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Is It Really a “Mothers’ Hell”? On Motherhood in the Dramas of Maria Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska¹

Czy rzeczywiście „piekło matek”? O macierzyństwie w dramatach Marii Pawlikowskiej-Jasnorzewskiej

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Abstract

The author draws attention to the complexity of motherhood as one of the themes depicted in the dramatic works of Wojciech Kossak’s older daughter. Considered a moderate feminist in the interwar period, Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska is aware of the fact that having children has become a public matter. It is in the interest of the family, the species and society in general. For this reason, legal regulations are likely to create oppressive situations in which women’s interests and rights are dismissed. In Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska’s plays, the topic of motherhood appears in a variety of circumstances, and the news about pregnancy often transforms into a touchstone situation, sparking a debate on the rights and obligations of an individual towards the human species and their family. Abortion is one of the possible solutions. Yet, while criticising the system of norms and imperatives evolved around the instinct of having children, the playwright focuses on the positive images of motherhood. Good mothers are happy, while bad mothers are condemned. Therefore, while granting the heroines of her plays the right to love and personal fulfilment, Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska remains a traditionalist when it comes to obligations towards a conceived child.

Maria Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska is mainly celebrated as a poet from the interwar period writing about romantic complications, although she is recently also discussed in the context of women’s drama (cf. Kot 2010: 437) and even

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feminist drama (cf. Rawiński 1999: 193–215; Poskuta-Włodek 2015: 105–120). During that period, the newly regained Polish independence encouraged authors to change their choice of topics and refresh their ways of character creation. The situation of women, their rights and obligations, including the question of motherhood, became major issues.

Compared to other female playwrights of the interwar period, such as Maria Morozowicz-Szczepkowska, Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska is not too revolutionary in her portrayal of social problems. If the author of *Sprawa Moniki* [*The Case of Monika*] showed women being independent both economically and erotically, which was equivalent with a postulate of their full humanity (Wiatrzyk-Iwaniec 2015: 167–168), she did not call for a “fight against the male sex”, but dissociated herself from too radical literary trends (Natanson 1932: 3; cf. Żarnowska 2004: 287–295). Her heroines predominantly seek happiness by a man’s side, mostly within a marriage, although they start to verbalise their dissatisfaction at being subjected to their husbands and, most importantly, begin ever more boldly to talk about their own desires (Warońska 2018). For this reason, the statement made some years ago by Katarzyna Sierakowska, “According to Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska, a woman withers in it [the marriage – J. W.], which is caused by routine” (cf. Sierakowska 2004: 373), which refers to a thesis of Inga Iwasiów (2000: 163), does not exhaust the relationships depicted in these plays. Similarly, an article by Monika Żółkoś (2018), which characterises the oppression of women of that time who were forced into a patriarchal discourse (based on Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska’s stage plays), treats this subject matter too unequivocally. This stance was indeed presented by the author in the text *Okrucieństwo matron* [*The Cruelty of Matrons*], published in “*Życie Świadome*”, a supplement to “*Wiadomości Literackie*”. In it, she demanded access to information about contraception and de-mythologised childbirth, restating the dangers which await both woman and child:

Dziwna rzecz, jak mało litości dla młodych kobiet mają starsze, w bólach rodzenia doświadczone matrony. Te wiarusy, dalekie już od groźnego frontu macierzyństwa, mające za sobą kleszcze, szwy, donoszone lub przenoszone cięższe, wymóżdżenia płodu, gorączki połogowe, żyłaki, skrzepy poporodowe i setki innych średnio-wiecznych okropności, z pasją popychają młode i nieraz wątych sił niewiasty, aby złożyły z siebie ofiarę².

[It seems strange, how little pity for young women is displayed by the older matrons, experienced in the pains of childbirth. These veterans, now far from the perilous front lines of motherhood, having survived forceps, stitches, pregnancies

² In the texts from before 1939, spelling and punctuation have been updated.

carried to term or past term, cephalotrips, childbed fevers, varices, post-partum clots, and hundreds of other medieval horrors, now passionately push young and often feeble women to make a sacrifice of themselves] (Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska 1932: 7).

