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**Eliza Orzeszkowa: Polish patriot, positivist writer, social critic and feminist.**

Aneta Maria Czarnik

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ELIZA ORZESZKOWA: POLISH PATRIOT, POSITIVIST WRITER, SOCIAL  
CRITIC AND FEMINIST.

A Thesis

Presented to the  
Department of History  
and the Faculty of the Graduate College  
University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Masters of Arts  
University of Nebraska at Omaha

by

Aneta Maria Czarnik

August 2005

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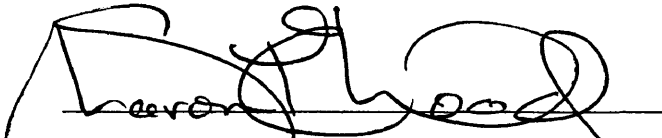


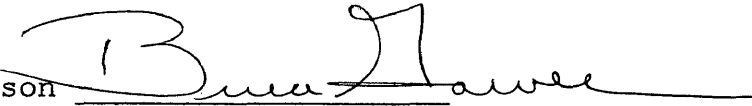
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THESIS ACCEPTANCE

Acceptance for the faculty of the Graduate College,  
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ELIZA ORZESZKOWA: POLISH PATRIOT, POSITIVIST WRITER, SOCIAL  
CRITIC AND FEMINIST.

ANETA M. CZARNIK, M.A.

UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA, 2005

ADVISOR: Dr. BRUCE GARVER

Eliza Orzeszkowa (1841-1910) became one of most popular and influential authors of the Positivist movement in Polish arts, letters, and politics during the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when Poles experienced economic and social instability and foreign political repression. Orzeszkowa achieved renown as a writer of realistic fiction, as a pioneering Polish feminist, and as a vigorous advocate of political and social reform who sought to challenge all discrimination based on gender, ethnicity, and religious affiliation. Many of her publications dealt with the emancipation of women, the assimilation of Jews, and the integration of the Polish peasantry into the Polish nation. Through her writings, Eliza Orzeszkowa exposed and critically examined contemporary problems in Polish society, often by creating memorable fictional characters based upon people whom she came to know well through her association with all social classes and ethnic and religious groups in Russian-ruled Poland and Lithuania. Eliza Orzeszkowa's exemplary

professional life and her manifold contributions to late nineteenth century Polish literature embodied her patriotic and reform-minded spirit and earned her the everlasting gratitude of all future generations of Poles. Given the fact that few of Orzeszkowa's novels as well as few publications about her have been translated into English, this thesis seeks to introduce her to an English-speaking audience.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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" I was taught that the way of progress is neither swift nor  
easy"

Marie Skłodowska-Curie (1867-1934)

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## Introduction

During the past millennium, Poles have often experienced foreign invasion, political oppression and military defeat. Nonetheless, despite such setbacks, the Polish people have established and maintained their national identity and have made positive contributions to European cultural life, particularly in strengthening the Roman Catholic Church. Since 1776, Americans as well as Europeans have generally considered the Poles to be a patriotic, honorable and religious people. Throughout those years, strong-willed and talented Polish intellectuals, revolutionaries, army officers, scientists, and historians have worked to resurrect a Polish state whenever the Polish people have experienced foreign occupation and oppression. These individuals' passion for achieving "Polish greatness" has been reflected in their aspirations for the future and in their political ideologies based upon an informed understanding of the past and present. Moreover, these leaders in every generation have appreciated the extent to which their success in accomplishing any objective requires that such a goal both reflect the interests and enjoy the support of a majority of the Polish people.

Eliza Orzeszkowa (1841-1910), one of the most popular and politically influential authors of modern Polish literature, helped improve the quality of Polish cultural and intellectual life and promoted social and economic reforms during the later

nineteenth century, when the Polish people endured oppression by the Russian Empire, the German Empire and the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. Orzeszkowa was a writer, a feminist, and a political and social activist at a time during which all Poles experienced ethnic and religious discrimination and during which Polish women, like women elsewhere, also experienced discrimination based on gender. Throughout her literary career, Orzeszkowa personally and professionally promoted the emancipation of women, the integration of Polish peasants into the Polish nation, and the assimilation of the Jews of Poland into Polish culture and society. Her critical evaluation of the shortcomings of Polish society and politics and her advocacy of "organic work" always identified her as one of the principal proponents of the Polish Positivist movement during the 1870s and 1880s. Moreover, her novels, short stories, and political and social pamphlets remained popular not only because they evoked the aspirations and tribulations of the Poles and neighboring peoples during the late nineteenth century but also because these literary works addressed timeless universal themes such as love, loyalty, and courage in adversity.

Eliza Orzeszkowa's life and works are discussed by many publications in Polish and by a much smaller number in Russian. Yet, little has been written in English about Orzeszkowa's life; and none of her biographies have been translated into English. The only English language analysis of Eliza Orzeszkowa's literary career is Joyce Kolodziej's 1975 doctoral dissertation entitled

*Eliza Orzeszkowa's Feminist and Jewish Works in Polish and Russian Criticism.* Furthermore, among Orzeszkowa's voluminous works, only six have been published in English translations. *Daj Kwiatek!* (*Give me a Flower!*) was published in 1944; *Meir Ezofowicz* (*Meir Ezofowitch*) was published in 1898 and in another edition of 1980 entitled *The Forsaken*. *Panna Antonina* (*Miss Antonina*) was published in 1960; *A..B..C..(A..B..C..)* in 1947; *Pieśń Przerwana* (*The Interrupted Melody*) in 1912; and *Argonauci* (*The Argonauts*) in 1901. *Moment* (*A Moment*) whose translation appeared in English was without any date of publication. In addition, several of Orzeszkowa's books, novels, and short stories have been translated into Russian, German, Czech and French, as indicated in the bibliography of this thesis.

In writing this thesis, I have used all available primary sources by and about Orzeszkowa. These consist principally of her personal correspondence and literary publications. This personal correspondence provided me with some information that, to the best of my knowledge, has not appeared in any other publications. Secondary sources have also facilitated and informed my research by helping me to understand the broader political and cultural context in which Orzeszkowa lived and wrote. Useful secondary sources include Polish-language biographies of Eliza Orzeszkowa by Jan Detko, Aurelii Drogoszewski, Franciszek Godelewski, Edmund Jankowski and Gabriela Pauszer-Klonowska. Excellent surveys of the broader political and cultural context include Norman Davies, *God's Playground: A History of Poland*; and Czesław Miłosz, *The*

*History of Polish Literature*. In addition, scholarly monographs that address nineteenth century Polish history include R.F. Leslie, *Polish politics and the Revolution of November 1830*, and *Reform and Insurrection in Russian Poland, 1856-1865*; and finally Piotr Wandycz, *The Lands of Partitioned Poland, 1795-1918*.<sup>1</sup>

This thesis is organized topically beginning with a survey of Eliza's childhood and personal life. Successive chapters address issues such as Eliza's involvement with Russians, Polish peasants, Jews, women, and finally with her own Polish intellectual contemporaries. This thesis aims to introduce Eliza Orzeszkowa's life and accomplishments to an English-speaking audience and also to examine critically Eliza's professional life and her contributions to late nineteenth and early twentieth century Polish politics and culture.

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<sup>1</sup> Full bibliographical citations for these works may be found in the bibliography of this thesis.

## Chapter I

**Eliza Orzeszkowa's Childhood and Domestic Life**

"This moment affected my whole future. Moreover, this same moment ignited my desire to dedicate my strength and the full extent of my ability to serving my country. I wanted to become part of the process [of national regeneration] by contributing a small 'brick' to the erecting of a lifesaving bridge over which our entire nation could travel despite the wide-open chasm beneath it. The year 1863 transformed everything around me. Had it not been for that year's hammer and chisel, my fate would have been different; and I probably would not have become a writer."<sup>2</sup>

Eliza Orzeszkowa was born on June 6, 1841, to Polish parents Benedykt and Franciszka Pawłowski on the Milkowszczyzna estate near Grodno.<sup>3</sup> At the time of her birth, the city of Grodno and the surrounding Polish, Lithuanian and White Russian speaking areas had been under Russian rule since 1813. Eliza's parents had one other child, a daughter, Klementyna (1838- 1851), who was three years older than Eliza. Eliza's father, Benedykt Pawłowski (1788- 1843) came from a noble family of gentry (*szlachta*), originally from the Ukraine, who was entitled to use the Korwin

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<sup>2</sup> Orzeszkowa, Eliza. *Listy Zebrane*. Volume VIII. Edited by Edmund Jankowski. Wrocław, Warszawa i Kraków: Zakład Imienia Ossolińskich (Wydawnictwo Polskiej Akademii Nauk), 1971. pp. 246-247.

\*Translation\*- "Moment ten wywarł na całą przyszłość moją wpływ decydujący. Ten moment wzniecił we mnie pragnienie służenia Ojczyźnie według miary sił i natury moich zdolności; od jego ognia i od jego łez powstała we mnie ambicja przniesienia choćby małej cegiełki do tego ratunkowego mostu, po którym naród przejść miał nad szeroko rozwartą pod nim otchłanią. To wszystko ucznił ze mną i we mnie rok 1863-ci. Gdyby nie jego młot i dłuto, losy moje byłyby najpewniej inne i prawdopodobnie nie byłabym autorką."

<sup>3</sup> June 6, 1841, is the correct date of birth according to her birth certificate and the Gregorian calendar. Eliza's having often reported May 1842 as the month of her birth cannot be accurate.

coats of arms.<sup>4</sup> Benedykt moved to Lithuania around 1815 and purchased the Milkowszczyzna estate before marrying his first wife, Teofilia Borzęcka.<sup>5</sup> After few years, this first marriage ended with her death. In 1837, Benedykt married Franciszka Kamińska (1814-1878), Eliza's future mother, who was the daughter of a Polish officer in the Napoleonic Armies and the owner of the Michałówka estate.<sup>6</sup> Like most Poles who had served under Napoleon, Wincenty Kamiński had hoped that French victories would lead to the restoration of Polish independence and had been disappointed when French defeat led to the repartitioning of Poland by Russia, Austria and Prussia at the Congress of Vienna in 1814 and the creation of a small "Congress" Kingdom of Poland under Russian domination.<sup>7</sup>

Eliza's father, Benedykt Pawłowski, was an intellectual who admired the French *philosophe* Voltaire (François-Marie Arouët, 1694-1778). Moreover, Benedykt belonged to one of the Masonic Lounges in Lithuania in the years between 1825 and 1840.<sup>8</sup> His personal library included the complete works of many outstanding eighteenth century French authors among whom Jean-Jacques

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<sup>4</sup> Orzeszkowa, Eliza. *O sobie*. Edited by Julian Krzyżanowski. Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1974. p.20. The Social division with the Polish gentry (szlachta) will be discussed in detail in Chapter III.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p.20.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p.20.

<sup>7</sup> The "Congress" Kingdom of Poland included what was left of the Napoleonic "Duchy of Warsaw" after Poznań was taken over by Prussia and Galicia was returned to the Austrian Empire. Congress Poland had its own administration, parliament, and army, but Czar Alexander I of Russia, who also ruled as the King of Poland, appointed its higher officials. After Russian troops suppressed the Polish Revolution of 1830-31, Czar Nicholas I put an end to the autonomy of Congress Poland, disbanded its parliament and army, and chose not to be crowned as King of Poland. His officials then began a thorough Russification of schools and other institutions. For additional information, readers are referred to the monographs by R.F. Leslie: *Polish Politics and the Revolution of November 1830*. (London: University of London Press, 1956) and to Piotr Wandycz: *The Lands of Partitioned Poland, 1795-1918*. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1974).

<sup>8</sup> Orzeszkowa, Eliza. *O Sobie*. Edited by Julian Krzyżanowski. Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1974. p.22.

