentation. It is through them that her bourgeois virtues manifest themselves: forethought, thrift, diligence – these constitute the bedrock of bourgeois standards and principles and are universally "approved and consecrated." Dulaska's inventiveness is, in turn, expressed in her logic – constructing a direct causal link between the order of things (their quantity and quality) and the order of values, between the moral and the spiritual order; as the quantity and quality of possessed objects can elevate people to the stature of "honest" and "dependable." The position occupied in the socio-economic hierarchy therefore determines – as a matter of simple symmetry – the place within the spiritual hierarchy. This logic also reveals the nature of Dulaska's quest for an ideal 'I'; and entangles the fulfillment of this desire with possession – of things, people, goods, and money. The ideal moral 'I' to express itself – to become – must have. This credo of Dulaska, and her whole social stratum to a certain extent, in some sense legitimizes her household microeconomics.

Dulaska's "virtue" of thriftiness endows the world of objects with a special value. They play a role that is not as much aesthetic or utilitarian as Dulaska equips them with the supreme trait that fills them with meaning in the broader structure of the world of values – durability. A divine perpetuity. She brilliantly recognizes that in themselves things are devoid of value. They only acquire it when introduced into the realm of exchange, with the conversion of their economic value into a monetary equivalent. Money wasted due to mismanagement of things shatters Dulaska's well-being, distancing her from her desired self-image. Dulaska counts and notes: the number of wooden sticks for tinder, naphtha used in lamps, the durability of Hesia's gumboots, broomsticks, the

number of raisins in the dough which should equal the number of those brought from the store. Money should not only be valued, it must also be multiplied. Therefore, not to pay for the ticket, Dulska makes Hesia crouch in the tram, that is also why she overlooks the practices of a “coquette” – she uses the tidy sum from her rent to pay the taxes. The balance of gains and losses is the source of her obsessive antipathy towards physicians, which is depicted in *The Death*. They are characterized in economic terms as “bloodsuckers,” “abusers,” cunning “conmen,” “poisoners,” “impostors,” and “animal doctors,” whose only goal is profit. This animosity is expressed in a vane and narcissistic statement of utter stupidity: “I heal myself, and you, and father. Household remedies are more reliable and... they cost less” (D, 275). The final part of that sentence, exhaled rather than spoken, is key. Dulska’s virtue of thriftiness takes on the shape of horror, which is endured for several months by Felicjan whose broken leg is diagnosed by Dulska as a “bruising” and treated, accordingly, with lots of rest, what in the end leads not to recovery but death.

Dulska embodies, in a hyperbolic way, the tendencies of her own age. They were laid out with precision by Georg Simmel in *The Philosophy of Money*, which investigates the sociological and psychological effects of monetarization of economy. Money as a tool of exchange, defined as “abstract economic value” (GS, 127), ruined the system of relationship, solidarity, and interpersonal dependencies. It is “responsible for impersonal relations between people” (GS, 321). The relations an individual establishes with others are of the same kind as his relations with things, and are mediated by money. “Money is – Simmel writes – the ideal representative of such a condition since it makes possible relationships between people but leaves them personally undisturbed; it is the exact measure of material achievements, but is very inadequate for the particular and personal.” (GS, 305). Excerpts from Simmel give a clearer understanding of Dulska’s status; he is devoid of his individuality and personhood, and amounts to nothing more than a mere thing. If the value of things is objectified in monetary exchange, then – bound to his bed – Dulska loses value. He does not work, and therefore represents no perceptible gain for his wife. That is why she avoids making any investments in him. That the value of a person/thing has its monetary equivalent is attested to by the scene in which Dulska prolongs Felicjan’s life. One must remember that even the value of life is relative in the realm of money. Dulska knows that after her husband’s death she will receive a pension that will secure her future. Nevertheless, she is disenchanted by “a piece of paper” that makes her realize that Felicjan is still only “an eight [rank] superintendent.” That is the reason Dulska modifies her initial wishes: “Oh, the hell with you! The hell with you, you nincompoop!...” (D, 322). Dulska’s hope that Felicjan will be promoted and the pension will become more substantial, extends his life:

Not now... not now... let him be promoted to the sixth rank, or the seventh, at least.
 She glanced at the Holy Mary.
 Blessed Virgin... Health of the Sick, Tower of Ivory, Ark of the Covenant...
 support him... and that sixth rank... (D,322)

Dulska perverts the bourgeois virtue of frugality, turning it into an irrational miserliness, into predatory gain-seeking and preying on easy victims. This rapaciousness finds expression in Felicjan's remarks, when he confronts Anieli's ways with a nostalgic recollection of a prostitute:

Because the other seemed to expect something more from him than money and sexual pleasures.
 This one, in turn, awaited nothing at all.
 Because she did not want him to bring her anything on his own.
 She simply took it all from him by force. (D, 307)

By introducing Dulski's viewpoint Zapolska, in a meaningful way, contradicts the common, though not unique, perception of the nature of relationships that are produced by prostitution. This is most certainly a manifestation of the writer's conviction that contemporary marriage is a thinly veiled form of prostitution. Returning to Simmel once again – as he was shortly summarized by Anne-Emmanuelle Berger – we should say that prostitution is “both a model and form of the most extreme interpersonal relationship «bound» by money and the objectification of the traded good.”¹¹ It is also a reduction of a human person to a mere means. Therefore, if Dulska deposes Felicjan–husband to the role of means, then she degrades his value as a person. Dulski frames his relationship with the prostitute very differently. Although he does not overlook the monetary aspect inherently associated with prostitution – purchasing of “sexual pleasures” – he nevertheless goes beyond the value as equated with the monetary equivalent, referencing in fact the historically preceding form of gift, as described by Marcel Mauss.¹² He therefore individualizes the reciprocity of the relationship (the prostitute has a name), and neutral-

11 Anne-Emmanuelle Berger, *Le grand théâtre du genre. Identités, Sexualités et Féminisme en "Amérique"* (Paris: Belin, 2013), 219.