However, the theses of this article do not find a continuation in the author's plays. The playwright does not use them to question the ethos of marriage, nor does she launch a direct attack on the matrons (described in the article above), who are most often merely comical. The cruellest of these seems to be Róża Krzeptowska (*Egipska pszenica* [*Egyptian Wheat*]), who criticises her daughter-in-law for choosing childbirth under anaesthesia and shirking the pain.

Almost all of Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska's theatre plays, starting with her debut *Szofer Archibald* [*Archibald the Chauffeur*] (1924), are set in wealthy families, either bourgeois or aristocratic. For this reason, the wives do not hold jobs, and are helped in their house duties by servants. There are professionally active women depicted in the plays, but in most cases they are single – unmarried young women from poor families (Diana Castor from *Powrót mamy* [*Mother's Return*]) or widows (Kinia from *Skarb w płomieniach* [*A Treasure in Flames*]). An exception could be the excellent chemist Petronika Selen-Gordon (*Baba-Dziwo* [*Weird Woman*]), whose knowledge helps to topple the dictator Valida Vrana.

Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska's heroines wonder about the determinants of womanhood, taking into account the existing socio-political situation. However, they never treat this category as a stigma which should be combated. Thus, they do not try to emulate manly behaviours (Rawiński 1999: 195) and, furthermore, women who lack typical womanly traits, such as sensitivity or the ability to love, are placed by the author among negative characters, such as Valida Vrana (*Baba-Dziwo*), Alda (*Dowód osobisty* [*Personal Identification*]) or Mura (*Skarb w płomieniach*).

In the interwar period, it was still the perceived wisdom that biological sex predestines women for the role of mother and caretaker. It should, therefore, come as no surprise that family life is a major theme in Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska's plays. These dramas are set against the backdrop of the struggle for planned motherhood which was fought at that time, including the topics of abortion, eugenics, and the significance of offspring for the family and society. It is worth noting that the turn of the 1920s and 30s saw changes in the discourse on marriage, family and the social role of women (Kraft 2004; Kulak 2004). The alternative was increasingly raised between family and self-realisation (Sierakowska 2009: 120), which meant more than just the career, including the satisfaction in intimate life as well. Sex ceased to be discussed exclusively as a procreational act

(Sierakowska 2009: 120), although motherhood was still considered one of the drives which rule the subconscious of a woman. An example of this can be found in “*Życie Świadome*”, discussed by Irena Krzywicka (1932: 15).

The problems of motherhood shown in Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska’s dramas have drawn the interest of scholars since the beginning of the 21st century. Apart from the already cited Monika Żółkoś, they were also explored by, among others, Marta Wiatrzyk-Iwaniec and Anna Wzorek. The former pointed out the author’s “complex views on motherhood” (Wiatrzyk-Iwaniec 2015: 170], while the latter, when discussing *Baba-Dziwo*, observed:

This drama dealing with dictatorship is not voicing an objection to motherhood as such, but it does object to treating it as an absolute commandment and obligation of a woman (Wzorek 2009: 106).

As early as in her dramatic debut, *Szofer Archibald*, the author introduced comical aunts wishing that the newlyweds would soon procreate. In this way, a relationship between two people was to be transformed into the basic social unit. The idea that this is the only lasting and only reason for even unhappy couples to remain together is also found in later plays.

In Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska’s first comedy, we find a humorous reference to the postulates of the feminists of the day. Robert agrees to marry Ama, commanded by his uncle’s testament, because the woman, in spite of her experiences in her former relationship, is able to “respect the humanity in the man” and “the manhood in the human” (Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska 1986: 34). Interestingly, the young divorcée protagonist has also learned that men often promote motherhood because they want to be fathers. The “fatherhood fixation” reaching levels of cruelty is raised by the author in *Egipska pszenica*.

Motherhood as oppression is portrayed chiefly in *Baba-Dziwo* (1938), and as a side-issue also in *Mrówki* [*Ants*] (1936) and *Egipska pszenica* (1932). In the first of the three plays, young women are forced to bear children for the good of the state, which is the ultimate expunction of women’s freedom (Rawiński 1999: 206). Prawia, however, is a state which oppresses its subjects irrespective of sex (cf. Morska 1933: 5; Warońska 2019: 358) and turns out to be a dystopia ruled by a woman (Krzywicka 1932: 15). The dictator is associated with other “broads” mainly by her title, “Her Motherly Highness”, although in reality, she is not a mother nor even an aunt. Having changed her name, she seems to reside outside of any clan. The leader, shaped by a loveless life and a lack of interest from men, is more like a machine than a human being. Anna Krajewska called her a “kobieton” – a being lacking typical womanly characteristics

(Krajewska 1989: 137). The confrontation between Valida Vrana and Petronika, who “realises subversive models of womanly existence” (Żółkoś 2018: 44), is thus not a meeting of two heroines with different worldviews, but of a being who lacks human feelings with an independent, wise, and sensitive person.