Rousseau (1712- 1778) and Denis Diderot (1713-1784) as well as Voltaire enhanced the keenness and breath of Benedykt's intellectual outlook and abilities.<sup>9</sup> Orzeszkowa never knew her father because he died suddenly on November 28, 184, shortly after her birth. As she grew up, she knew her father only from his portrait that hung in the main hallway and from the stories told to her by her mother and maternal grandmother. Eliza much admired her father notwithstanding his early death.

It soon became evident in the Pawłowski household that Benedykt's youngest daughter, Eliza had inherited his intellectual predilections. At the age of five, she could read, write, and speak in Polish and in French.<sup>10</sup> She and her older sister Klementyna were fortunate that from infancy onward their teacher, Michalina Kobylińska, taught them three languages (Polish, French, German) as well as arithmetic, geography, and Polish history.<sup>11</sup> At the early age of three, Eliza and her eight-year-old sister Klementyna also memorized Polish patriotic songs and poems by one of the famous Polish patriots, Stanisław Ursyn Niemcewicz (1757-1841).<sup>12</sup> Their mother, Franciszka Pawłowska, encouraged her daughters to increase their knowledge of Polish literature, history, and culture as much as they could.

Franciszka came from very patriotic family and was inspired by her father, Wincenty. In her memoirs, *O sobie (About myself)*, Eliza wrote about her mother's support for the 1848 revolutionary

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p.23.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p.23.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p.60.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p.24.

movements in Europe, including the Hungarian Revolution against the Austrian Empire.<sup>13</sup> In the Pawłowski household, Hungary was admired as much as Poland. Orzeszkowa's wrote in her memoirs about how she, her mother, and her sister had observed "the Russian army marching through Grodno to assist Austria. By then, all women began to wear dual-colored red and white bows on their dresses and little daggers behind their belts. Of course the colors of the bows were those of an independent Poland. I remember one time when my mother wore her bow and her dagger; she was approached by one of Russian officers who demanded that she take off her bow and a dagger. But she refused to do so, and the next day dressed us in Cracovian folk costumes and while wearing her bow and dagger walked with us directly to the public park where she hoped to encounter the same officer from the previous day. She saw him and gave him an evil eye, but he was pretending not to see us."<sup>14</sup>

In 1849, when Eliza Orzeszkowa was seven years old, her mother married Konstanty Widacki (1821-1875), the owner of the Janopol estate. Eliza and her sister Klementyna did not object to their mother's remarriage; in fact, both sisters liked and respected their stepfather. When they were growing up, Eliza and

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p.61.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p.63. \*Translation\* - "Przez Grodno przechodziły wojska rosyjskie, na pomoc Austrii wysyłane. Zapanowała moda noszenia przez kobiety kokard u sukien z trójkolorowych wstążek i sztyletów za paskiem; kolory wstążek były naturalnie polskie. Pamiętam doskonale taką kokardę u stanika mojej matki i tkwiący u niego sztylecik stalowy. Pułkownik żandarmski, zobaczywszy gdzieś mamę z tą kokardą i z tym sztyletem, wyrządził jej jakąś przykrość. Ale mama ani kokardy, ani sztyleta nie porzuciła i pamiętam dzień letni, z nami ubranymi w śliczne kostiumy krakowskie, pojechała do ogrodu publicznego. W kokardzie ze sztyletem i z dwiema małymi krakowiankami kilka razy rozminęła się z nim w alei ogrodowej, a on nic, jakby nie widział."



her sister Klementyna were extremely attached to one another. They enjoyed reading, acting, and singing together until the winter of 1850, when Klementyna became ill and her health deteriorated to the point where she had no hope of any recovery. In February 1851, she died, thus forever separating the two sisters and best friends. After the death of her sister, Eliza experienced a mental and physical breakdown and later recollected that "When all the mourners left the house and when I heard the funeral march, I collapsed on the floor and started screaming, crying, and pulling my hair. By the time my mother and my grandmother came back from the funeral, doctor Zabiełło had forced some medicine down my throat and put me to bed. It was my first childhood illness and the first time in my life when I experienced harsh and severe pain."<sup>15</sup>

Shortly after Klementyna's death, Eliza's mother and her stepfather decided to send Eliza to a boarding school in Warsaw run by nuns (*Sakramentki*). Upon arriving at this boarding school, Eliza began to miss her family, often cried, and felt intimidated by her new teachers and the nuns.<sup>16</sup> Eventually, Eliza found a new circle of friends, one of whom was Maria Wasiłkowska (1841-1910), who later achieved fame as a writer under the penname of Maria Konopnicka and who remained Eliza's devoted friend until Eliza's

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.,p. 29. \*Translation\* - "Gdy tylko mieszkanie opróżniło się i muzyka zagrała marsza żałobnego, upadłam na ziemię tak krzycząc, płacząc i włosy rwiąc z głowy. Nim matka i babka z pogrzebu wróciły, przyszedł dr. Zabiełło, wlał mi przemocą w usta jakieś krople i do łóżka położyć kazał, w którym też kilka dni przeleżałam. Była to pierwsza moja choroba i pierwszy w życiu ciężki, dotkliwy ból."

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p.30.

death in 1910.<sup>17</sup> Thanks to these new friendships, Eliza began to enjoy her classes and to become completely comfortable in her new home for next five years. Furthermore, during Eliza's stay in the *Sakramentki* boarding school, she became popular among all girls because she helped them write some of their literary essays, and they helped Eliza with her least favored assignments, such as arithmetic. Mr. Kowalewski, Eliza's teacher in Polish literature and language, eventually recognized Eliza's writing style in other students' papers and prohibited Eliza from providing this assistance.<sup>18</sup> Mr. Kowalewski introduced his students to Polish literature from the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries, especially the writings of such luminaries as Jan Kochanowski (1530-1584), Mikołaj Rej (1505-1569), Piotr Skarga (1536-1612), Ignacy Krasicki (1735-1801), Adam Mickiewicz (1798-1855), and Józef Ignacy Kraszewski (1812-1887).<sup>19</sup> The students were also assigned to read contemporary French writers such as Jean-François Marmontel (1723-1799), Alphonse Marie Louis Prat de Lamartine (1790-1869), Jules Sandeau (1811-1883), George Sand (1804-1876), and Alexandre Dumas (1802-1870).<sup>20</sup> The *Sakramentki* school curriculum included three foreign languages, general history, the history of Polish literature, geography, arithmetic, music, drawing, and dancing.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Maria Konopnicka- she was a poet, a novelist and a writer for children and youth. Her famous publications include: *Pan Balcer w Brazylji*, *Na Jagody* and *Ludzie i Rzeczy*.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p.35.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p.34.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p.34.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p.34.

Eliza Orzeszkowa enjoyed the simplicity and the purity of this boarding school. She later wrote: "We did not attend any social dances, we did not dress with impropriety, and we were taught to avoid idleness, exaggeration, arrogance, and flirtatiousness."<sup>22</sup> In 1857, Eliza left the boarding school in Warsaw and moved with her mother, her stepfather, and stepbrother, Jasio Widacki, to the Rumlówek estate near Grodno.<sup>23</sup> Unfortunately, Eliza's stepbrother died during the same year. After the funeral, Eliza, along with her mother and stepfather, moved back to Grodno for the winter. Because Eliza belonged to a wealthy family, it was now time for her to be formally introduced to gentry society and to begin looking for an appropriate husband.

Eliza was sixteen years old when she married Piotr Orzeszko (1825-1874) in 1857. She moved to Piotr's estate Ludwinów in 1858, and lived there until 1863. By 1860, Eliza began to experience a moral and intellectual metamorphosis, caused by the political and social developments in the Russian occupied lands of Poland. She began extensively to read such French writers as Voltaire, Rousseau, Jean Racine (1639-1699), Pierre Corneille (1609-1684), Adolphe Thiers (1797-1877), and Jules Michelet (1798-1874).<sup>24</sup> She began attending local political meetings before the January Uprising of 1863. "Love and Work" were Eliza's ideal goals for the progressive movement toward cooperation between two

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p.35. \*Translation \* - "Nie bywałyśmy na balach, nie stroiłyśmy się na żaden sposób i nic nie uczyło nas próżności, przesady, pychy i kokieterii."

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p.37.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p.47.

major Polish social groups (gentry and peasants) during the year of 1862.<sup>25</sup> According to Eliza, "I wanted to love- I was only twenty years old. I wanted to work- but I did not know on what yet. I wanted to leave my home and my husband. I was unhappy."<sup>26</sup> Eliza's marriage to Piotr Orzeszko will be discussed in greater detail in subsequent chapters.

Eliza's "work and love" ideology intensified following the January Uprising of 1863. This uprising spread to Lithuania in the month of May. Eliza lived in Ludwinów estate, which was situated not far away from the first battle between the Russian troops and the insurgents in Kobryński County. She did not witness the battle, but she heard its sounds and saw the aftermath of the Polish defeat.<sup>27</sup> In the letter to Marian Dubiecki (1838-1928) in 1907, she wrote: " I went to the battle scene, where I saw unburied skeletons of horses, military tents, and the burial mound in which were interred the bodies of fallen Polish insurgents."<sup>28</sup>

Piotr Orzeszko, Eliza's husband did not approve of her involvement in the uprising. At that stage in their marriage, Orzeszkowa often disobeyed her husband and, in fact, their marriage was approaching its end. Orzeszkowa and other female

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p.48.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p.48. \*Translation\* - " Pragnęłam kochać- miała lat osiemnaście-dwadzieścia, pragnęłam pracować- nie wiedząc jeszcze nad czym. Zamiar wyjechania z domu i nawet wzięcia rozwodu uwyraźnił się i sformułował. Potem jasno i śmiało powiedziałam sobie , że jestem nieszczęśliwą."

<sup>27</sup> Jankowski, Edmund. *Eliza Orzeszkowa*. Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1964. p.65.

<sup>28</sup> Orzeszkowa, Eliza. *Listy Zebrane*. Volume VII. Edited by Edmund Jankowski. Wrocław, Warszawa i Kraków: Zakład Imienia Ossolińskich (Wydawnictwo Polskiej Akademii Nauk), 1971. p.245. \*Translation\*- " Zwiedzałam potem to miejsce , na którym się stoczyła bitwa. Jeszcze leżały tam nie pogrzebane trupy końskie, stały namioty i już wznosił się kopiec mogilny nad zwłokami poległych powstańców."

participants in the insurrection sewed confederate caps (square-topped caps) and silk shirts for the insurgents.<sup>29</sup> Orzeszkowa also helped to take care of wounded Polish soldiers. Furthermore, she helped to deliver the insurgents' mail. At one point during such deliveries, she was forced to swallow some important letters from fear of revealing important military information.<sup>30</sup>

The most memorable moment of Eliza's participation in the January Uprising occurred when she assisted Romuald Traugutt, the Commander of the Polish insurgents' army in Lithuania. Traugutt (1825-1864) was an important political as well as military leader of the Polish uprising in Lithuania. Orzeszkowa took care of him in her home when he became seriously ill. At this time the Russian authorities searched the Ludwinów estate nine times but never found Traugutt.<sup>31</sup> Eliza's most dangerous mission came when she secretly transported the seriously ill Traugutt in her carriage from Ludwinów to the border of Russian Poland. At one point of their journey, she and Romuald Traugutt were stopped by a Russian patrol. She did not panic and took control of the situation by convincingly explaining the alleged purpose of her journey. She told the Russian soldiers that she was taking her ailing cousin to see the doctor. Fortunately, the Russians did not realize whom she was transporting and, after checking her and his documents, they let the two of them go. Eliza and Traugutt arrived safely at the border, where he was supposed to meet his

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<sup>29</sup> Jankowski, Edmund. *Eliza Orzeszkowa*. Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1964. p.65.