12 “In economic theory, the gift is among the anomalies that are hard to explain with existing models. At the same time, the concept of the gift (which we cannot repay) is the basic principle of the Christian salvation.” A. Sedláček, *Economics of Good and Evil: The Quest for Economic Meaning from Gilgamesh to Wall Street* (Oxford: OUP, 2011), 135.

izes the degrading reification of people entering this kind of relationship. The other expected from him – as a person – a “voluntary” gift. Dulska, in turn, took everything from him by force. The other expected an exchange of spiritual values, and these are valuable for Dulska because they escape monetary exchangeability. This is proved by Helusia’s fondness of the – symbolic – color red, that he reminisces.

According to Georg Simmel, “the peculiarity of money lies in its being acquired by dealing successfully with other objects” (GS, 307). Dulska proves her abilities in this respect while negotiating with Hanka – who is depersonalized in this encounter – when she tries to settle on a monetary equivalent, though she does not recognize the girl’s debasement and “injury.” She is well-aware that she must preclude the threat of *mésalliance*, which would compromise her desired social status. Even if a son’s or a husband’s romance with a housemaid was tolerated – having a place among behaviors accounted for in the bourgeois moral code – still a *mésalliance* or a substantial disparity of the dowry were neither sanctioned nor accepted by society.¹³ This bourgeois moral code explains, to a certain extent, the scorn and sarcasm with which Dulska refers to the motives of suicide attempted by the Tenant, summing it up with the commonality of experience: “all the business with that girl... that is one thing...” (M, 21). Dulska’s sensitivity to the “eye of the beholder,” her fear of scandal, is caused not as much by her regard for the meticulous self-image projected onto the external world. It is not the aim. It is merely a means of achieving another aim – accumulating profits; in the present time from her tenement building, or otherwise the tenants will leave, and in the future when the respected family name will gain material representation through her son’s and daughters’ marital trade. The “Coquette” is well concealed while the Tenant has compromised Dulska’s interests – she has exposed her family to public ridicule and gossip. Accusations against her are possible through the reification of a person. An act of desperation is classified by Dulska as a poorly played “comedy”: “only death is always something...” “second-rate poison... If you’d at least died... well then...!” (M, 21). Dulska personifies the exact kind of belief in fiction that is noted by Simmel: “The extraordinary simplification and uniformity of the legal system which this reduction to money interest implies has, in association with its actual domination, led to the fiction of the autocratic rule of money – a fiction that also corresponds to the peculiar practical indifference towards those values that cannot be expressed in money terms, even though they are theoretically recognized to be the highest values” (GS, 399).

¹³ See Ossowska, *Moralność mieszczańska*.

2. Men on the Marital Marketplace

Dulska's household economy reduces things – accumulated capital, as well as her family – to the role of goods that belong to her only. It would seem that a model for this kind of economy is represented by the market with its circulation of commodities. Nevertheless, Dulska's practice rather points toward an economy that conceptualizes commodities in the common-sense way – that is as material objects. According to Dulska the value of goods does not depend upon their competitiveness – on the quantity of desirous glances of customers – only upon the subjective appraisal of the quality of labor invested into its production. And the labor invested should be reimbursed. Therefore the capital invested into her son, Zbyszko, “all the expenses raising and educating him entailed,” should one day return to her. She was filled with a “hagglers” distress that “what he settled for was far too low” (D, 287). Zbyszko, in turn, more sober in his accounts but also sensitive to values that cannot be conveyed by money, is ready to accede that his disenchanting wife is right in thinking that: “she was the one who paid, and who has been given a worn out low-quality item” (D, 293). Dulska herself has once exchanged her “virtue,” her dowry in the form of virginity, for “a husband's salary.” That is why, defending the budget from being misspent on an ever more “parchment-like,” bedbound, and therefore useless, Felicjan, she repeats the mantra: he ought to pay her “handsomely” for “being his wife all those years” (D, 321). Even more so, as with his prolonged sickness Dulska develops an obsession of material ruin and beggary in her final years.

Underscoring the pecuniary motive, which forms the basis of both marriages, Zapolska tellingly changes – in fact reverses – the cultural convention: a man is now the object of marital trade, and the transaction is carried out by a woman. One could imagine that Aniela also ascribed to herself an active role when she entered the marital contract with Dulski, and that it was her who dictated the terms of that contract. There is one substantial difference, though. If – as Simmel would have it – “where a relationship based on money interest exists in which superiority and advantage rest from the outset on one side, these tendencies may grow further” (GS, 414), then the advantage of the Brajbur girl would be a logical consequence of her financial standing. In turn Dulska's dominance, despite her lack of dowry, is rationalized by her subjective evaluation of gains and losses, which grants her added value as a wife. Meanwhile, in the monetary economy the division of chores in marriage – the man makes money and the woman manages his assets in the household – means that the dowry was considered compensation for the man, who was tasked with providing for his unproductive wife, while for the woman the dowry was supposed to guarantee safety and independence in the new household. Despite all this, Dulska did not require a dowry

to gain all the privileges for herself. This was so because, according to her, her own productivity far surpassed that of her “nincompoop” husband. She expresses her worth when she says: he ought to pay her “handsomely” for “being his wife all those years.”