In *Mrówki*, on the other hand, accidental motherhood exists first of all in the world of animals, whose only concern is the good of the colony as they unconsciously realise the tenets of Taylorism (Rawiński 1999: 210). Their level of organisation makes the process of reproduction look like an assembly line, whose guardians are the infertile worker ants. One of them, Xax, reminds princess Illi:

Rodzić, rodzić z entuzjazmem! Aby nasz wielki gatunek świat zawojował. A dla nas robotnic co za nawał zbożnej pracy w segregacji larw, w doborze pokarmu, w oznaczaniu i wyrabianiu płci!

[Birth, birth with enthusiasm! So that our species conquers the world. And for us workers, what a heap of goodly work, segregating larvae, selecting feed, marking and developing sexes!] (Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska 1986, vol. 2: 424)

Worker ants, more effectively than “broads” in the human world “guard the reproduction of traditional roles of the sexes” (Żółkoś 2018: 38). The playwright does not build strained analogies, although in “Wiadomości literackie” Xax is characterised as follows: “a colony devotee, full of cruelty and mendacious kindness; she hates winged ants” (Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska 1937: 9). This description appears only in the magazine. It seems, however, that the situation portrayed by the author is rather an allegory for the division of roles and cruel purposefulness discovered in nature. Furthermore, in the case of ants, one might as well speak of the oppressiveness of nature towards the workers, who will never know love (cf. Campbell 1994: 164). In this regard, the human species seems more democratic. Here, every guard of the existing order, such as mothers-in-law and other “broads”, had a chance at being happy, which for Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska is equivalent with experiencing the feeling of love, and sometimes even parenthood. The main question of *Mrówki* was discussed in the magazine “Czas”, recommending the play to theatres. Its satirical nature was foregrounded:

Z właściwą sobie poetycznością rozwija przed nami autorka zagadnienie stosunku dwóch zasadniczych, a tak przeciwnych sobie kierunków, nurtujących psychikę ludzką: indywidualizmu, który jednostce podszeptuje pragnienie szczęścia i piękna – oraz instynktu, dążącego w sposób bezwzględny przede wszystkim do zachowania gatunku jako takiego bez względu na jednostkę. W finale obu aktów, drugiego i trzeciego, ukazuje nam poetka odwieczne: “da capo al fine”, zwycięstwo gatunku nad jednostką (lub, jak kto woli, zwycięstwo instynktu macierzyńskiego). Ofiarą padają skrzydła, symbol idealnego wzlotu w sferę piękna.

[With a poetic sense typical for her, the author presents to us the relationship between two principal, and so opposed, directions guiding the human psyche: individualism, which whispers to one of the need for happiness and beauty – and instinct, which ruthlessly drives at preserving the species with no regard for the individual. In the finales of both the second and third act, the poet shows the eternal *da capo al fine*, the victory of the species over the individual (or, if one prefers, the victory of the motherly instinct). The sacrifice are wings, the symbol of ideal flight into the sphere of beauty] (*Nowe sztuki polskie* 1934: 4).

Developing the presented allegory slightly, Monika Żółkoś draws a picture of an imprisoned and oppressed mother:

A jednak macierzyństwo, początkowo zapewniające królowym wyjątkowe miejsce we wspólnocie, staje się przyczyną uwięzienia i degradacji. Sprowadzone do funkcji rozplodowej ciała okazują się własnością społeczeństwa, któremu mają służyć, jak długo produkują jaja.

[Still, motherhood, initially granting queens an exceptional place in the colony, becomes the cause for imprisonment and degradation. Bodies reduced to the reproductive function are revealed to be the property of society, which they are to serve as long as they produce eggs] (Żółkoś 2018: 43).

However, Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska does not show the ant queen. Furthermore, the play contains no mention of her. After all, the presented events will not influence her fate. The author focuses her attention on Illi and Mirmi, the winged princesses, who dream of love, and who may start new nests after the nuptial flight. Fertilisation will change them into queens and make them the defenders of the colony (as Illi's last lines insist).

In the world of insects the maternal instinct, which involves concern for the future of the family or species, is somewhat different than in the world of humans. The role of the male is also different in the two societies. In a patriarchal system, he is the head of the family and takes responsibility for its wellbeing. In Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska's plays, fathers and husbands provide for the home, even if they seem absent, but as time passes they stop noticing the womanhood of their children's mothers. These are the behaviours of Adrian Rembert Sr (*Powrót mamy*), and Jan Miłobraccki (*Gąsiornica*), who is more likely to trade jokes with the maid Olesia than with his wife. It is difficult to conclude about the reason: routine, the passage of time, or maybe, as Monika Żółkoś suggests, a certain desexualisation of motherhood (Żółkoś 2018: 39), caused by its sanctification. It seems, however, that in the discussed plays the message transferred from feminist discourse is too strong. Only Róża Krzeptowska tries to pose Ruta with the child as Madonna by Bartolomé Esteban Murillo

(cf. Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska 1986, vol. 1: 532). The asexual perception of mothers at the turn of the 19th and 20th century was discussed by Katarzyna Sierakowska (2004: 378) and Natali Stegmann (2000: 34). According to Sierakowska, even in the supplement "Życie Świadome" a mother was portrayed as an entirely asexual individual (Sierakowska 2004: 379).

In Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska's plays, motherhood is usually mentioned in the context of the protagonists' marriage (*Szofer Archibald*), in the situation of a prolonged lack of offspring (*Egipska pszenica*), in the face of an unexpected pregnancy (*Mrówki*), or when infidelity is suspected (*Dowód osobisty*; here, the family court considers the reasons for the lack of interdigital webbing in young Zebrzydowiecki, and the bold pronouncements of Malwa are shaped by the eugenic thought of the era (Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska 1986, vol. 2: 188, 222–223)). The appearance of a child (*Egipska pszenica*, *Dowód osobisty*), or even the news of pregnancy (*Mrówki*) are often a moment of truth in these plays. Difficulties may be compounded by a fear of misalliance (young master Podkowicki does not want to have a child with the servant Karolina Koralik), of scandal (Ruta in *Egipska pszenica* decides to bear the child of her stepson Horacy, who is presumed to be her husband's son), or simply by the wish to pursue one's own plans (Kajetan and Gina's trip abroad in *Mrówki*).

In the case of motherhood, no longer theoretical, but one which becomes a fact, Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska represents the interests of the child which, although unborn, already exists. She remembers that it represents the future of the family, of the species, and in consequence also of the nation or state, and that completely freeing individuals from universal obligations, even if it can grant them personal happiness, can ultimately mean the destruction of the world. In that regard, the author remains faithful to her position from the poem *Prawo nieurodzonych* [*Right of the Unborn*], published in "Wiadomości Literackie" (1932): children deserve happiness, since they are born out of love (Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska 1932: 2)³. At first glance, such a statement from an advocate of planned motherhood seems somewhat inane but may reveal a deeper true meaning. Love creating a new life precludes oppression. It abolishes rape and violence, overrules fear. The pronouncement "children are born out of love" turns out to be a demand to modernise social relations.

³ Drama which toys with incest was one in a long line of plays which describe the love of a stepson for his stepmother. To point a few: *Phaedra* by Jean Baptiste Racine, *Kochankowie* [*Lovers*] by Waclaw Grubiński, or an idea for a parody of such dramas proposed by Brunon Winawer. That plot was described as follows by Jan Lechoń: "The son is in love with his mother. He finds out that she is not his mother, and kills himself out of despair" (Lechoń 1992: 397: 24 March 1952).

Learning about a pregnancy incites characters to think about the possible solutions. Abortion is one of them, even if it is not available in entirely official ways (*Egipska pszenica* and *Mrówki*). In the depicted world, the procedure can be performed by gynaecologists, who also treat infertility (*Egipska pszenica*). The issue of abortion divides Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska's characters – the matrons are its firm opponents, as they treat children almost like a public resource. For the young generation, the procedure is primarily a solution to a problem. Terminating a pregnancy may also be indicated in the case of an incestuous relationship (Wiktor Krzeptowski in *Egipska pszenica* is surprised that his wife wishes to bear her stepson's child; he is convinced Horacy is his son). In that situation, it is not only a means to avoid scandal, but also a genetic disease of the foetus.