<sup>30</sup> Bigay- Mianowska, Aleksandra. *Spółeczeństwo polskie w twórczości Elizy Orzeszkowej*. Kraków: Księgarnia Stefana Kaminskiego, 1941. p.149.

<sup>31</sup> Jankowski, Edmund. *Eliza Orzeszkowa*. Warszawa: Państwowy Intytut Wydawniczy, 1964. p.67.

other traveling companions. Unfortunately, after arriving in Warsaw, Romuald Traugutt was captured by the Russian authorities and sentenced to death on August 5, 1864.<sup>32</sup> According to Edmund Jankowski, the author of the most thorough biography of Eliza Orzeszkowa, Eliza was probably unaware that she had saved one of the last principal leaders of the 1863 uprising and one who later became a Polish national legend.<sup>33</sup>

After the failure of the January Uprising, Orzeszkowa and her husband separated. She no longer believed that her marriage could survive in view of their different political opinions and personal actions during the uprising. She moved out of their Ludwinów estate and initiated proceeding to obtain a divorce. During her separation from her husband, she moved back to her father's estate, Milkowszczyzna, where she lived for six years until she was forced to sell the property due to the heavy debts which had accumulated during her marriage to Piotr Orzeszko. Despite Piotr's exile to Siberia, which is discussed in subsequent chapters, Eliza eagerly sought the divorce. During her stay at her father's estate, Eliza contemplated moving to Warsaw where she thought that she could begin a new life. Nonetheless, after traveling to Warsaw, she came back to Lithuania without having secured any employment. Shortly after her trip, Eliza became reacquainted with Doctor Zygmunt Święcicki (date of birth unknown, died in 1910), a friend of Florenty Orzeszko (1835-1911), the younger brother of Piotr Orzeszko. Eliza fell

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p.68.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p.68.

passionately in love with Zygmunt. By the time Eliza finally received the long awaited divorce from her husband in 1869, the possibility of marriage to Doctor Święcicki was diminishing. Apparently, Eliza did not support her "future" husband's decision to move to St. Petersburg, where he obtained the post of Doctor to the Russian Imperial Guards.<sup>34</sup> Eliza believed that if she moved to St. Petersburg, she would be a traitor to her patriotic beliefs and to her homeland. Eventually, Doctor Święcicki moved to Minsk in 1877, where he married the niece of Adam Mickiewicz (1798-1855), one of Poland's three most famous Romantic poets of the first half of the nineteenth century.<sup>35</sup> Orzeszkowa never saw her first passionate love interest again. Coincidentally, both of them would die three days apart in May 1910, and their funeral services would be held at the same church in Grodno.

After Eliza's failed love affair with Zygmunt Święcicki, she immersed herself in the study of internationally famous contemporary literary works, such as Hippolyte Taine's (1828-1893) *Les originales de la France contemporaine* and *Histoire de la littérature anglaise*, Herbert Spencer's (1820-1903) *Introduction à la science sociale*, and the complete works of John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) translated into French and Polish.<sup>36</sup> Orzeszkowa started her career as a writer while she was still residing in Milkowszczyzna. Her first publication entitled *Obrazek z lat głodowych* (A Picture of the Hunger Years) was published in 1866

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p.104.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p.105.

<sup>36</sup> Godelewski, Franciszek. *Pani Orzeszkowa. (Wspomnienia)*. Warszawa: Dom Książki Polskiej SP.AKC, 1934. p.38.

and was followed by *W Klatce* (*In the Cage*, 1867), *Na Prowincji* (*In the Province*, 1869) and *Pan Grabia* (*Mr. Grabia*, 1869).<sup>37</sup> In that same year, Orzeszkowa sold her estate and moved to Grodno, where her mother lived. But, Eliza did not move in with her mother, she used money left over from the sale of the Milkowszczyzna estate to rent her own modest apartment. For Eliza, living in Grodno was a "sentence" to a life without "the world".<sup>38</sup> She found the city to be "small", without any Polish cultural life; not even intellectual circles, social gatherings, or public discussions of Polish arts and letters.<sup>39</sup> She perceived Grodno to be provincial and depressing; yet deep down she remained strongly attached to this region. Her attachment to Grodno was based on her past going back to the uprising.

In 1867, before Eliza moved to Grodno, she met her future second husband, Stanisław Nahorski (date of birth unknown, died in 1897), a lawyer by profession. But their wedding did not occur until after the death of Nahorski's wife in 1894. Beginning in 1867, Eliza and Nahorski formed a close relationship of 27 years that was regarded by many Grodnians as scandalous and embarrassing because the couple were not legally married.

In 1885, Eliza was deprived of her own house when a fire in Grodno devastated half of the town. She became the organizer and distributor of financial help to many victims of the fire. At that time, inhabitants of Grodno began to acknowledge Orzeszkowa

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p.38.

<sup>38</sup> Janowski, Edmund. *Eliza Orzeszkowa*. Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1964. p.122.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p.124.



as a woman who deserved respect despite her illicit open relationship with Nahorski. Though Nahorski's wife was seriously ill he never abandoned her for Orzeszkowa and remained with his wife until her death, while Orzeszkowa was ostracized for several decades on accounts of her relationship with Nahorski. Further details of this relationship are discussed in the following chapters.

Despite the fact that Eliza Orzeszkowa lived in the small city of Grodno and despite being a woman, her writing career blossomed throughout the 1870s. The era of Positivism emerged in Poland during late the 1860s, and Eliza Orzeszkowa became one of the leading figures of this progressive movement. In 1871, two of the leading Warsaw Positivists, Piotr Chmielowski (1848-1904) and Aleksander Świętochowski (1849-1938), published a manifesto entitled "We and You" in which they advocated a thorough reform of Polish politics, society and culture. In the context of the 1860s, they asserted that "we were the young, with no time to worry about the past; you were the old guard desperately holding on to antiquated principles."<sup>40</sup> In his book *When Nationalism Began to Hate*, Brian Porter notes "positivists wanted to replace the characteristics of the old Poland which included traditionalism, particularism, chauvinism, mysticism, and obscurantism with modernity and scientific method. The new Poles according to the Positivists' ideologies would bring the nation out of the backwardness of the Russian Empire into the modern world by

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<sup>40</sup> Porter, Brian. *When Nationalism Began to Hate. Imagining Modern Politics in Nineteenth -Century Poland*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000. p.46.

addressing problems with administration, management, economics, education, and industry."<sup>41</sup>

Polish Positivists believed in scientific progress as defined by European liberalism and in the application of the methods of the natural sciences to the critical evaluation of society, much in the manner of such British liberals as John Stuart Mill and Herbert Spencer.<sup>42</sup> Eliza's friend Bolesław Prus (1847-1912), another famous positivist writer, contended that in contrast to his fellow positivists "the romantic nationalists do not really love our [Polish] landscapes and they have contempt for the peasants, the craftsmen, and the merchants. This means that these [nationalistic] people do not love the real country and society in which we live and which constitute the real human fatherland, but are in love with some sort of mental construct built from distant memories and vague desires. For that unreal country and society they are indeed prepared to make sacrifices and exertions, which, however, do not bring the least benefit to the real land and its inhabitants."<sup>43</sup>

Throughout her literary career, Eliza Orzeszkowa always presented herself as an individual who promoted positivistic progress through "organic work". According to Polish positivists, "organic work" embodied all efforts to achieve the economic, technological and cultural development of Polish society in all lands of partitioned Poland. Eliza supported such desired reforms

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p.46.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p.43.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p.50. Bolesław Prus was the pen name of Aleksander Głowacki. His publications exposed ethnic and social prejudice and class pride in Poland. Prus's novels include: *Placówka*, *Emancypantki* and *Lalka*.

as the emancipation of women, the assimilation of Jews into Polish culture, and finally a re-conciliation between the landed gentry and the peasants in the wake of the failure of the January Uprising of 1863. As a woman and a writer, Orzeszkowa was not intimidated by the complexity of these or any other pressing social and political issues. *The Grodzienska Samotnica* -- "the lonely woman of Grodno", as she was frequently called -- always marched to the beat of her own drummer. Many critics compared her favorably to the greatest Polish Romantic poet, Adam Mickiewicz; and some critics referred to her as "his younger sister". Arguably, Eliza's qualities in some instances overshadowed those of the great poet. Even though Orzeszkowa, like Adam Mickiewicz in 1831, had an opportunity to emigrate after the January Uprising of 1863, she stayed on Polish soil, unwillingly to leave her family, her friends and her country.<sup>44</sup> Whereas Mickiewicz exercised effective literary and political leadership from his exile in Paris, Eliza with equal effectiveness promoted Polish arts and letters from her home in the provincial city of Grodno. Eliza's stubbornness, determination, and loyalty became legendary among her friends and contemporaries.

The determination of the Warsaw Positivists to have "organic work" displace traditionalism from Polish culture was evident in their celebration and promotion of scientific and industrial progress. Eliza Orzeszkowa identified herself as a Positivist, but in many respects she still projected a Romantic

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<sup>44</sup> Lukaszewicz, Jacek. *Mickiewicz*. (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Dolnośląskie, 1998) is a comprehensive recent scholarly biography of Adam Mickiewicz.

outlook in some of her publications. By the time of her death in 1910, Eliza had published her twenty-sixth and last book entitled *Gloria Victis*. This volume consisted of short stories based on the events of the January Uprising of 1863. Traditionalism and mysticism infuse the whole of *Gloria Victis* because Eliza sought to preserve the past that, to her mind, was an essential element in maintaining a positive Polish national identity. The following six chapters will discuss Orzeszkowa's distinguished literary career and her manifold personal and professional contributions to the development of Polish culture and politics to the improvement of relations between Poles of all social classes and between the Poles and the other peoples of Russian-ruled Poland and Lithuania.

## Chapter II

**The Making of a Polish Patriot and Critic**

"I saw the invasion of the victors bursting from all around, treading upon everything, spitting on everything that was ours: on all of our people, language, religion, and customs. I saw the legislation; whether openly enforced or secretive (hidden from Europe's view), which fell on us like hail, denying to us our rights to possess land, to have jobs, income and services, to speak our own language, and to teach our children the religion and the history of our ancestors."<sup>45</sup>

Eliza Orzeszkowa's lifelong service to her nation as a *patryjotka* (patriot) and social critic dates from the traumatic events of the Polish Insurrection of January 1863 and its brutal suppression by the Russian Empire. This Insurrection, a watershed in Polish history comparable to that of the Civil War in American history, dashed Polish hopes of regaining political freedom and national independence from Russia. The Russian "Great Giant" annihilated Polish insurrectionary forces and drove the Polish spirit into deep and dark corners of an abyss. In recollecting these events, Eliza described how she "became a witness at the age of twenty to one of the most horrific social catastrophes... I saw gallows, pale ghosts marching to their deaths, the end of hope, bleeding pain, depressing grief, and the procession of prisoners in rattling chains on the way to Siberia and being

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<sup>45</sup> Detko, Jan. *Eliza Orzeszkowa*. Warszawa: Wiedza Powszechna. p.67. \*Translation\*- "Widziałam najazd zwycięzców rozpierających się na wszystkich miejscach, deptający wszystko, co było naszym: na reszcie ludzi pozostałych na gruncie, na język, religię, zwyczaje. Widziałam ustawy prawne, jawne i tajemne (przed Europą tajone), które jak grad gęsty spadały na nas, odsądzając nas od posiadania ziemi, prawa do pracy, zarobku, zasługi, mówienia własnym językiem, uczenia dzieci naszych wiary i historii przodków w języku przodków."

followed by orphaned families plunged into deprivation."<sup>46</sup> The social and political impact of this national disaster deeply affected Eliza Orzeszkowa, becoming her personal obsession that colored virtually all of her literary works. Biographer Jan Detko described Orzeszkowa as "a person whose passion was to overcome social and moral evils, and who was determined to find ways to return Polish achievements to the forefront of European civilization and to strengthen the Polish economy."<sup>47</sup> All these efforts resulted the deeply shocking experience of the January Uprising of 1863 and from the Russians' iron grip on Polish society after 1864.