In contrast with Zbyszko, who is aware that the trade degrades him, Dulaska is free of such feelings; she is confident that, just like things, people only gain in value when one has to pay for them – she makes sure that the transaction is profitable for her.

3. Zbyszko's Priggishness

In the drama Zbyszko is tasked with unmasking his “mommy's” morality. He exposes her mentality with irony and sarcasm; mercilessly pierces through her convoluted excuses. One could say he reveals her masquerade, her inner mystifications – “the wardrobe of the soul,” as Irzykowski would say – disclosing the true motives of her actions. He attacks and disarms her “economy of thought,” expressed in doxa and the use of “palliatives.” He exposes the state of intellectual indolence, which she unwittingly characterized herself: “I don't have any time to think” (M, 14). When Dulaska, referring to the maternal sacrifice that ennobles her, attempts to make her son repent by exposing his thanklessness and the reprehensibility of his ways, which subject the household to gossip: “Zbyszko! Did I nourish you with my own milk so that you could drag our decent and respected family name through various cafés and dens of iniquity?” she receives an answer: “You should have reared me on Nestlé's milk – it is, apparently, most excellent” (M, 13). He disdainfully calls his mother's house “an establishment,” “a cemetery” for “expansive, independent thought” (M, 14). He explains to Juliasiewiczowa the etiology of his priggishness.

Because, my angel I was born a prig! Because even in my mother's womb, I was a dyed-in-the-wool philistine! Because even if I tore the flesh from my bones, somewhere down there, inside my soul, is a big, thick layer of ignorance, immune to eradication! There's something else down there too – not sure where it came from – putting up something of a fight, eager to break loose. But I know it's only a matter of time before the big family prig overwhelms my mind, and then I shall be... Felicjan... I shall be... well... quite frankly... Dulski... great-Dulski, über-Dulski, I shall sire Dulskis, whole legions of them... celebrate my silver anniversary and have a decent gravestone, far away from all those dreadful suicides. And I won't be green, only puffed up with fat and puffed up with theories and I shall talk a great deal about God. (M, 32–33)

When Juliasiewiczowa contradicts his fatalism by saying: “one can break the bonds of priggishness,” Zbyszko replies: “Not true! You think you’re free, because you have a little surface polish. But you’re made of mahogany, that’s all, just like your fin-de-siècle furniture and your dyed hair. That’s the mark, madam counsellor – the true mark!” (M, 33).

This “lecture” belongs to the phase of Zbyszko’s suppressed revolt, which, though superficial, spasmodic, and lacking stronger grounding in an existential project, nevertheless allows him to recognize his own entanglement in the priggish mentality and to view himself through the eyes of another – the inhabitant of a modernist café, a bohemian, an artist. Zbyszko views the stigmatizing “mark” from the point of view of those who embody for him a free world of intellect and mores; a world of spiritual values. The “mark” is experienced simultaneously with growing self-knowledge and the recognition of his own “shadow.”¹⁴

4. Producing Dulskis

This “lecture” also resounds as a kind of prophecy, when it is set side by side with the history of the father and son described in *The Death of Felicjan Dulski*. Zapolska recounts the process through which Zbyszko becomes Dulski that must be similar to the process Felicjan underwent in the past. It is perpetuated not through genes but by laws of economy and the peculiarities of the new female and male gender formation. Zbyszko “tormented by lack of funds, by payday loans, Jewish debt – therefore bound to his family” (D, 276), finds recourse in a solid, “priggish” marriage. The Brajbur girl with her social standing, dowry, education, and manners fulfills all preconditions of an advantageous matrimonial contract.

5. Sexual Politics of the Dulski Women

Financial dependence and the resulting dominance in marriage seems to be transient for both Zbyszko and Dulska. Zbyszko is convinced that, according to the traditional script of sexual relations, “the influence of the senses will allow him to rule over the household” (D, 291), and Milunia “with her pious and modest upbringing” will be easy to “tame and prey-upon” (D, 279). Nevertheless it is not his “sexual politics” that is victorious but that of Milunia.

¹⁴ As understood by Jung. This means that he confronted the reality of dark aspects of his personality that were repressed in his unconscious, which was home to both the individual and collective shadow. Carl Gustav Jung, *Archetypy i symbole. Pisma wybrane*, trans. J. Prokopiuk (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1981).