In the context of abortion, it is worth considering one variant of *Mrówki*, specifically Act II scene 16. In the final draft of the typed play submitted to Juliusz Słowacki Theatre in Kraków, the fragment directly mentioning an unborn child, the remark by Kajetan about his wife's cruelty, and mentions of womanly nature have been crossed out. This smoothed over the conflict between the young and allowed older women to be presented as their antagonists. The play's ideological thrust became unambiguous. It seems like advocates of social reform feared that their opponents may find in the text some arguments against change. Meanwhile, the described first version of the dialogue reveals controversy between the couple on the subject of abortion. It turns out that the cause of Gina's decision was complete devotion to a man, which prompted her to act as if saying: I know what you want, so I will fulfil your every wish, even if unspoken. Such a course of action, however, is not approved of by Kajetan, since, for him, abortion is a horrifying act:

GINA

No tak... więc ja ratuję nasze małżeństwo... bo ja bym tu zmarniała, ty byś mnie tam zapomniał – nie, nie! Teraz, ktokolwiek by mi stanął na drodze, byłabym bez litości... no, co tak patrzysz...

KAJETAN

Bo mnie zastanawia, jak ci jednak łatwo przyszła ta myśl...

GINA

Widzę, że i ty jesteś mną przerażony, Kajetanie!

KAJETAN

Nie, tylko mi przykro trochę... Wczoraj rozczulałaś się nad pisklęciem czyżyka, które wypadło z gniazdka – oj, Boziu, Boziu, co za nieszczęście! A to do waty wsadzić, a to bułki z mlekiem, byle o sekundę to życie przedłużyć. Nie mówiłem nic, ale mam wstręt do przesady... teraz widzę przesadę w przeciwnym kierunku...

GINA

Więc jesteś za tym, żeby działa się ze mną, co chce?

KAJETAN

(*chmurnie*) Nie jestem za tym, bo to fizyczna niemożliwość! Ale razi mnie ta obojętność... Moje dziecko to przecież też ostatecznie nie jest byle co!... Ale dla ciebie głupi pisklak więcej znaczy!

GINA

Toś ty taki dziecinny? To ty mówisz? Jak to, nie rozumiesz, że ja dla ciebie, tylko dla ciebie nie dopuszczam do głosu mojej kobiecej natury? Powinien byś to uważać za swój triumf, za moją wobec ciebie lojalność! Co za głupstwa mówisz o tym pisklęciu! Widzę, że twoja ambicja została urażona w sposób dla mnie całkowicie niezrozumiały!

KAJETAN

O, bo to można głowę stracić!

GINA

Więc mam iść do lekarza, ale z żałobą, z płaczem, czy tak?

KAJETAN

No... powiedzmy, że tak! To byłoby w każdym razie przyzwoiciej – bardziej kobieco.

[GINA

Yes, so... I am saving our marriage... because I would waste away here, you would forget me out there – no, no! Now, whoever should stand in my way, I would have no mercy... why are you looking like that...

KAJETAN

Because I'm wondering how easily this thought came to you...

GINA

I see you are appalled by me too, Kajetan!

KAJETAN

No, I'm just a little sad... Yesterday, you felt sorry for a siskin chick which fell out of the nest – oh, Golly, Golly, what a terrible thing! Put it in cotton, give it bread with milk, if only to prolong this life by a second. I said nothing, but I detest excess... now I see excess in the other direction...

GINA

So you would prefer that things happen to me as they will?

KAJETAN

(*broodingly*) I would not, because that is physically impossible! But I am put off by this callousness... My child, after all, is not just anything!... But to you a stupid chick means more!

GINA

Are you this childish? Is that you talking? What, you don't understand it's for you, only for you, that I don't let my womanly nature take control? You should consider this your triumph, my loyalty towards you! What nonsense are you saying about that chick! I see your ambition's been hurt in a way that's completely incomprehensible to me!

KAJETAN

Oh, this is maddening!