The Polish Uprising of January 1863 spread rapidly and was joined by the Poles of Lithuania in May of the same year. Alarmed by some initial victories by Polish troops, the Russian government appointed the "hangman" Mikhail Muraviev (1794-1866) as General-Governor (1863-1865) of Lithuania in order to oversee and control the northwestern provinces of the Russian Empire in which large Polish minorities, notably of the gentry class, resided.<sup>48</sup> Under his administration, each insurgent caught by the Russian forces was punished by death; furthermore, exile to Siberia was inflicted on Poles of all social classes on a daily

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p.67. \*Translation\*- "Stałam się dwudziestoletnim świątkiem jednej z katastrof społecznych ..... Widziałam szubienice.... Białe strachy idących na śmierć, konające nadzieje, krwawe bóle, ponure żałoby, orszaki więźniów dzwoniących łańcuchami w drodze na Sybir, z długimi za sobą orszakami rodzin osieroconych i wtrąconych w nędzę."

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p.66.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p.68. On May 1, 1863, Mikhail Muraviev was appointed governor general of the Northwest Territory, which included Lithuania. He is best known for his suppression of the 1863 rebellion in Lithuania and for introducing a thoroughgoing program of Russification in Lithuania.

basis.<sup>49</sup> In a letter dated May 5, 1903 to Aurelii Drogoszewski (1863-1943), Orzeszkowa reported that "here (in Lithuania), blood was shed; and the ensuing mourning, the smoldering rubble, the ruins of an existence and possessions, breaking the whole body into small atoms, left no hope for single families, estates, social bonds, and social relations; and no laws or hope remained."<sup>50</sup>

After Russian troops had suppressed the 1863 Polish Uprising, the ensuing Russian repression adversely affected almost every Pole in Poland and Lithuania. All Polish landed gentry lost their estates, which the Russian government confiscated, as well the elite social status they had enjoyed for nine hundred years. At this time, Orzeszkowa was obliged to leave her husband's estate when the Russian authorities confiscated it.

After "the hangman" Governor-General Muraviev departed from Lithuania in 1865, the process of trying to completely annihilating Polish culture was enforced and maintained by a new Governor-General, Konstantin von Kaufman (1818-1882, and Governor-General from 1866-1868). By the year 1866, the Russian government gave Russians complete freedom to purchase Polish estates in the western provinces. Furthermore, all non-Polish buyers were exempted from paying estate taxes and were also

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p.68.

<sup>50</sup> Orzeszkowa, Eliza. *Listy Zebrane*. Volume IV. Edited by Ludwik Brunon Swiderski. Warszawa i Grodno: Instytut Wydawniczy "Biblioteka Polska" oraz Towarzystwo im. Elizy Orzeszkowej, 1938. p.145. \*Tranlation\*- " Były tu: krew, żałoby, zgliszcza, ruiny istnień i majątków, rozbicie ogółu na rzadko rozsiane atomy. Żadna rodzina, żaden majątek, żaden węzeł społeczny, żaden stosunek towarzyski, żadne prawo i żadna nadzieja, w całość nie ostały." Aurelii Drogoszewski- an historian and a critic of Polish literature, who was Eliza Orzeszkowa's biographer and one of her friends.

granted the privilege of paying fixed-term installments on the credit and tax debts, which had accumulated under the previous owner.<sup>51</sup> Under this system the majority of Polish landholders lost their estates to Russian buyers. Furthermore, the Russians took over almost all government jobs that had been held by Poles in the Polish Congress and in Russian Western provinces. By 1870, the Poles encountered harsh economic disadvantages as the private job market became limited and highly competitive. Polish teachers, court officials, and manual laborers experienced economic uncertainty and a bleak political environment in which there was no escape from injustice and prejudice.

In his biography of Eliza Orzeszkowa, Jan Detko quotes from an article by Antoni Wrotnowski written after the Russian Army had crushed the Polish insurrection of 1863: "The numbers of the Russian officials in Russian-occupied Poland are massive. They have arrived from distant parts of the Russian Empire without any knowledge of our Polish language; they cannot communicate with or understand the local inhabitants and likewise do not understand their needs and their beliefs. Therefore, these Russian officials are like parasites on the body of this unhappy country."<sup>52</sup> Eliza Orzeszkowa felt deep resentment toward the Russian Empire and made this evident in many of her letters and literary

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<sup>51</sup> Bigay-Mianowska, Aleksandra. *Spółeczeństwo polskie w twórczości Elizy Orzeszkowej*. Kraków: Księgarnia Stefana Kaminskiego, 1941. p.60.

<sup>52</sup> Detko, Jan. *Eliza Orzeszkowa*. Warszawa: Wiedza Powszechna, 1971. p.70. \*Translation\*- " Urzędnicy rosyjscy tworzą w Królestwie Polskim liczne legiony, będące dla jego mieszkańców istną plagą. Jako przbysze z odległych stron cesarstwa nie znają przede wszystkim języka kraju, porozumiewać się więc z ludnością miejscową, ani jej rozumieć nie mogą. Nie odczuwają również jej potrzeb i siły jej wiezeń; są pasożytami na ciele tego nieszczęśliwego kraju."



publications throughout 1870s and 1880s. In a letter to her friend Aniela Sikorska (1844-1880), Orzeszkowa observed that "we (Poles) are forced to associate ourselves with (Russian) people who offend our individual pride and our good, refined taste in civilization. They are laughing and joking about our sadness, and they are telling us (Poles) that, with regard to today, we've seen nothing yet. Tomorrow will be worse. Nonetheless, even if they would take everything from us, we would still be left with the conviction that it is nobler to be a victim than to be a murderer."<sup>53</sup>

After suppressing the Polish Uprising of 1863, Russian officials began the Russification of all aspects of everyday Polish life. In 1866, Russian was designated as the sole mandatory language in all state and private schools.<sup>54</sup> Courses on history, geography, mathematics and physics were to be taught in Russian. By 1885 all subjects except religion had undergone thorough Russification.<sup>55</sup> To speak Polish or to read Polish books was considered illegal and punishable. This law especially adversely affected Polish children in secondary schools and Polish college students. In Eliza's novel *Zygmunt Ławicz i*

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<sup>53</sup> Orzeszkowa, Eliza. *Listy Zebrane*. Volume VII. Edited by Edmund Jankowski. Wrocław, Warszawa i Kraków: Zakład Imienia Ossolińskich (Wydawnictwo Polskiej Akademii Nauk), 1971. pp.12-13, p.17.

\*Translation\*- "Przestawiać musimy z ludźmi obrażającymi naszą osobistą godność i nasz dobry, wykształcony cywilizacją smak. Wobec naszego smutku oni śmieją się i stroją żarty, i nieskonńczoną przyjemność im sprawia powtarzanie, że dziś- to nic, jutro będzie gorzej.... Choćby wszystko, co posiadamy, nam odebrali, zostanie nam jeszcze to przeświadczenie, iż szlachetnej jest być ofiarą niż mordercą." Aniela Sikorska- she was the daughter of the editor of *Gazeta Polska*, Józef Sikorski. Aniela met Eliza at her father house in Warsaw, shortly after these two became close friends.

<sup>54</sup> Porter, Brian. *When Nationalism Began to Hate. Imagining Modern Politics in Nineteenth-Century Poland*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000. p.79.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p.79.

koledzy (*Zygmunt Ławicz and his friends, 1881*), she wrote about the unfair treatment of Polish students by a Russian college professor. Moreover, it was a common practice among Russian teachers to offend Polish national sentiments and culture and the Catholic religion.

"Poland, whose major city is Warsaw, is inhabited by a malicious people who slavishly obey the Pope", was a Russian definition of the Polish "subjects" of the Czar, a definition that was taught to Polish children.<sup>56</sup> Nonetheless, Polish pupils and college students felt no love for Russia; on the contrary, they hated everything Russian. By keeping alive the memory of the January Uprising of 1863, Polish parents increased their children's awareness of Russian malice toward all things Polish. These parents undertook the task of making Polish culture thrive in the privacy of their homes.

In 1869, the Russian authorities closed down *Szkoła Główna* (*The Warsaw Main School*) in Warsaw and replaced it with the University of Warsaw under a heavy Russian influence. The latter school, in Eliza Orzeszkowa's own words "was a sad parody of an academic institution."<sup>57</sup> Russian students were given scholarships to attend this university, whereas Polish students were starving for knowledge because they did not receive enough financial support. Most of the successful Polish students pursued a higher

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<sup>56</sup> Orzeszkowa, Eliza. *Listy Zebrane*. Volume IV. Edited by Ludwik Brunon Swiderski. Warszawa i Grodno: Instytut Wydawniczy "Biblioteka Polska" oraz Towarzystwo im. Elizy Orzeszkowej, 1938. p.146.

\*Translation\*- "Polsza, głównij gorod Arszawa, narod echidnej, poklaniajetsia Rimskoj Papie."

<sup>57</sup> Porter, Brian. *When Nationalism Began to Hate. Imagining Modern Politics in Nineteenth-Century Poland*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000. p.80.

education beyond the borders the Russian Poland and the Russian Empire. Polish students found France and Switzerland to be two of the most desirable and hospitable places to study in Europe in part because French was the preferred second language of most educated Poles and also because French literature had informed the aspirations and expectations of so many such Poles.

Eliza Orzeszkowa desperately sought to maintain Polish culture in Lithuania. On July 23, 1866, the Governor-General of Vilno, Konstantin von Kaufman, issued laws, which prohibited the sale of Polish books and magazines and also ordered the destruction of all Polish movable type on which Polish letters and diacritical marks appeared.<sup>58</sup> Between 1868 and 1874, under Aleksandr Potapow (date of birth unknown, Governor-General from 1868-1874,), the distribution of Polish printed materials was partially allowed. But, by June 1876, under the administration of Piotr Albedynski (date of birth unknown, Governor-General from 1874-1880), all previous prohibitions on the publications and distribution of Polish literature were imposed once again.<sup>59</sup>

Eliza Orzeszkowa wanted to open her own bookstore in Vilno, but she was unable to secure an official governmental concession for this project. Eventually, Eliza and her partners, Wincenty Chełminski (1850-1887) and Wacław Makowski (1854-1929), took over the bookstore in Vilno of Stefan Romanowski (date of birth unknown), one of their silent partners. This bookstore was called

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<sup>58</sup> Stepnik, Krzysztof, ed. *Twórczość Elizy Orzeszkowej*. Lublin: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej, 2001. See article by Romanowski, Andrzej: "Miejsce i rola księgarni Orzeszkowej w kulturze polskiej Ziemi Zabraných." p.52.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p.52.