"Milunia in this most important aspect, in which most young brides fail, has proved herself most adept, even masterful" (D, 292). Her vitality and creative invention with "small, household orgies," put her in a "leadership position." "She reigned in her marriage" (D, 291), concludes Zapolska, pointing out the libidinal aspect of control ("reigns") and the hierarchical nature of marital relationships. And as Dulski, after a failed attempt at resistance, acceded to the "system of tending to his health," "yielding to fate with all the apathy of a man tired with life and abuse" (D, 291), so did Zbyszko, who "at first bewildered, objected and defended his leadership, soon surrendered, finding his supporting role [in the bedroom] more pleasant, and much more suitable to his character" (D, 292). "Zbyszko did barely notice when he took on the part of Felicjan" (D, 292). By analogy we can recreate a corresponding sexual prowess of Milunia's mother-in-law. A volcano of energy, an indefatigable vitality, likened by the family to the power of elements: gale and hurricane, finally a howl. If in *The Morality of Mrs. Dulaska* Zapolska merely hints at "Dulaska's temperament," then in *The Death* she explicitly lays out the details and does not leave room for speculations about Dulska's asexuality: "Like the spirit of Banco she roamed the night, searching for someone on whom she could release her temper of an unsatisfied lady of critical age" (D, 278). The conduct of this "lady of critical age" reveals that she did not lose her sexual appetite: "she pounced on Felicjan, deep asleep in his cozy flannel nightgown" (D, 278). Zbyszko "surrendered" leadership in the bedroom to his wife, Felicjan, in turn, "shrugged Dulska off, resigned, as if he was trying to avoid a fly." What is striking in the case of both son and father is the dispersed, exhausted vital and sexual energy. If the male gender represents the decline of power, decline of energy, its overuse; then the female gender represents its accumulation, capitalization, its disproportionate overabundance. And Zapolska, in accordance with the positivist, mechanical-energetic model,¹⁵ persuades that this asymmetry of energy and will is caused by the lifestyle of both men: Zbyszko's apathy can be traced back to sensual/libidinal abuses, while Felicjan's lethargy and inertia are caused by the boredom of a small-time clerk trapped within the limited confines of the office, household, and café, allowed only a fictitious walk to the Castle, from time to time. This insight is undoubtedly valuable as it suggests two distinct levels, on which women and men function, that determine their cultural gender in distinct ways. The public space of men has been greatly reduced. Because they do not partake in all aspects of public life (diminished opportunities to engage with the public institutions of a country that does not, in fact, exist), they begin to resemble the women of their social class who are

15 I described this model in "Teorie neurozy," in *Powieści o "wieku nerwowym"* (Katowice: Śląsk, 1988).

locked away in the household prisons of everyday life. And these domesticated men function in public space, waging small-time – but no less exhausting – battles for their livelihood; battles that do not lead to sublimation, but to the dissociation of desires. They are affected with the same frustration that is experienced by the women of their social class. Zapolska has reversed the situation. The household space is traditionally ruled by women, who do not share their power with men. Dulaska breaches the boundary separating the private from the public when she assumes a traditionally masculine role, anticipating contemporary businesswomen, while at the same time her husband is isolated even from the family budget. Control over it is exerted exclusively by Dulaska. The patriarchal “head of the family,” has withdrawn and the vacant place was taken by a female “head.”

Another kind of role reversal is depicted through Milunia’s sexual politics. It can be said that her sexual scenario has liberated sexuality from the power of the phallus, from under the “overweening importance of male sexual experience” – to recall the words of Anthony Giddens.¹⁶ Zbyszko’s wife could personify the avant-garde of this new project of sexual relations, if it were not for the inherent traditional inequality, which only substituted female dominance for male dominance. While Pierre Bourdieu said that “the sexual act itself is seen by men as a form of domination, appropriation, «possession»,”¹⁷ Zapolska ascribes this same outlook to a woman. Sexual relations not only describe the private sphere but are also a reflection of social relationships between the sexes: while Milunia dominates the marital bedroom, Dulaska goes even further extending this dominance onto both the household and the public sphere. The basic balance is disturbed: passivity describes that which is masculine, and activity that which is feminine.

6. Dulskification or the Ruin of Men

It seems proper to take under consideration one more element that was highly stressed by Zapolska herself. The “Dulskification” of father and son has a single source and a similar finale. Zbyszko and Felicjan, subjected to the laws of economy, are left among the ruins of their dreams. The former has bid farewell to the undefined but significant longings that are personified by his “true soul” or “better part” (“have I accomplished anything? Was I ever an artist or at least a talented dilettante?” D, 293) – the source of rebellion and self-knowledge.

16 Anthony Giddens, *The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love and Eroticism in Modern Societies* (Stanford: SUP, 1992), 2.

17 Pierre Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, trans. Richard Nice (Stanford: SUP, 2001), 20.

The latter has discarded memories, experiences of an ideal, amorous communication. Both, forced by the circumstances, have suppressed and inhibited the remnants of their inner lives, blocked access to spiritual values, to their metaphysical dimension. They have also dismissed fantasizing, which we know – from reading Freud – to be a special and invaluable form of being, distinct from the material reality. Withdrawn, in a state of anomie, living but as if they were already dead, dispossessed of their selves, from visions of the future, bereft of dreams. Dormant, though not dreaming, in an atmosphere of superficial, maternal tenderness and economic precaution of their wives. Silent Dulski prefigures the silence of his son. Dulski with his eroded subjectivity limits himself to body language, to nonverbal gestures. He did not refrain from taking part in household affairs because this was more convenient for him¹⁸ or – this is one of Zapolska's invaluable insights – because he was deprived of another, even more important than the real (according to Freud) reality of inner life. We get a glimpse of that reality in *The Death of Felician Dulski*, when the bedridden protagonist loses control of his chain of thought. Malignant and feverish this “errant, small-town Don Quixote,” who seemed like “a doll cut out of limp paper,” and who “emanated a lifetime misery” (D, 296) gains access to an extraordinary world that was previously inaccessible to him. Reified by Dulski, who terrorized and humiliated him, he begins in his hallucinations “an alternative, fulfilling and accomplished life.” Within that world resurfaces a tender memory of a girl “with long, silky hair.” This regained, positive memory of a prostitute violates the order of petit bourgeois morality and of the regime to which he surrendered, overturning his previous hierarchy of values: “And suddenly... all that, material and moral, was no longer «his» – was not that which was «his». But rather this – tranquil, unfulfilled, elusive” (D, 307). That which is on the horizon of desires: wants, dreams, hallucinations. Under his eyelids there remained an image of a girl on a red catafalque, because Helunia liked the color red. One of the fundamental reasons for Dulski's silence is the suppression of the moment of this last goodbye: “But he remained still in front of this red catafalque in a dark corner of the Dominican church.” “He remained and hardened” (D, 307), Zapolska will add.