GINA

So I should go to the doctor, but weeping and in mourning, is that it?

KAJETAN

Well... let's say it is! That would be more decent in any case – more womanly] (Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska 1986: 733).

In Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska's plays, the decision about the course of the pregnancy is made by women. Fathers either do not feel responsible or are brushed aside by mothers, mothers-in-law and aunts. We get the impression that these matters are outside of men's concern. Ultimately, no heroine decides on abortion, and only the servant Karolina Koralik (*Egipska pszenica*) offers her baby for adoption.

During pregnancy, the heroines of these plays disappear from the stage to return as happy mothers. In Act III of *Egipska pszenica*, Ruta Krzeptowska receives guests soon after childbirth, which, due to the character's age and possible complications, was probably performed under anaesthesia and through caesarean delivery. She dazzles with beauty. Similar looks are enjoyed by Malwa and Alda (*Dowód osobisty*), although in their case more time has passed since birth. The plays do not show women gaining weight or going through mood swings due to hormones. Heroines experience no pregnancy risks, nor deliver a disabled baby (the only deformation, considered a mark of aristocratic heritage, is Alda's son's interdigital webbing from *Dowód osobisty*, although the comedy mentions much more dangerous proofs of racial purity). For this reason, motherhood, and especially preparations for it, remain a beautiful story, and the discomfort of young married women is only the result of pressures from their surroundings, hastening them to become mothers.

The heroines' fear of motherhood, or even a kind of disinclination, must be considered individually in each case. Malwa (*Dowód osobisty*) is driven by concern for the good of the unborn baby, specifically the desire to protect him from a genetic defect. To achieve this, the woman is prepared even to betray her husband. The behaviour of Gina (*Mrówki*) is dictated by fear of separation from Kajetan, and most of all by lack of confidence in his fidelity. Whether the women are afraid of a certain exclusion from life due to overprotectiveness from the rest of the family, as proposed by Monika Żółkoś, is hard to determine. Perhaps they are slightly irritated or perceive it as an injustice that future fathers may still realise their ambitions. But does consent to motherhood mean capitulation before traditionalist ways of thinking? This question, like some others about the

plays of Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska, seems also to be unsolvable due to lack of material.

The most dramatic reaction to motherhood is that of Gina (*Mrówki*). Her emotional words spoken in the finale of Act II are caused by the family court, but also perhaps by disappointment in her husband:

GINA

(z wielkim patosem, występując naprzód, podczas gdy oni się cofają) Nie! Nie! Już nie chcę! Odjeżdżaj! Nie chcę twojego poświęcenia! Dziecko, dziecko, więc tyś mi jedno zostało na świecie? Może ty jedno właśnie kochać mnie będziesz? Już my swoi na zawsze!... Nie zawieziemy się na sobie! Teraz cię rozumiem, dziecko! *(twardo, wyniośle)* Zostawcie nas samych! *(do pań, które chcą ich zostawić oboje z Kajetanem)* Nie, nie nas. *(wskazuje na serce swoje i niżej)* Nas!

Kajetan i panie cofają się.

[(with great pathos, stepping forward as they retreat) No! No! I don't want this anymore! Go! I don't want your sacrifice! Child, child, do I have only you in this world? Maybe only you will love me? We belong to each other, forever!... We will not fail each other! Now I understand you, child! *(firmly, proudly)* Leave us alone! *(to the ladies who move to leave them together with Kajetan)* No, not us. *(gestures to her heart and lower)* Us!

Kajetan and the ladies retreat] (Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska 1986, vol. 2: 407).

The significance of this fragment, and the difficulties with finding the right tone for it, are shown by the changes made by the author (cf. *ibid.*: 711–716). The words of the disappointed wife spoken against her husband, against the world, and maybe in a way against the unborn child sound a little theatrical. They are full of exaggeration and pathos. The earlier ending seemed a little more natural, although it was only directed against the older generation of women:

Zawiodłam się na tobie *(wskazuje matkę)* i na tobie. *(wskazuje Mirę)* Dziecko moje więcej warte od was. Już go nie oddam, zostawcie mnie samą, z tą moją gorzką, ale jedyną, jedyną nadzieją! Idźcie! Nienawidzę was!