*E.Orzeszkowa i S-ki* (*E.Orzeszkowa and Company*). In addition, Eliza opened her own publishing house called *Wydawnictwo E. Orzeszkowej i Spółka* (*The Publishing House of E. Orzeszkowa and Company*).<sup>60</sup> The partners' bookstore sold a variety of books, magazines, and photographs and was increasingly patronized by Poles living in and near the city of Vilno where more Poles resided than in any other city of Russian ruled Lithuania. Unfortunately, Eliza's publishing house and her efforts were criticized by some Polish newspapers and by a Polish literary circle which included one of Eliza's "accomplished friends" and rivals, Hendryk Sienkiewicz (1846-1916), the author of popular Polish historical novels and of the international best-seller *Quo Vadis*. According to Hendryk Sienkiewicz, Eliza's publishing house was unfortunately unable to publish any significant or artistically adequate publications which would deserve recognition and praise from Polish literary circles.<sup>61</sup>

Nevertheless, Eliza Orzeszkowa's bookstore and publishing house occupy a preeminent place in the history of later nineteenth century Polish language, literature and periodicals. Between 1864 and 1905, her bookstore and publishing house were the only institutions in Russian ruled Lithuania that gave priority to promoting the reawakening of this Polish periodical press.<sup>62</sup> Eliza and her partners' petitioned the Russian authorities in Vilno and St.Petersburg to obtain a concession for

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<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.53-54.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p.58.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p.59.

printing a Polish language calendar for Vilno in 1881. Finally, with the permission by Eduard Todtleben (1818-1884), Governor-General from 1880-1884, they undertook a printing campaign that led to the abolition of Muraviev's laws that had restricted the printing of Polish publications since 1864.<sup>63</sup> Also in 1881, Orzeszkowa's publishing house began to publish Wincent Chełminski's satirical notebooks under the titles of *Argus* (A alert person), *Bodziec* (Stimulus), *Cerber* (An alert and stern watchman), *Dzwonek* (A small bell) and finally *Eureka*. Eliza and her partners constantly petitioned the Russian authorities to grant them authorization to establish legally a Polish lending library, an institution officially prohibited in Lithuania since 1864.<sup>64</sup>

A well kept secret in the Polish community of Vilno was the fact that Eliza's bookstore operated an illegal lending library right under the noses of the Russian authorities.<sup>65</sup> In January 1882, the Russian newspaper *Ruś* published an article accusing Eliza Orzeszkowa of promoting Polish culture in Lithuania.<sup>66</sup> By the end of January 1882, the Russian authorities in Vilno charged Eliza with publishing Polish newspapers without the permission of the Ministry of Internal Affairs.<sup>67</sup> By publishing Wincent Chełminski's notebooks, Eliza's press was allegedly promoting political agitation against the Russian Empire among the Poles

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p.59.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p.65.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p.65.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p.66.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p.66.

living in Lithuania. Furthermore, several of Chełmiski's notebooks had not been authorized for publication in accordance with the censorship regulations imposed by the Russians.

The Russian authorities searched Eliza's bookstore early in 1882 and declared that her establishment was "harmful to Lithuania because it served to direct and support Polish existence."<sup>68</sup> On May 6, 1882, the Russian authorities officially closed *E.Orzeszkowa i S-ka* and ordered Orzeszkowa to return to Grodno where she was obliged to live under probation for three years.<sup>69</sup> According to Andrzej Romanowski, the bookstore of *E.Orzeszkowa i S-ka* achieved the greatest accomplishments of any Polish bookselling business in Lithuania during the period of the Positivist movement.<sup>70</sup> Eliza Orzeszkowa not only wanted to promote Polish culture through her bookstore, but she was also determined to fight against all efforts by the Russian government to diminish "Polishness" (*Polskość*). Her bookstore defiantly asserted the presence of the Polish nation and provided it with an ideology that affirmed that although Poles might be politically suppressed, they could not be spiritually and politically overcome.

The contacts between Eliza Orzeszkowa and the Russian community of Grodno were limited. She spoke Russian but refused to use it during visits by Russian officials to her residence. Russian ladies of the *crème de la crème* society in Grodno sought

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p.67.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p.67.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p.69.

her acquaintance and were profoundly shocked when the terms of Eliza's parole were revealed: Orzeszkowa was detained in Grodno for three years. According to Orzeszkowa: "The ladies were disturbed and used words like 'Impossible!', 'Terrible'!, 'Unpleasant!' This makes me laugh... Naturally, I shall never seek their company." <sup>71</sup>

Noteworthy, nonetheless, was the fact that Eliza always appreciated certain aspects of Russian culture. She enjoyed reading Russian literature, especially works by Aleksandr Sergejevich Pushkin (1799-1837), Leo Nikolaevich Tolstoy (1828-1910), Michail Saltykow (1826-1889, also known as Szczedrin), and Fjodor Michailowitsch Dostojewski (1821-1881). To Eliza, these Russian writers were "true humanists and great men of the literary world."<sup>72</sup> In 1899, when St. Petersburg officially celebrated the centenary of Pushkin's birth, Eliza personally wrote a letter to the centenary committee in which she commemorated Alexander Pushkin as "*gèneie de premier ordre, gloire de Votre patrie, ami de Mickiewicz.*"<sup>73</sup> Due to her evident admiration for Pushkin's poetry and prose, Eliza was slightly concerned that her reputation would consequently suffer from the ridicule of Polish literary circles. In fact, Eliza's Polish friends from a "literary committee" in Warsaw persuaded her not

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<sup>71</sup> Pauszer- Klonowska, Gabriela. *Zwykłe Sprawy przewytkłych ludzi*. Lublin: Wydawnictwo Lubelskie, 1978. p.87. \*Translation\*- "Impossible, Nie-wozmożno, Obidno, itd. Nigdy jeszcze na takiej fecie nie byłam."

<sup>72</sup> Jankowski, Edmund. *Eliza Orzeszkowa*. Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1964. p.337.

<sup>73</sup> Orzeszkowa, Eliza. *Listy Zebrane*. Volume I. Edited by Edmund Jankowski. Wrocław: Zakład Imienia Ossolińskich (Wydawnictwo Polskiej Akademii Nauk). p.232. \*Translation\*- "As a genius of the first rank, the glory of your country and a friend of Mickiewicz."

to travel to St. Petersburg in 1886 to participate in the celebration of the twentieth anniversary of the inauguration of her literary career.

Despite the Czarist government's continued maintenance of discriminatory laws designed to limit the use of Polish language, many of the more enlighten members of the Russian intelligentsia took a keen interest in the non-Russian cultures and languages of the Russian Empire. In these circles, for example, Eliza Orzeszkowa's literary talents were widely appreciated even when her political opinions including opposition to Russification. Some of Orzeszkowa's works were published in Russian translation in such respectable Russian magazines as *Kraj (The Country)* and *Russkaja Mysl (The Russian Thought)*, whose editors Erazm Piltz (1851-1929), and Wukół Michajłowicz Ławrow (date of birth unknown), were great admirers of Eliza's literary achievements. Together with like-minded colleagues, they worked to promote Eliza's publications in Russia particularly those which advocated the sort of reforms which would facilitate social reform and individual accomplishment regardless of sex, religious affiliation or nationality.

Conservative Polish literary circles in Warsaw regarded the professional friendship between Eliza Orzeszkowa and reform-minded Russian editors as indecent and unacceptable. Consequently, Orzeszkowa never went to St. Petersburg for the Russian-sponsored silver anniversary of her literary début by the magazine *Kraj* and its editor Erazm Piltz; instead, she celebrated



this occasion in Grodno. Few of Orzeszkowa's Polish peers appreciated her discrete efforts to promote mutual understanding and appreciation between the Polish and Russian artistic communities. Furthermore, her having received "political patronage" from Russian editors elicited from influential Polish newspapers a severe criticism of her alleged flawed patriotic motives.<sup>74</sup> Consequently, Orzeszkowa felt betrayed by the harsh and uncompromising accusations and admonitions published by many of her Polish literary friends and contemporaries. Regardless of such publicly expressed personal opinions, Orzeszkowa never lost her poise and professional dignity. In 1896, she wrote to one of her close friends, Lucyna Kotarbińska (1858-1941): "If you only knew how my books are being read and appreciated in Russia, you would be laughing."<sup>75</sup>

After the Russian Revolution of 1905 and the establishment of a *Duma* and other institutional reforms in Russia, Eliza Orzeszkowa hoped that improved political relations between Poles and Russians would be forthcoming. Though such improvements turned out to be either short-lived or illusory, she maintained a distinguished literary career until her death in 1910. As Orzeszkowa was dying, the Russian governor of Grodno ordered the entire street in front of her house to be covered with straw so

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<sup>74</sup> Jankowski, Edmund. *Eliza Orzeszkowa*. Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1964. p.345.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p.350. \*Translation\*- "Gdybyś wiedziała, jak jestem czytana i uwielbiana w Rosji, śmiałybyś się!" Lucyna Kotarbińska met Orzeszkowa through her husband Józef Kotarbiński, who was a literary critic and an actor in the theater. Lucyna's professional interest was in journalism, but she was also involved in her husband's theatrical career.

that the passing trams, wagons, and carriages would not disturb the last moments of the great Polish writer and reformer.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Pauszer- Klonowska, Gabriela. *Zwykłe Sprawy przewyżłych ludzi*. Lublin: Wydawnictwo Lubelskie, 1978. p.21.

## Chapter III

**A Perceptive Observer of the Polish Gentry and Peasantry**

"Unfortunately, our wagons and carts never stopped in front of the locked cottages of peasants. These cottages were always closed off to us -- unfortunately! This confinement was due to our differences in religious beliefs, in languages spoken, and in the past mistakes of our ancestors -- unfortunately, unfortunately!"<sup>77</sup>

Like all the Poles of her generation, Eliza Orzeszkowa formed her understanding of politics and society during the Polish Insurrection of 1863 and the turmoil that followed its repression by the Czarist Russian government. Before the Uprising of 1863, the inhabitants of Russian Poland and the Western provinces of Russia had addressed the difficulties of initiating peasant emancipation and agrarian reforms following Russia's defeat in the Crimean War of 1854 - 1856. At the time, all Polish political parties were engaged in trying to develop reasonable agrarian reforms that would advance the interests of peasants as well as the gentry in future as well as present political, economic and social circumstances.<sup>78</sup> Some educated Poles attempted to persuade the Polish peasants that the landed gentry (*szlachta*) were their

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<sup>77</sup> Detko, Jan. *Orzeszkowa Wobec Tradycji Narodowo-Wyzwoleńczej*. Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1965. p.256.

\*Translation note\* "I tylko - niestety - wozy i wózki nasze nie zatrzymały się nigdy przed chatami chłopskimi. Chaty te były przed nami zamknięte- niestety! Zamykały je przed nami różnice wiary i mowy, błędy przodków naszych- niestety!niestety!" Eliza refers to the fact that many peasants in the vicinity of Grodno were Orthodox in religion and spoke White Russian, or Catholic in religion and spoke Polish or Lithuanian language.

<sup>78</sup> Kieniewicz, Stefan. *The Emancipation of the Polish Peasantry*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969. p.155.

friends and not their foes.<sup>79</sup> These Polish "democrats" tried persistently in their political propaganda to urge the peasants to recognize their common interests with the landed gentry. The Polish democrats' visions for the future anticipated that everybody in Poland would be politically free and enjoy equal political rights.<sup>80</sup> A factional division among Polish democrats began to surface by 1860 in the White Party, composed primarily of landowners and upper middle class and professional people, as opposed to the Revolutionary or Red Party composed of younger radical intellectuals and gentry who advocated the emancipation of the peasantry and the implementation of agrarian reforms.<sup>81</sup> The White Party did not intend "officially" to side with the partitioning powers of Russia, Austria and Prussia; nonetheless, the "whites" were willing to cooperate with these powers in order to implement "a policy of legal opposition and of gradual 'organic' economic and cultural improvements."<sup>82</sup>

The Central National Committee (Reds), founded in Warsaw in June 1862, did not fully support the White Party and were not interested in introducing their own program of agrarian reforms.<sup>83</sup> The Reds' patriotic agenda was to unite peasants and landowners in a mutual understanding based on the ideals of brotherhood and patriotism.<sup>84</sup> The Czarist governmental decree of 1861 that introduced limited agrarian reforms was strongly opposed by the

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p.156.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p.157.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., p.160.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., p.160.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p.160.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., p.160.

