

Elżbieta Koziółkiewicz

Alliances and declarations. The Marriage Plot and Politics in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Polish and British Literature

Supervisor: prof. dr hab. Olga Płaszczewska

## **Summary**

The thesis aims at comparing the uses of the marriage plot in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Polish and British committed literature. The comedies and novels discussed here tackle social and political issues, but they explore them through the private experiences of the characters. This device fostered a deeper reflection on the relations between the public and the domestic and the introduction of political themes into genres that were accessible to a wide audience. Due to the ubiquity of the romance plot in the fiction of the era, the scope of the project was narrowed down to two story patterns: the double-suitor plot and the unequal (cross-class) marriage plot. The periods of their popularity, combined with the times of major importance in the history of both nations (the Stanisławian Age and the January Uprising as well as its aftermath in partitioned Poland; the 1790s and the turmoil of the Industrial Revolution in Great Britain) mark the chronological axes of the project. In British culture, the novel had become the dominant political genre by the end of the 18th century. In Poland, this function belonged then to comedy, and the shift to prose did not occur until the 19th century.

The interpretative methods used here were inspired by cultural comparative studies and contextualist narratology as well as the findings of the scholars working on the marriage plot and its cultural history. In order to establish whether the images and ideas presented in fiction are realistic, I compare them with the concepts and models promoted in non-fictional texts such as treatises, conduct manuals, journalism, and legal documents. These sources not only contain information about the marital practices of the past but also indicate what beliefs on the propriety and dynamics of relationships impacted the mindset of readers at the time. One of the tenets of this thesis is that the authors employing the marriage plot reacted to the dominant patterns of match-making and socio-domestic life. The concept of social imaginary, created by Charles Taylor, is used to better describe the influence of widely-held views.

Chapter 1 defines the marriage plot in comparison with the broader term of romance plot and the structural functions of a wedding employed in the narrative closure. Then the long history of the convention in question is presented with special regard to its relations with social and political themes as well as some attempts to undermine the totality of the plot and the models of private life that it embraced. The last section discusses the state of arts, specifically taking into account the evolving approach to the marriage plot and the studies devoted to literary works linking it to public affairs.

Due to the major differences in the chronology and uses of the double-suitor plot in Polish and British literature, these problems are explored separately in chapters 2 and 3, and the results of the analyses are presented in the Conclusion. The similarities concerning the ways in which the unequal marriage plot was employed made it possible to discuss Polish and British examples simultaneously in chapter 4. Chapter 2 is devoted to the figure of the reasonable unmarried woman in Polish Enlightenment literature. This model emerged in the comedies by Franciszek Bohomolec (such as *Małżeństwo z kalendarza*, discussed here) and continued to be used in subsequent plays based on the double-suitor plot: *Pieniacz* and *Polak cudzoziemiec w Warszawie* by Feliks Oraczewski, *The Return of the Deputy* by Julian Ursyn Niemcewicz and *Polusia* by Wincenty Ignacy Marewicz. However, as the initial optimism about the future of the Polish state was fading, writers started to depict the choice of a suitable husband as increasingly more difficult – examples of this tendency may be found in *Czynsz* by Franciszek Karpiński and in the novel published in the days of the November Uprising by Anna Nakwaska – *Aniela, czyli ślubna obrączka*.

Chapter 3 is an attempt to explain why in the revolutionary decade of the 1790s only a few politically committed British authors (such as Thomas Holcroft and Charlotte Turner Smith) employed the double-suitor plot. The investigation into the very limited popularity of the pattern and the identification of some alternative storylines presenting private life in the context of the changes in the public sphere requires referring to multiple phenomena. The major ones include the early development of the double-suitor plot in English drama, the family-state analogy, the changes in marital practices and the law regulating them, and influential publications by Edmund Burke (*Reflections on the French Revolution*) and Mary Wollstonecraft (*A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*). The final section proposes a hypothesis explaining the reasons behind the return to the double-suitor plot in nineteenth-century literature.

Chapter 4 introduces the difference between hyper- and hypogamous marriages, which is useful in exploring the symbolic meanings and dynamics of the unequal marriage plot between the 18th and 19th centuries. A description of the historical background is followed by a presentation of some stereotypical beliefs concerning the bad consequences of forming a cross-class union. The analyses in this chapter deal mostly with works depicting hypogamous relationships. British texts discussed involve novels commenting on the social effects of the Industrial Revolution: *Michael Armstrong* by Frances Trollope, *Shirley* by Charlotte Brontë and *Sybil; or the Two Nations* by Benjamin Disraeli. Polish literature is represented by a comedy *Szlachectwo duszy* by Jan Chęciński and some little-known prose fiction published in the progressive journal “Dziennik Literacki” in the late 1850s and early 1860s. Some of their themes announce the ideas that later emerged in the texts of the positivist authors, especially Eliza Orzeszkowa. The final section comments on the figure of a lonely elderly woman, whose experiences prove that ending an unequal relationship because of social pressure may lead to suffering.

This circle – from a maid to a spinster or widow – indicates that one of the interests of the thesis is the development of the characters typical for the marriage plot. The main focus is on female protagonists, but male characters – suitors, and fathers – are analyzed as well. Another objective is to determine how the plot evolved, along with the symbolic and realistic senses of relationships and their impact on the public sphere. The marriages depicted in literature may be ideological declarations and fantasies about beneficial alliances, which is why it is important to juxtapose them with the historical background. This practice allows ascertaining whether the author aimed at portraying reality or rather at promoting a set of socio-political ideas or suitable behavior in the private sphere.