[You failed me (points to mother), and so did you. (points to Mira) My child is worth more than you. I will not give it away, leave me alone, with this bitter, but only, only hope! Go! I hate you!] *(ibid.: 716).*

The behaviour of Gina, juxtaposed with the monologue of Illi, the defender of the ant colony, points to yet another aspect of motherhood. This situation is interpreted as an ironic joke by Rawiński, which he describes as follows: "We see the pregnant and wingless lover, the 'victim of the system', undergo a sudden transformation in the face of a threat to the colony: she finds in herself

the calling and identity of a mother and new ruler, who personifies the genius of the species” (Rawiński 1999: 212). It seems this is the induction into the next level of womanhood, which is not compulsory, but slightly alters the social role (Campbell 1994: 199).

The birth of a child gives Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska an opportunity to show two kinds of parents: wise and foolish, responsible and egotistical (Witold Krzeptowski). In bourgeois or aristocratic families, offspring enjoy decent conditions under the care of mothers, grandmothers and nurses. The child focuses the attention of the entire family, although it can be a doll on stage (cf. Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska 1986, vol. 1: 526; vol. 2: 134).

Older children play important parts in the development of events, working to prevent the disintegration of the family. Adrian Rembert Jr from *Powrót mamy* or Lech Miłobracki from *Gąsiornica* present a certain oppressiveness, but it must be said that these actions are directed both towards the father (*Powrót mamy*) and the mother (*Gąsiornica*). The sons seem to defend the arrangement which benefits them.

Premieres of Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska’s plays generated avid discussions. In *Powrót mamy* (1935), Stanisław Piasecki was surprised to notice a defence of family in a play written by an author who advocated social reform (Piasecki 1935: 7), an opinion which Wacław Syruczek attempted to dispel in “Tygodnik Ilustrowany”:

Socjologicznie można by ująć tę sztukę jako obronę instytucji rodziny. Świadczyłaby o tym anegdota, owo sprowadzenie starszego pana na drogę cnoty małżeńskiej. Ale to tylko pozór. Gdyby to właśnie miało być wydzwiękiem ideowym sztuki, nawrócenie musiałyby się odbyć pod hasłem integralności rodziny jak o takiej, jako komórki społecznej. Lecz o tym ani słowa, argumenty społecznego czy religijnego “noli me tangere” [“nie dotykaj mnie”]; słowa te wypowiedział Jezus do Marii Magdaleny po zmartwychwstaniu – J. W.] rodziny nie dochodzą wcale do głosu. Można więc wnioskować *à rebours*, że skoro pominięte zostały motywy norm społecznych, widocznie są autorce obce. Przemawia za tym także to, że rzekoma “obrona rodziny” powierzona jest młodzieńcowi, [którego] tryb życia jak najbardziej odbiega od tradycyjnego ideału moralnego. W wyborze adwokata widać raczej ironię niż aprobatę do tradycyjnych podstaw rodziny.

[Sociologically, the play may be described as a defence of the institution of the family. This could be confirmed by the anecdote in which an elderly gentleman is led back to the path of marital fidelity. But this is only a pretence. If this was indeed the ideological timbre of the play, the conversion would have to happen under the slogan of the integrity of family *as such*, as a social unit. But there is no mention of that, the arguments of social or religious *noli me tangere* [“do not touch me”; words spoken by Jesus to Mary Magdalen after the resurrection – J. W.] of the

family are not given a voice at all. It can therefore be concluded *à rebours*, that if the motives of social norms have been ignored, they must be foreign to the author. This is also borne out by the fact that the seeming "defence of the family" is entrusted to a young man, [whose] way of life is most distant from a traditional moral ideal. This choice of advocate reveals rather irony than the approval of traditional family values] (Syruczek 1935: 778).

This lengthy quote should serve as a warning against forming too hasty or superficial opinions. One reason for this may be a lack of definiteness in the author's worldview, and sometimes also a lack of unequivocal character creation, which leaves room for interpretations stemming from the audience's own convictions. It seems the role of the plays was not to promote a specific ideology, but rather to discuss a specific problem. The apparent ideological (but also structural) inconsistency of the playwright was observed by Maciej Freudman, a student belonging to the "rybałci" literary society, and to the Polish Language Circle at the Jan Kazimierz University in Lwów [Lviv], when discussing *Egipska pszenica*. A few months after the world premiere of the play in Kraków, after the emotions roused by it had somewhat subsided, the young critic proclaimed the author's message as too unclear to be a rallying cry for social revolution:

Przez trzy akty *Pszenicy* (*Egipska pszenica* – J. W.] myśli się naprzód: czy kobieta jest rzeczywiście tylko do rodzenia dzieci – i w konsekwencji dochodzi się do przekonania, pod wpływem p. Jasnorzewskiej, że niekoniecznie, to znaczy nie przymusowo.