Red Party.<sup>85</sup> By August 1862, the Central National Committee issued its own manifesto which stated: "all peasants are promised full equality before the law, the abolition of monopolies on salt and tobacco, lower taxes, shorter military service, educational facilities for their children and full title to their holdings."<sup>86</sup> This manifesto was designed to conciliate the peasants and persuade them to settle their differences with their landlords. In October of 1862, the Czarist government in Russian Poland implemented a draft for military service in which draftees were to be chosen from the "politically undesirable elements." This draft excluded landlords, those peasants who owned land, and landless farm helpers. Instead, this draft primarily selected townspeople, the petty gentry, university students, and low-ranking officials.<sup>87</sup>

On January 22, 1863, the Central National Committee had become concerned lest the drafting of its members would render its projected revolutionary activities impossible. Consequently, this committee officially began an insurrection against the czarist regime. Thus had conscription created a "now or never" situation for the Red Party. Under its newly adopted name of the Provisional National Government, the Red Party issued two more decrees that promised that "with the first decree, all peasants now farming any amount of land would become full owners of their

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., p.161.

\* May 16, 1861," those (the peasants) who own at least three *morgi* would have to make a decision if they want to commute their labor charges into a temporary "ransom" (okup)." Ibid., p.158.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.,p.161.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.,p.162.

holdings, and that all existing obligations including compulsory labor, and rent should be suppressed. The second decree stated that every landless citizen who volunteered to serve in the Polish national army would receive full title to four acres of land."<sup>88</sup> It should be mentioned that only a minority of Polish peasants participated in the Uprising of 1863. In some regions, peasants took matters into their own hands by attacking their own landlords.<sup>89</sup> The White Party, which initially did not endorse the policies of the Provisional National Government, soon began to support them so as not to run the risk of being regarded as unpatriotic and anti-national. Besides, the prominent noble landowners understood that if they opposed the uprising, the Red Party might turn the insurrectional masses against them.<sup>90</sup>

By the fall of 1863, the Polish insurrectionists realized that their hopes for foreign intervention and for additional peasant support had been in vain. Peasants had begun to withdraw from the revolutionary movement because they did not believe that they would benefit very much from the agrarian reforms proposed by the Polish National Government. The majority of the peasantry was satisfied with the Czarist reforms of March 1861, which appeared to meet peasant needs and to require no risk to any one's life. The Ukrainian and the Byelorussian peasants actively helped Russian troops disarm the Polish insurgents; thereby these

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., pp.162-163.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p.164.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., p.165.

national minorities clearly revealed their general dislike of the Poles and of the Polish insurrection in particular.<sup>91</sup>

Following the collapse of the 1863 uprising, the Russian government undertook political and military reprisals against the Polish population. The majority of peasants regardless of nationality remained loyal to the czarist regime because they knew that the division of land depended on the decisions of Russian officials.<sup>92</sup> The final emancipation of the peasants in Russian Poland and in Lithuania was issued on February 19, 1864, after the utter defeat of the uprising.<sup>93</sup> This emancipation decree "liquidated all peasant obligations to the manor, deprived the landowners of their monopolies in the production and sale of spirits. The peasants received as freeholds the land that they used and the landless peasants were given some land."<sup>94</sup> Nevertheless, social conflict still occurred between the Polish landed gentry and the peasantry. Eventually, the peasant masses expressed disapproval of the Czarist regime's opposition to further agrarian reforms as well as the regime's efforts to suppress public use of the Polish language; universal free and compulsory public education; as well as the regime's discrimination against the Polish peasantry on account of individual peasants' national identity and Catholic religion.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., p.168.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., p.186.

<sup>93</sup> Wandycz, Piotr. *The lands of partitioned Poland*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1974. p.197.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., p.197.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., p. 200. March 2, 1864, by the Western calendar.

In this context, the social and political views of the seventeen-year-old Orzeszkowa began to mature and to take a different direction from those of her husband, Piotr Orzeszko. One of the principal influences on Orzeszkowa was Piotr's brother, Florenty Orzeszko (1835-1905), who had recently graduated from the University of St. Petersburg with a medical diploma. Upon returning from Russia, Florenty Orzeszko, according to Piotr, was "infected" with that "democratic chimera" whose political and social propaganda prevailed in Polish and Russian student circles at universities.<sup>96</sup> Eliza Orzeszkowa appreciated Florenty's presence at Ludwinów because she regarded their intellectual conversations as stimulating and refreshing.

Eliza's involvement in the lives of the peasants on her and her husband's estate was limited to the selling or exchanging of food and commodities and to attending weddings and christening parties.<sup>97</sup> She repeatedly tried to persuade her husband to acknowledge and to try to alleviate the peasants' poverty and harsh living conditions; but he would always reply with negative comments. According to Piotr, all peasants were "lazy" and "thieves"; furthermore, he did not approve of Eliza's involvement in agrarian political debates because to do so was not appropriate behavior for a lady.<sup>98</sup>

When Florenty Orzeszko returned from St. Petersburg in 1861, he obtained employment as a local physician in Kobryński

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<sup>96</sup> Pauszer-Klonowska, Gabriela. *Opowieść o Pani Elizie Orzeszkowej*. Warszawa: Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza, 1973. p.85.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, p.84.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, p.84.



County, where he encountered peasant poverty, ignorance and superstition.<sup>99</sup> Florenty and his brother Piotr Orzeszko not only did not share each other's political views but also belonged to two different political parties. Piotr Orzeszko supported the White party and its proposed 1862 agrarian reforms. On the other hand, Florenty Orzeszko supported the Red party and its revolutionary ideas. Because Orzeszkowa advocated improvements in peasant life, she believed that Florenty's "democratic chimera" was more progressive and preferable to her husband's "ignorant" opinions. Florenty Orzeszko and Eliza established a very close friendship, and Piotr Orzeszko felt uncomfortable and angry that his wife was becoming politically active under the influence of his brother. Florenty and his friends revealed to Orzeszkowa the poverty and the ignorance of the Ludwinów peasants and helped her understand the difference between merely granting property rights to peasants as opposed to the more extensive improvements advocated by the revolutionary movement. Finally, Florenty helped Eliza to build an elementary school for Ludwinów peasant children against her husband's wishes.<sup>100</sup> Florenty was her mentor, and the times they had spent together at Ludwinów estate were her "university".<sup>101</sup> After the failure of the January Uprising of 1863, Florenty and Piotr Orzeszko, as well as other participants in the revolutionary movement, faced imposed exile by the Russian

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid., p.85.

<sup>100</sup> Pauszer-Klonowska, Gabriela. *Zwykłe sprawy przewytkłych ludzi*. Lublin: Wydawnictwo Lubelskie, 1978. p.30.

<sup>101</sup> Pauszer-Klonowska, Gabriela. *Opowieść o Pani Elizie Orzeszkowej*. Warszawa: Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza, 1973. p.93.

government into the more distant regions of Siberia. All Polish participants of the January Uprising were punished even those who like Piotr, had provided limited or reluctant participation or support for the Polish cause.

Eliza Orzeszkowa did not join her husband in his Siberian exile; furthermore, she demanded a divorce in order to make a new start in life. After leaving Ludwinów, Eliza settled down on her father's estate, Milkowszczyzna, which she had inherited after Benedykt Pawłowski's death. She resided on this estate for six years; but in 1870 was forced to sell her property due to the heavy debts, accumulated during her marriage to Piotr Orzeszko. Afterwards, Eliza chose Grodno as her place of residence because it was not far from her childhood home and her favorite countryside. In a letter of November 1876 to a friend, T.T. Jeż (1824- 1915), Eliza stated that " I must tell you that from my birth, my upbringing and my likings, I am a peasant. I was twenty-seven years old when for the first time I moved to the big city. Ten years have gone by so far, and I cannot stop thinking about the countryside in the winter and in the summertime. I want to be surrounded by its vast expanse, clean air, and soothing silence."<sup>102</sup> During summer months, Orzeszkowa ventured out to the

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<sup>102</sup> Orzeszkowa, Eliza. *Listy Zebrane*. Volume VI. Edited by Edmund Jankowski. Wrocław, Warszawa i Kraków: Zakład Imienia Ossolińskich (Wydawnictwo Polskiej Akademii Nauk), 1967. p.38. \*Translation\*- "Powiedzieć Panu muszę naprzód że z urodzenia, wychowania i upodobań najserdeczniejszych wieśniaczką jestem. Miałam lat 27, kiedy po raz pierwszy zamieszkałam stale w mieście, i oto upływa już lat dziesięć od pory owej, a ja za wsią odtęsknić się nie mogę i nie tylko w lecie, ale nawet w zimie pragnę mieć dokoła siebie szerokie jej przestrzenie, czyste powietrze i kojącą ciszę." T.T. Jeż- was his pen name; his actual name was Zygmunt Fortunat Milkowski. He participated in the Uprising of 1863, after the failure he sought exile in Switzerland. Zygmunt Fortunat Milkowski was a

countryside and spent as much time as she could in leisure. She would explore the countryside and collect all sorts of wild flowers, which later on, she would dry out and put into her flower album. Furthermore, Eliza enjoyed spending her time in the village getting to know its inhabitants and their customs. Nonetheless, one "thing" in the countryside terrified Eliza. As Franciszek Godelewski (1866- 1937) remembered it, "One evening I was walking with Mrs.Orzeszkowa while holding flowers that we had picked up at the meadow. All of a sudden, Mrs. Orzeszkowa dropped her flowers and started to run; naturally I followed her. - 'I am scared! The cow, the cow' she whispered in her terrified voice- 'it is the darkest side of the village'. 'But the cow was white', I said to Mrs. Orzeszkowa. Eventually she relaxed, but she never conquered the fear of the cow."<sup>103</sup> Why was Orzeszkowa so afraid of a cow? It was quite amusing to see Orzeszkowa run away from the cow, whereas, in her past, she had encountered and endured much worse things and individuals than just a simple cow! Since, Orzeszkowa herself never explained the source of her anxiety over the encounter with this cow, one can assume that cows somehow represented some unsavory aspect of rural Polish life.

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writer and a patriot for Polish cause. His publications included: *Uskoki and Historia o pra-pra-pra.. dziadku i pra-pra-pra... wnuku.*

<sup>103</sup> Godelewski, Franciszek. *Pani Orzeszkowa. (Wspomnienia)*. Warszawa: Dom Książki Polskiej SP.AKC, 1934. p.49. \*Translation\*- "Jednego wieczora szedłem z panią Orzeszkową pod ramię. Trzymaliśmy snopy zdobytych na łące kwiatów. Wtem pani Eliza rzuciła swoje brzemień, wyrwała mi rękę i uciekła; ja naturalnie nią. - "Boję się! Krowa, krowa" wyszeptała przerażona- "jest to najczarniejsza strona wsi."-Ależ krowa jest biała, droga pani"- zauważyłem. To ją udobruchało, lecz spotkania z krowami obawiała się w dalszym ciągu." Franciszek Godelewski- he came from the gentry class, he was also an infantry soldier when he met Orzeszkowa in Grodno around 1890. He wrote a memoir entitled *Pani Orzeszkowa* in 1934.