And once more a reversal in the order of things becomes apparent, this time a reversal of gender attributes. Dulski becomes overwhelmed by emotional tendencies, conventionally associated with femininity: sensitivity, subtlety, focus on relations with others, empathy. A rejection of dominance in relations with another. And Dulski? If masculinity is constituted by power, then undoubtedly Dulski is masculine and therefore powerful. And she enters this masculine position and role unflinching.

¹⁸ This interpretation was suggested by Karwowska in *Ciało i śmiech*, 6.

The story of the extinction of passion and the emptiness of existence filled with Dulaska's economy, juxtaposes two gains. Aniela's economy and pragmatism reveal their twofaced nature: the more Dulski recedes from the real world and gives in to the world of fantasy, the greater his reimbursement, his gain, which is not expressed in monetary equivalents; a gain in possessing finally "something of my own," that he receives from this "alternative, fulfilling and accomplished life."

7. Idiocy and Cruelty

Dulaska's intellectual indolence manifests in her recourse to "palliatives" – "empty and elusive expressions [...] awkward excuses not free of flippancy,"¹⁹ banalities such as: "The apple didn't fall too far from the apple tree" (M, 5), "No need to fret, it'll heal in time for your wedding day!" (M, 4). She exhibits thoughtless carelessness in constantly mistaking the meaning of words: she uses the name "sztrudel" when she means "szprudel", she says "szkandalistka" when in fact it is pronounced "skandalistka," she mistakes "illusion" for "allusion." That is how Dulaska ends each conversation. Palliatives "do not leave any space for doubt, they are deaf to the other,"²⁰ in turn they facilitate aggression and violence towards them. Doxa functions in a similar manner, it is predominantly expressed in social conventions that are a means of controlling others. Dulaska's "I don't have any time to think," perfectly describes the automatism of her quips and behavior.

The study of Dulaska's stupidity gains new meaning when juxtaposed with the study of her cruelty.

Disregarding the difficulties with the clarity of this term – troublesome not only for psychoanalysts – I would like to point to several of its components that do not contradict each other. Cruelty understood as an act requires interrelations, an object. Nevertheless, this very relation must be severed for the act to actualize. The intentionality of the act becomes crucial – cruelty precludes "identification with the object through mercy and compassion."²¹ Therefore, the status of this object must be external and unfamiliar to the perpetrator's "self." The object of cruelty must be ignored as a person – its "contours" and its "individuality" must become unclear. To be cruel means to negate the being of another, annihilate him in his identity and difference, "to disembowel his in-

19 Matthijs van Boxsel, *Encyklopedia głupoty* (Warszawa: W.A.B., 2004), 113.

20 Ibid., 113.

21 Sophie de Mijolla-Mellor, *La cruauté au féminin* (Paris: Presses Universitaire de France, 2004), 30.

ner self.”²² Aggression directed at an object is associated with its destruction, with “appropriation” (*emprise*) that reaches his interior. From the point of view of microsociology, represented by Claude Javeau,²³ cruelty is considered to be a certain kind of interaction, whose necessary condition is a clear “intention of one side to cause the other side to lose face” – a loss that cannot be undone.

Dulska's cruelty is most severe towards those who are situated, for various reasons, on the lower end of the family hierarchy. Directed at Hanka it stigmatizes and excludes her because of her social origins, reducing her to a nameless “drudge,” “a bumpkin.” The financial compensation for the harm Zbyszko inflicted upon her, with his mother's acquiescence no less, does not have any rectifying power.

Mela, one of Dulska's daughters, is the subject of constant aggression and permanent destruction of personality. A sensitive, sickly girl, burdened by a physical mark: a hunchback. She personifies “fear that fills a being scared of life,” terrorized by her mother's screaming but also by her deliberate amplification of terror, perpetuated once Dulska realizes “the effect” she has on her daughter. For her difference and strangeness in the world of the Dulskis, for her empathy, Mela is subjected to punishment. Her silent resistance to the absurd treatment Dulska administers to Felicjan, her request to get a doctor, give rise to Dulska's rage, as she feels her daughter is challenging her authority and omnipotence. Repressions culminate in two events.