Na samym końcu jednak, z wyznania Ruty, że o dziecku zawsze marzyła i że swej bezdzietności wstydziła się, dorozumiewamy się, że przecież jest inaczej z macierzyństwem i że posłannictwo kobiety jest naprawdę zbliżone do tego wymarzonego przez Krzeptowskiego, widzącego jedynie matkę...

[During the three acts of *Pszenica* [*Egipska pszenica* – J. W.], one thinks, first: is a woman truly only fit for bearing children? – and, in consequence, one reaches the conviction, under the influence of Mrs. Jasnorzewska, that she is not, that is, not compulsorily.

At the very end, though, from the confession of Ruta that she had always dreamed of a child and was ashamed of her childlessness, we gather that the truth about motherhood is quite different and that the mission of a woman is indeed close to that imagined by Krzeptowski, who only sees a mother...] (Freudman 1933: 4).

The heroines of Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska rebel against compulsory motherhood, they do not want the role of a woman to be reduced to the duties of a wife, mother, and lady of the house. However, once they feel a new life inside them, they accept it as a consequence of love. The only heartless exception

seems to be Karolina Koralik, although a servant is hard to condemn. She could be blamed for loose morals, since she had to have relations with at least two men, but the child's father behaves no better than her.

The descriptions: woman and mother belong to slightly different orders, to the discourse of love and to the discourse of the family. These two areas may intersect, although as we see in the discussed plays, it is not common. Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska's heroines fight for their happiness and want to free themselves from societal preconceptions, but when they learn of the child, they behave quite traditionally. Only Alda (*Dowód osobisty*) tries to cynically take advantage of the pregnancy to keep the status of wife to doctor Goryczko and to stop her husband from leaving her for his beloved Malwa. This is the only play in which a family with children is about to divorce, since it is the only way the biological parents of the babies can be together (eventually, Jan Błażej Zebrzydowiecki does not marry Alda, which the author reveals in *Popielaty welon* [*The Ashen Veil*]).

In tackling the issue of motherhood, Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska accentuates different aspects than feminists do today. They, reading plays from the interwar period, find examples of objectification of female characters and oppressive behaviours. For this reason, they separate "womanhood" from "motherhood", even if the connection between these concepts is obvious on the grounds of biological sex: one can be a mother, being a woman, but one cannot be a mother, not being a woman.

But, interestingly, Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska's heroines face dilemmas as if taken straight from today's feminist discourse: is it possible to be a woman, not being a mother (the case of Ruta Krzeptowska, who undergoes various procedures to fulfil her husband's dream of fatherhood), and whether, being a mother, it is possible to be a woman who is attractive to her husband or to men in general. But the plays pose yet another question: where lies the line between the happiness of the woman and the harm of the child? It seems *Gąsiornica* tries to reverse it: should a mother sacrifice her love, or even forget her womanhood, for the good of the children? This play, however, was never finished, so it is difficult to solve the dilemma on its basis.

Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska, who had the opinion of a moderate feminist in the interwar period, knew that having children had become a public matter. It impacts the interests of the family, the species and the society. For this reason, legal regulations may easily result in oppressive situations in which the good of women is overlooked. It is difficult, however, to see her plays as an illustration of "mothers' hell".

The plays involve motherhood in various circumstances and the news of pregnancy often creates a moment of truth, leading to a discussion of the rights and obligations of the individual towards the species and the family. Abortion is one of the possible solutions. Still, as the playwright attacks the system of norms and commandments grown around the reproductive instinct, she focuses on positive depictions of motherhood. Good mothers are happy, while bad ones are condemned. In doing this, Pawlikowska-Jasnorzewska grants her heroines the right to love and fulfilment, while remaining a traditionalist about the obligations towards the conceived child.

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