Eliza spent her summer vacations in various rural locations but only a few became her favorites. Miniewicze, Florianów and Poniemun were among her preferred summer retreats; and they were also associated with several of her literary masterpieces. She wrote *Nad Niemnem* (*On the Niemen River, 1886-1887*), *Cham* (*The Boor, 1888*), *Niziny* (*The lower classes, 1884*) and *Dziurdziowie* (*Dziurdziowie Family, 1885*) based upon her observations of the local population, customs and social relationships. In another letter to T.T. Jeża, Eliza remarked: "There are two things counting against the peasant population: alcoholism and theft. They drink and steal, you cannot leave any benches in front of your house or if you think about planting a fruit tree by the side of the road, don't bother because it will be taken away. It is true that peasants do not bother to steal gold, silver or clothes; but everything that is useful to them like wood, iron, leather and grain needs to be locked up and guarded."<sup>104</sup>

Eliza Orzeszkowa's novel, *Nad Niemnem* was partially written during her summer visit to the Miniewicze estate in 1887. On October 4, 1886, from Miniewicze, Eliza wrote to Leopold Mèyet (1850- 1912), "the main theme of this book revolves around the January Uprising of 1863. In the year 1863 the petty gentry of Lithuania (*szlachta zaściankowa*) took an active role in the

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<sup>104</sup> Orzeszkowa, Eliza. *Listy Zebrane*. Volume VI. Edited by Edmund Jankowski. Wrocław, Warszawa i Kraków: Zakład Imienia Ossolińskich (Wydawnictwo Polskiej Akademii Nauk), 1967. p.41. \*Translation\* - "Tymczasem dwie rany przegryzają ludność wiejską aż do szpiku kości: pijaństwo i kradzież. Piją straszliwie, a kradną tak bezwzględnie, że w lasku tuż pod domem ławki postawić nie można, bo ją wnet sprzątną, o zasadzeniu zaś przy drodze drzewa owocowego pomyśleć nie można. Złota nie wezmą, srebra nie wezmą ani odzieży, ale wszystko co jest drzewem, żelazem, skórą, owocem lub ziarnem, strzec trzeba jak najpilniej, zamykać i warować."

uprising; the wealthy landed gentry "manipulated" the lower class into the position where they wanted them to be and later on released them into an ignorant and brutish state."<sup>105</sup>

In *Nad Niemnem*, Eliza also wrote specifically about the life of the wealthy Polish gentry class residing at the Korczyn estate versus the life of the *szlachta zaściankowa*, the impoverished gentry, living like peasants in a small village next to the Korczyński estate. During the January Uprising of 1863, those two social classes were united in their efforts to recreate an independent Polish state. After the failure of this Insurrection, the overall attitude of the landed gentry toward the peasant population took a negative turn. In the minds of most Polish members of the gentry, the peasants had erred in not supporting the political and social ideologies and policies of the Polish Insurrection. In *Nad Niemnem*, the social clash between Korczyński and Bohaterowicz families did not reminisce the brief period of unity and appreciation of each other's interests that coincided with the events of 1862 and 1863.

To realize her hopes for a better future, Eliza Orzeszkowa tried to recruit kindred spirits among the younger generation by her positive portrayal in *Nad Niemnem* of reform-minded young characters that included Witold Korczyński and Justyna Orzelska,

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<sup>105</sup> Orzeszkowa, Eliza. *Listy Zebrane*. Volume II. Edited by Edmund Jankowski. Wrocław: Zakład Imienia Ossolińskich (Wydawnictwo Polskiej Akademii Nauk), 1955. p.30. \* Translation\*- "Głównym źródłem jej wątku jest powstanie 1863 roku. Przy tym w roku 1863 na Litwie szlachta zagrodowa odegrywała rolę niezmiernie czynną, obywatelstwo żyło z nią wtedy po bratersku i zaprowadziło ją, gdzie chciało-potem puściło ją na pastwę ciemnoty i powolnego dziczenia." Leopold Méyet- He was Eliza's closest friend in Warsaw, and he was also her lawyer. Leopold was a writer and he was actively involved in the Jewish assimilation into the Polish culture but he also advocated for Polish acceptance and tolerance for Jews in Poland.

a poor and distant cousin of the Korczyński clan. Witold believed that his father Benedykt Korczyński had abandoned the ideals for which his brother Andrzej had fought and died in the January Uprising of 1863. Witold believed that the gentry and peasants should unite and work together toward advancing social and economic harmony and reform. He wanted to commemorate his uncle's memory by resurrecting the dream once shared by the landed gentry and *szlachta zaściankowa*. His father Benedykt finally realized that Witold was Andrzej's ideological heir and that by turning away from his son, he would lose him not in the battle as he had lost his brother but rather in disagreement over political opinions and policies.

Justyna Orzelska was another character in *Nad Niemnem* who experienced a personal identity crisis in the Polish gentry society whose main interests involved trying to acquire greater wealth and social status. Justyna's presence in the Korczyński's household went unnoticed by the privileged Poles living nearby because she did not possess any wealth that would attract eligible bachelors. Furthermore, wealthy "gentlemen" who wanted an "exciting adventure" rather than a proper relationship subjected Justyna to improper advances. Eventually, Ms. Orzelska met Jan Bohatyrowicz, who was respectful, well mannered and pleasant but who unfortunately belonged to the *szlachta zaściankowa*. Nonetheless, Justyna did not form her feelings and opinions based upon class but rather upon mutual respect and admiration. She understood that by marrying Jan, the peasant, she would be

ridiculed by the gentry society because she would be committing misalliance. Regardless of her lack of funds, she was still a noblewoman by birth and as such belonged "officially" to the Polish upper class. Eliza Orzeszkowa deliberately portrayed the union between Justyna and Jan positively in *Nad Niemnem* because she wanted to encourage reconciliation between the two classes.

Given Eliza Orzeszkowa's own gentry background, she keenly understood the prejudices and economic interests of her own social class. More than most other daughters of the gentry, Eliza genuinely appreciated the finer qualities of Polish peasants and sought to better understand them through the exercise of her sympathy and imagination as well as through meticulous observation and charitable work. Throughout her literary career, Eliza frequently wrote about the lives of peasants, especially women. She always had kind words to say about them because she was well aware of the hard lives that they led. Eliza usually categorized peasants as naïve creatures who were abused by all types of "scoundrels".<sup>106</sup> Women like Pietrusia in *Dziurdziowie*, Franka from *Cham*, and Krystyna from *Niziny* were based upon real individuals whom Eliza encountered during her stays in the countryside.

Eliza's presence still lingers in the villages along the Niemen River in northeastern Poland and in Lithuania. All of the estates and peasant cottages mentioned in her books have vanished, leaving behind only traces of foundations. Yet, the

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<sup>106</sup> Bigay-Mianowska, Aleksandra. *Spółeczeństwo polskie w twórczości Elizy Orzeszkowej*. Kraków: Księgarnia Stefana Kaminskiego, 1941. p.72.

mass grave of the participants of the January Uprising of 1863 is still at its original location in Miniewicze. Eliza's legendary bench, on which she used to sit when writing her famous epic, *Nad Niemnem*, is now a popular tourist attraction.<sup>107</sup> Although Eliza is long gone, her presence is acknowledged and preserved in the Niemen region, where her literary legacy remains as integral part of late nineteenth and twentieth century Polish history.

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<sup>107</sup> Stępnik, Krzysztof, ed. *Twórczość Elizy Orzeszkowej*. Lublin: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marii Skłodowskiej, 2001. See article by Małgorzata Ostrówka, p.44.



## Chapter IV

**Eliza Orzeszkowa and the Jewish Question**

"As for myself, I always had compassion and liking toward the Israelites. In their lives, I see similarity to the fate of my nation; and with painful speculation, I can see both societies intertwined with the destiny of common misfortune, wandering and humiliation."<sup>108</sup>

The relationship between Poles and Jews in the lands of partitioned Poland during the 1850s became more unbalanced and tense as a consequence of such developments as the granting of equal political rights to Jews and the growth in Jewish wealth and economic investments which affected the Polish middle classes and also the urban Polish lower classes.<sup>109</sup> By 1859, *the Warsaw Gazette* had launched a full blown political and social campaign against the Jewish bourgeois class of Warsaw.<sup>110</sup> In 1859, a critical response to this "Jewish War" came from Aleksander Kraushar, a Jewish Pole who published a poem in which he lamented: "For centuries, with glowing hearts, our fathers shed blood for Poland's freedom. Why are we today rejected with

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<sup>108</sup> Detko, Jan. *Eliza Orzeszkowa*. Warszawa: Wiedza Powszechna, 1971. p.100. \*Translation\*- " Co do mnie, miałam zawsze dla Izraelitów współczucie i pewną sympatię, wzmożoną jeszcze tym, że w losie ich niezmiernie widzę podobieństwo do losów mego narodu, a z boleścią przypuszczam, że przyszłe obu społeczeństw przeznaczenia mogą się ściśle zbratać wspólną dolą nieszczęścia, tułactwa i poniżenia."

<sup>109</sup> Opalski, Magdalena, and Israel Bartal. *Poles and Jews: A Failed Brotherhood*. Hanover, N.H: University Press of New England, 1992. p.16.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, p.18.

contempt? Why do the Poles not see in the Jew a friend and a brother?"<sup>111</sup>

In fictional and in political pamphlets, Eliza Orzeszkowa sought to examine critically the relationship between Poles and Jews and also the means by which this relationship might be improved to the benefit of both peoples. For example, in her pamphlet on "The Jews and the Jewish Question" (1882), she wrote about the Poles, in which she stated "We say: enlighten, improve, assimilate, unite- but our knowledge of those who are to be enlightened, improved, assimilated and united by us may for many reasons be called childish. What do we know about Jews? From what point of view do we look at them? On what foundations do we base our opinions about them?"<sup>112</sup> In another article "Patriotism" (1886), Bolesław Prus contended that "whenever the question of the relationship of Jews to Christians comes to the fore, my anti-Semitic colleagues think only on the faults of the Jews and of the virtues of the Christians."<sup>113</sup> Similarly, in her "The Jews and the Jewish Question", Eliza Orzeszkowa criticized Poles for perceiving the stereotypical Jew to be "a cheat, an exploiter, and a fanatic when he belongs to the mass of the ignorant and poor; and boastful, arrogant and vainglorious when he has become rich. Such is the Jew according to the conceptions we Poles have established! Is this the case, and nothing more? Do we not look

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid., p.18. See Kraushar, Alexander full poem.

<sup>112</sup> Olszer, Krystyna, ed. *For Our Freedom and Yours: The Polish Progressive Spirit from the Fourteenth Century to the Present*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York: F. Ungar, 1981. p.113. See the article by Orzeszkowa, Eliza: "The Jews and the Jewish Question." (English translation).

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., p.111. See article by Prus, Bolesław.

in this social group of human beings to seek any other features and characteristics?"<sup>114</sup>

As noted, by 1860, the political situation in Russian Poland had become unstable; and Poles were becoming increasingly hostile toward the Russian authorities. The majority of Poles were also questioning the extent to which Jews were supporting Polish aspirations for independence. A breakthrough to the improvement of Polish-Jewish relations came during the patriotic demonstrations in Warsaw and the funeral of the five Polish victims killed on February 27, 1861, by the Russian military during earlier peaceful demonstrations. On this occasion, Poles and Jews emphasized their bonds of brotherhood and of mutual interests in promoting civil liberties and national unity between Poles and Jews.<sup>115</sup> Waves of protests spread from Warsaw to other cities of Poland. Churches and synagogues performed patriotic services and songs and exchanged gifts. Displays of national mourning proliferated throughout Polish and Jewish communities.<sup>116</sup> On March 13, 1861, prominent Jewish authorities, including Rabbi Beer Meisels (1798-1870), issued a statement to the Jewish inhabitants of Russian occupied Poland, urging them to unify in support of the Polish struggle for independence. Jewish involvement in this movement was also motivated by aspirations to gain greater autonomy and social reforms for Jews in the Congress

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid., p.113. See article by Orzeszkowa, Eliza.

<sup>115</sup> Eisenbach, Artur. *The emancipation of the Jews in Poland, 1780-1870*. Edited by Anthony Polonsky. Translated by Janina Dorosz. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991. p.433.

<sup>116</sup> Opalski, Magdalena, and Israel Bartal. *Poles and Jews: A Failed Brotherhood*. Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1992. p.42.