The first is when in answer to Mela's suggestion to pay for the doctor out of her dowry, Dulska takes off her mask and reveals the true purpose of her compulsive accumulation of wealth, of her prudence and integrity, a purpose that has veiled her in the universally accepted and desired aura of motherhood. The purpose that was the rationale behind the household regime and which legitimized the subjection of the whole family:

– Your dowry? What dowry? – she yelled. [...] Nothing, you'll have nothing, neither you, nor Hesia, nor Zbyszko. I will give it all away to monasteries, I will erect a church, fund a chapel on Łyczakowska with an everlasting light and a tablet. That's what I'll do, and nothing to you lot! (D, 323)

²² Mijolla-Mellor, *La cruauté*, 31.

²³ Claude Javeau, “La cruauté: un point de vue microsociologique,” *Cahiers de Psychologie Clinique* 22 (2004): 13–26, <https://doi.org/10.3917/cpc.022.0013>, accessed September 3, 2015.

Mela's tears intensified by Dulska's new lie: "Either way, I have nothing left," are a visible sign of her sudden entry into adulthood, which strips away illusions leaving only trauma.

In the next moment, accompanied by the sound of Felicjan's "crepitations," Dulska forces Mela's silence through a symbolic and literal assault: "the powerful fist of an agitated hysteric fell upon the girls humped back. She falls silent, then whimpers quietly with a spasmodic cry, standing by the wall" (D, 349). And she will remain silent – a lone depository of the secret of crimes perpetrated by "mommy" upon the souls and bodies of her fellow men.

Felicjan plays the star part in the theater of cruelty run by Dulska. This "parchment-like man," bedbound and reified, doomed to the medical horror of Dulska's experiments that cause physical pain and loss of consciousness, the object of abuse when the treatments fail, ineffective in his task of filling the family coffer, despised more and more, humiliated as a "cripple" and "halfwit"; he falls back on a defensive strategy from the start. Hearing Dulska's shuffling, he hides his head beneath the sheets. "They became his shield, barrier, border wall, something completely his and only his" (D, 303–304). And because the sheets are his gateway to the world of dreams and memories – to this other reclaimed self – as his sickness progresses he hides beneath them more and more. Eventually, the boundary between his world beneath the sheets and the other world disappears. On the one hand, the sheets, a keyword of the final paragraphs of *The Death of Felicjan Dulski*, take on a therapeutic role – allowing his fantasy to roam free – but, on the other hand, they facilitate Dulska's acts of cruelty. For if – as Levinas sees it – "the face is that which signifies: Do not kill me," then Dulska by choosing an existence without a face exposes himself to the risk of murder. He becomes blurry to the Other, the Other ceases to see him or "sees in him something that is no longer a face." Nevertheless, for Dulska he has long since lost his outlines, his identity – he existed as an object of her hallucinations induced by malice. Likewise, Dulska also lost her face: she became merely an abject body, a spreading mass. Felicjan death occurs in solitude, with the kitchen noise of a tenderizer and the counting of raisins in the background, accompanied by Mela's distant "howling."

8. The Nature of Money – The Nature of God

I would like to linger for a moment on the interpretation of a previously quoted passage:

– Your dowry? What dowry? – she yelled. [...] Nothing, you'll have nothing, neither you, nor Hesia, nor Zbyszko. I will give it all away to monasteries, I will erect a church, fund a chapel on Łyczakowska with

an everlasting light and a tablet. That's what I'll do, and nothing to you lot! (D, 323)

Dulska, by appropriating family capital, reveals her true face. Dispossessing her children, she destroys the fundamentals of the family's existence. That is if in a market economy a family – by losing integrity and unity – becomes just a form of “organized succession” (D, 382). It is as if this particular final goal did not satisfy her wishes, because it would deprive her of the power over accumulated capital which she would, in this case, share with her relatives. Frustrated, she “anxiously chews on her fictitious resentment” – as we learn from *The Death of Felicjan Dulski* (D, 273) – seeing herself as the family victim, who has worked her hands to the bone for them. She dreadfully anticipates the fate of the accumulated capital after her death: “they will squander her hard work,” they will succumb to the pleasures of consumption: use the services of medicine men, go to ballets, and buy automobiles.

Therefore Dulska disburses the acquired capital on an indisputably ultimate goal, one which allows her to satiate her true yearning that goes beyond the boundaries of family territory. And it is a vanity project: to immortalize herself, inscribe her name on a “tablet.” This project, stereotypically associated with the purpose of masculine existence, seems to be a compensation for the sacrifices she made as a wife and mother.

From beyond this yearning – to immortalize her name here on earth – peers another one. To elucidate its merit, I must refer to a psychological mechanism, described by Simmel, of the intertwining of two notions – God and money. I pursue this line of enquiry inspired by the nature of Dulska's donation: monasteries, a church, and a tablet. These are spaces and forms wherein religiousness is expressed, where God is praised, where one transcends oneself. It is as if the accumulation of money as an absolute means enabled her to reach the ultimate goal – religious absolute. As if the path of material gain was the same as the path leading to the ultimate values represented by God. A path to eternity. As if eternity purchased on this earth guaranteed her eternity in heaven. Such a link is plausible if we agree with Simmel on the reasons for which money, as an absolute means, “in its psychological form [...] possesses a significant relationship to the notion of God” (GS, 254). In the idea of God “all diversities and contradictions” achieve “unity” and from that unity “arises the peace, the security, the all-embracing wealth of feeling.” According to Simmel, money excites similar feelings. It has the ability to become a center “in which the most opposed, the most estranged and the most distant things” come into contact. “Thus, money actually provides an elevated position above the particular and a confidence in its omnipotence, just as we have

confidence in the omnipotence of a highest principle to grant us the particular and the baser at any moment and to be able to transform itself into them" (GS, 255).

It is easy to notice a certain pattern: whenever Dulska turns her prayers, or her gaze, towards the Almighty, together with the plea for God's mercy and compassion the assumption of her own elevation through money manifests itself. The commensurability, exchangeability of these two orders, two ideas, illuminates the meticulous cleansing of the world, over which Dulska exerts her absolute power, of spirituality. The closing scene of Felicjan's death is outright blasphemous. And again Dulska shield her self-image from the inconvenient truth that Felicjan died without confession and sacraments. She conceals this fact by simulating a conversation with the deceased and creating a fiction in which he reveals his last will to her. The Dulski frame of mind triumphs again, with its pragmatism and mundane automatism – a soulless rite of vegetation. When the cook asks: "what about the dinner?" Dulska answers: "We must wait with the meatballs. The master will be dressed first, before he cools and stiffens. Then we will eat" (D, 355). The cook sighs because the dinner will go cold.

9. Further Remarks on Gender Identity

In the preceding sections I explored those situations that could shed light on the reversal of traditional gender roles and on the new hierarchy of the two genders. A crisis of identity, and the anxiety it arises, was usually expressed through a narrative of role reversal. Zapolska exhibited an interest in gender hybrids from the start of her literary career, as evidenced by her debut novel. Nevertheless, the literature and culture of the nineteenth century had a strong proclivity for a binary opposition between the masculine and the feminine, equating social gender with biological sex on the premise of their uniformity. Therefore, Zapolska left an empty space between the masculine and feminine in her writing.²⁴ A disruption of social order could only occur through the transposition of the genders and the reversal, or a new ordering, of gender roles. This motif of "a world *à rebours*" perseveres in literature but it always ends in a restoration of "normalcy," in a return to the conventional, patriarchal

²⁴ Even if the first of Zapolska's novels features a goat-man and a monstrous woman, paraded in front of the public for their enjoyment, still I would like to place these curiosities: midgets, bearded women, Siamese twins – the object of fascination for 19th-century writers – not in the sphere of normative femininity and masculinity but rather beyond that which is masculine and feminine. Although a goat-man is introduced by Zapolska as an allegory of dominant masculinity.

ordering of the sexes from before the revolt. Usually the wife's power-hunger is, in the end, suppressed and punished.²⁵

Dulska triumphs in the finale of both of Zapolska's works. Dulski, in turn, shares the fate of numerous silent, invisible women who, as if by the sheer fact of their existence, were a threat to male aspirations²⁶ – he is banished from the literary (social) scene. And Zapolska delays his death, just as the death of heroines was retarded through operatic devices.²⁷

Bożena Karwowska is of the opinion that:

At first glance the gender identities in *The Morality of Mrs. Dulska* seem to be of no great importance. The main protagonist, Mrs. Dulska is not supposed to represent women, but to be an embodiment of "sexless" bourgeois (or more precisely – petit bourgeois) hypocrisy.²⁸

On the grounds of my previous analyses I am inclined to pursue a line of argument contrary to the one presented by Karwowska. The fact that Dulska represent the female sex is not without significance to Zapolska's narrative. All of Dulska's attributes and actions are adjusted and – at the same time – caricatured in light of her gender, which is shaped by the network of socio-economic and cultural determinants. The ruthless regime of household economy has its rationale: as a woman occupying the household space, barred from the possibility of earning wages but, being a woman of her times – worshipping money – she can either put aside the surpluses from a low-rank clerk's wages, or penny-pinch the tenants of her townhouse. Hypocrisy, priggishness, the very fact of being a Dulska, are therefore constructed in a gendered way. The constraints of social mores, cultural requirements and prohibitions do not constrain men to the same degree as women. There is still asymmetry in this respect. The superego of patriarchal culture internalized by Dulska, assisted by bourgeois morality, confronted with a money based economy that unleashes an insatiable hunger of goods or their equivalent in coin, must in effect lead to hypocrisy. It provokes the concealment of economic motivation, of earthly goals, behind motives of a higher order. This is because a mask of virtuousness and piety is well-suited for achieving "elevation" – of communion with

25 Cf. Karwowska, *Ciało i śmiech*, 5.

26 The conventional finale that disposes of the heroine in "male" 19th-century American narratives is analyzed by Judith Fetterley, *The Resisting Reader. A Feminist Approach to American Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978).

27 See Catherine Clément *L'opéra ou la défaite des femmes* (Paris: Grasset, 1979).

28 Karwowska, *Ciało i śmiech*, 4.

divine money. Dulska's fictional adherence to religious norms, which she in fact fails to follow, is for her also a source of "elation," of achieving an ideal self. At the junction of utilitarian and Christian ethics there could emerge a force that would counterbalance the negative effects of utilitarian culture but only if certain aspects of Christian values would shape social interaction, as is the case in Protestantism, according to Max Weber, and in Catholicism, according to Georg Simmel. Traditionally, in our culture, not men but domesticated women – also those from the petite bourgeoisie – were tasked with the transmission of religious virtue. Dulska's idiolect is embellished with religious ornaments, therefore her religious virtues remain atrophied. In nineteenth-century Polish novel the home space was the domain of the "Polish Mother." Her unchallenged position was legitimized by her attributes. The persona of Dulska breaks this continuum. The only figure she can personify is that of a ruined myth/stereotype/phallasm of Polish culture – the figure of "Polish Mother" whose traditional roles were eviscerated. The new roles, which were created by monetary economy, are caricatured in Dulska.

The person of Dulska could be understood as a pamphlet on a woman, who joins the struggle for livelihood, gaining in the process attributes of masculinity. This is exactly what Ruskin had in mind when he portrayed the catastrophic consequences, for household and social life, that would result from the venturing of women beyond the household space, which is the space where mystical, psychological womanhood manifests itself.²⁹

For the above reasons it is impossible to dissociate the quality of being a Dulska from gender. For even if Zbyszko "considered himself an adherent and successor of the values represented by his mother"³⁰ – as Karwowska points out, when she discusses the universal quality of the Dulska phenomenon – he is nevertheless conscious, unlike his mother, of his inheritance, which he considers to be an oppressive "blemish." Moreover, Felicjan, just like Zbyszko, is not, in contrast with Dulska, a worshipper of money. Both retreat from the struggle of everyday, from the space where capital is accumulated; both are artificially stiffened by their white collars, locked in their clerical suits and offices, each month they collect for their work an arbitrarily assigned monetary equivalent, which in turn is collected from them by their wives – meticulous in their accountancy. Maybe this is the reason for their spiritual proclivities. Zapolska even endows them with a sensitivity and hopes normally attributed

29 Zapolska was familiar with Ruskin's concepts, she refers to them in her opinion piece "Piękno w życiu kobiety," where the beauty of the house-interior becomes a metaphor of a woman's soul. See Gabriela Zapolska, *Publicystyka*, ed. Jadwiga Czachowska (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1962).

30 Karwowska, *Ciało i śmiech*, 4.

to women. This might explain why they find connection with the Imaginary realm, while women decisively prefer contact with the Symbolic order. Dulska knows how to adapt to it and, at the same time, subvert it (this is her hypocrisy) according to her whim.

Dulska's way of being overturns not only Ruskin's projections of womanhood, but also the figures of dependent women and listless boudoir-ladies. Zapolska unhinges the stereotype of feminine gender. Petite bourgeoisie requires active women – lively, energetic, and victorious in the struggle for livelihood. So it produces Dulaska. As a combatant in this war Dulaska annexes a section of the public sphere that was previously reserved for men. She administers not only her household and its inhabitants but also, as a property owner, she exerts control over the tenants of her townhouse. Her command over money goes beyond the household budget. Dulaska develops expertise confronting the socio-economic realities and sheds stereotypical female attributes; meanwhile, both Dulski men do the opposite – their domesticated masculinity retains merely the privilege of unaccompanied escapades to the café and the prerogative of smoking cigars. The burden of physical and metaphorical “incapacity,” hitherto associated with womanhood, is being transferred onto men. What is more, now men are cast in female roles, as those who are characterized by psychological and intellectual indolence. That is why Dulaska fulfills her pedagogical–custodial obligations towards Felicjan, as if he were a being incapable of autonomous existence. This is the reason why “this halfwit” Dulski is treated like a child:

Juliasiewiczowa: I have the children in mind.

Dulska: Hesia, Mela, please leave! Felicjan, off you go as well, man...

(M, 63)

The dispersed, used up energy of the “parchment-like” man renders him invisible. Felicjan assumed the responsibilities dictated by patriarchal “masculinity,” as he provides for his family, but he conceded the privileges that this entails. The dominance of women is expressed metaphorically through the appropriation of space by their bodies – the more Dulski shrinks physically, the more Dulaska's body expands. Karwowska writes: “Felicjan's attitude towards life (and family) is not a consequence of an unmanly timidity and weakness, but of convenience, as he simply hides behind the back of his wife, who elbows her way through life and therefore clears the path for her husband as well.”³¹ *The Death of Felicjan Dulski*, reveals the hidden life of a “suppressed masculinity,” by focusing on the trauma of “petrification” before Helusia's

³¹ Karwowska, *Ciało i śmiech*, 6.

catafalque, it indicates that his unwillingness to participate – out of “convenience” – should be rather regarded in categories related to feminine coping mechanisms. In one aspect, as a way of fulfilling the demands of the symbolic order (work, family), and in another, as a survival strategy, a way of remaining in the Imaginary order – accommodating the past and the memory of the deceased.

“At whom and what are we laughing? At Felicjan Dulski, of course – Karwowska adds. [...] The humorous aspect of this persona is obviously gendered in character, we would not laugh if he were a woman.”³² Therefore, our laughter is the consequence of a reversal of gender norms, of the transposition of gender roles and of the reshaping of the gendered space of drama. It is most certainly so. Still, one cannot fail to ask about the essence and value of this laughter. Is it cathartic? Who is it that is laughing? Zapolska herself provides us with a fairly clear indication:

Dulska rarely attends the theatre. Very, very rarely. She saw *The Merry Widow*, she saw *The Wedding* (she left confused and decided that this was something straight out of the nuthouse) and on her own morality – she laughed her head off. She found herself wise and very proper. She was even content that people praise and applaud her morality so much.”³³

Translation: Rafał Pawluk

³² Karwowska *Ciało i śmiech*, 6.

³³ Gabriela Zapolska, “Lekki chleb,” in *Publicystyka*, 372.