Kingdom.<sup>117</sup> In his speech on the Jewish New Year of 1861, Rabbi Beer Meisels declared: "We Jews should love the native people of Poland more than any other people. Because they are our brothers, we sons of our patriarchal ancestors, the sons of Eran (Ezawa) who wrote that even dry piece of bread is good in peaceful Poland, where the Poles do not hate us and let us keep our tradition and religion."<sup>118</sup> Rabbi Izaak Kramsztyk (1814-1889) delivered a speech during the synagogue meeting of November 9 1861, in which he announced: "Currently our Mother Poland recognizes us as her legitimate sons; our Polish brothers hold us tight to their brotherly hearts, and they share with us their possessions and grant us their affections, longing and love."<sup>119</sup>

Eliza Orzeszkowa always positively remembered her having heard one of the many speeches delivered by Rabbi Beer Meisels, she wrote: "In 1862 when I was nineteen, I came to Warsaw where I stayed for a couple of months. During my stay, I went to the synagogue where I heard a great sermonizer speaking in Polish. This was Rabbi Beer Meisels whose appearance and speech lodged

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<sup>117</sup> Eisenbach, Artur. *The emancipations of the Jews in Poland, 1780-1870*. Edited by Anthony Polonsky. Translated by Janina Dorosz. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991. p.434.

<sup>118</sup> Eisenbach, Artur, D. Fajnhauz, and A. Wein, eds. *Żydzi a powstanie styczniowe*. Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1963. p.34 \*Translation\*- "Rodowitych mieszkanców Polski powinniśmy więcej kochać aniżeli mieszkanców wszystkich innych krajów. Albowiem one rzeczywiście są naszymi braćmi, synami naszych przodków patriarchów, synami Eranego(Ezawa) i napisał, że suchy nawet kawałek chleba dobry jest ze spokojem w kraju polskim, gdzie nie nienawidzą nas i pozwalają nam trzmać się praw świętego zakonu naszego." This speech was delivered in Polish, not Yiddish.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., p.36. \*Translation\*- "Obecnie nasza Matka-Ojczyzna uznaje nas za prawych synów swoich, obecnie nas bracia Polacy, prztulając nas do braterskiego swego serca, dzielą sie z nami swoim, ile posiadają dziedzictwa, obdarzają nas czułością, rzewnością i miłością serdeczną." This speech was delivered in Polish, not Yiddish.

themselves in my memory..."<sup>120</sup> How favorably impressed Eliza remained will become evident below in a discussion of her essays and fictional writings on Polish-Jewish relations.

In March 1861, the Agricultural Society, a civic organization established by the Polish landowning class, showed no intention of recognizing the emancipation of the Jews of Russian Poland and did not want to grant them civil rights equal to Christians.<sup>121</sup> The landowning class and the conservative Catholic clergy did not approve of the Polish patriotic movement, whose members supported Jewish emancipation. For example, this disapproval was evident in Archbishop Zygmunt Feliński's prejudiced assertion that "Jews have been sent to Poland by God to be a gutter in this era of stock exchange, trade and swindling and to carry away all the dirt that ought not to soil Polish hands that are clean, knightly and destined for other ends."<sup>122</sup>

By July 1862, the internal political situation in the Congress Kingdom was growing increasingly tense due to the rivalry of Poles and Russians in trying to win support for their respective national agendas from the peasantry and from Jews.<sup>123</sup> Under the tutelage of the Russian government, Count Aleksander Wielopolski (1803-1877), the Polish nobleman recently appointed to head a Polish civil administration, and Grand Duke

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<sup>120</sup> Detko, Jan. *Orzeszkowa Wobec Tradycji Narodowo-Wyzwoleńczych*. Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1965. p.35. \*Translation\*- "W 1862 roku, mając lat 19, przyjechałam do Warszawy... bawiłam tam parę miesięcy, bywałam w synagogach i słyszałam parę razy wyborczego kaznodzieję, przemawiającego po polsku, rabina Majselesa. Jego postać i jego mowa utkwiły mi w pamięci...."

<sup>121</sup> Eisenbach, Artur. *The Emancipation of the Jews in Poland, 1780-1870*. Edited by Anthony Polonsky. Translated by Janina Dorosz. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991. p.441.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, p.458. This speech was already translated into English in the book.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, p.469.

Constantine, the newly created viceroy of Russian Poland, began to implement the decrees of May and June of 1862, which introduced many reforms including Jewish emancipation and improvements in public education and the judiciary.<sup>124</sup> Wielopolski and Constantine were disappointed in their hope that these reforms would advance economic prosperity and political stability while beginning to satisfy Polish national aspirations. Instead, radical Polish groups, emboldened by expectations of achieving even greater national autonomy, began to express dissatisfaction at the perceived inadequacies of the reforms and the slow pace of their realization.

By August 1863, all Polish hopes for intervention by the Western powers in favor of Polish independence were bleak; and the Czarist government did not want to resume its pre-1863 reconciliation policy.<sup>125</sup> Important Polish political figures such as Władysław Czartoryski, Władysław Zamoyski and Napoleon Feliks Żaba had taken the initiative in campaigning overseas for the Polish national cause by seeking support from Jews in France, Britain and the United States of America. The January Uprising of 1863 had occurred twenty months after the outbreak of the American Civil War. Because Britain and France expressed sympathy for the Confederacy and because Russia had supported the Union by

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<sup>124</sup> For detailed discussions of these reforms and their consequences, see: Leslie, R.F. *Reform and Insurrection in Russian Poland, 1856-1865*. New York: Oxford University Press Inc, 1963. pp.138-153. Limanowski, Bolesław. *Historia Powstania Narodu Polskiego, 1863 i 1864 R.* Second edition: Lwów: Polskie Towarzystwo Nakładowe, 1909. pp.115-135. Wandycz, Piotr. *The lands of partitioned Poland, 1795-1918*. Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1974. pp.155-179 and pp.193-213.

<sup>125</sup> Eisenbach, Artur. *The Emancipation of the Jews in Poland, 1780-1870*. Edited by Anthony Polonsky. Translated by Janina Dorosz. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991. p.487.

not recognizing the Confederacy, the Lincoln administration chose not to risk losing Russia's support by expressing any sympathy toward the Polish Insurrection.<sup>126</sup>

The January Uprising of 1863 did not achieve any lasting political or social partnership between Poles and Jews. Even though the emancipation of the Jews in Poland had established their rights to freedom and equality before the law, the prospect of full Jewish assimilation into Polish culture was still questioned by many Poles.<sup>127</sup> As late as 1900, the *Przegląd Katolicki* (*The Catholic Review*) asserted "the emancipation of Jews was a great mistake on the part of Europeans who had succumbed to 'day-dreaming' about men's equality before the law, forgetting that the aim of this nation (the Jews) was to conquer the world and destroy Christianity."<sup>128</sup> Walery Przyborowski, a Pole who supported the partitioning powers, declared "the emancipation of Jews in 1862 was an act that brought no benefit to the country of Poland."<sup>129</sup> During the 1870s and 1880s, the effects of Polish anti-Semitism were evident in many aspects of Polish and Jewish lives. In the minds of most Polish Catholics, Jews were perceived to be "Christ killers". Many Polish peasants blamed Jews for causing plague, hunger and privation.<sup>130</sup> Such judeophobia also existed in the Catholic Church as well as among Polish peasants. Nonetheless, many Polish patriots found such

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<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, p.494.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, p.518.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, p.521.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, p.521.

<sup>130</sup> Cała, Alina. *Asymilacja żydów w Królestwie Polskim, 1864-1897: podstawy, konflikty, stereotypy*. Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1989. p.184.

prejudiced behavior to be distasteful and vulgar and refused to reinforce or to become engaged in any anti-Jewish undertakings.<sup>131</sup>

From the 1870s onward, the more strident proponents of Polish nationalism in the Kingdom of Poland poisoned the political atmosphere by advocating anti-Semitism, as evidenced in the Polish press of the 1880s and in the anti-Jewish pogrom of 1881 in Warsaw. On the other hand, the Positivist movement, which dominated Polish intellectual life between the 1870s and 1880s in the Kingdom of Poland, appeared to be well disposed toward the Jews.<sup>132</sup> Topics such as Jewish identity, assimilation, and anti-Semitism were discussed among Polish liberals in Warsaw during the height of Polish-Jewish tensions in 1881.<sup>133</sup> Aleksander Świętochowski, one of Warsaw's leading positivists, argued that "Were Jews should become Poles, the threat of anti-Jewish violence would disappear."<sup>134</sup> He also claimed "the Jews ought to repay the 'hospitality' and 'honest protection' they enjoyed in Poland by assimilating."<sup>135</sup> During the violent 1881 pogrom against the Warsaw Jews, Świętochowski attacked the Warsaw intelligentsia for not taking an active part in trying to improve Polish-Jewish relations.<sup>136</sup> Eliza Orzeszkowa described her

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<sup>131</sup> Porter, Brian. *When Nationalism Began to Hate. Imagining Modern Politics in Nineteenth -Century Poland*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000. p.159.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, p.161.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, p.162.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, p.162.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, p.162.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, p.162.



reaction to the pogrom of 1881 in Warsaw as a combination of "disgrace, pity and regret".<sup>137</sup>

By the mid-1880s, the Polish "Warsaw positivists" had begun to disagree among themselves regarding the process of Jewish assimilation into Polish culture. Most positivists welcomed assimilated Jewish intellectuals and businessmen into Polish society but only if these Jews stopped referring to themselves as being Jewish.<sup>138</sup> In 1886, a famous biologist, Józef Nusbaum (1859-1917), proclaimed himself to be both a Jew and a Pole. But, one of the leading positivists, Bolesław Prus, openly criticized Nusbaum by declaring that "Nusbaum is not a Jew, because instead of going around in a dirty gabardine and eternally unbuttoned pants, he dresses in a European manner. Instead of speaking Yiddish, he speaks perfectly correct Polish. Instead of becoming a dubious mediator, a usurer, or the manager of a public house.. he took up medicine and literature."<sup>139</sup> Why did Prus so strongly object to Nusbaum's pride in his Jewish roots? Was and is it not possible for a Jew to become a doctor, a lawyer or intellectual while continuing to practice Judaism and to appreciate his or her cultural background? What makes an assimilated Jew so different from a native Pole? In his article "Patriotism" (1886), Prus referred to his Polish colleagues as being anti-Semitic, without acknowledging his own strongly anti-Semitic reaction to Doctor Nusbaum's proclamation. According to Aleksander Hertz in his

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid., p.162.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., p.163.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., p.163.

book, *The Jews in Polish Culture*, "an assimilated Jew had to display all the virtues of Polishness: an excellent mastery of the language, a total adaptation of all Polish customs, self-sacrifice devotion to the cause of Poland, a complete renunciation of his or hers Jewish past. In short, he or she had to be an ideal denial of the image of the Jew that prevailed among people hostile to Jews."<sup>140</sup> This Polish definition of an assimilated Jew takes no account of the fact that most people are reluctant to reject all aspects of the religion and other traditions of their parents. Moreover, this definition suggested that Jews should employ an excessively destructive method of annihilating their religious, cultural and historical identity.

Eliza Orzeszkowa never endorsed Prus's attitude toward the Jews of Poland in large part because she established close contacts with the Jewish community in Grodno after moving there in 1869 from her father's estate. She thus witnessed Jewish isolation from the native Polish population of Grodno, as well as Jewish poverty, separatism and what prejudiced Poles perceived to be Jewish "religious fanaticism" and "tribal egoism".<sup>141</sup> Orzeszkowa took a sympathetic interest in the Jewish question quite early in her literary career. In 1870, she wrote a letter to S.H. Peltyn (date of birth unknown) the editor of *Izraelita* (*The Israelite*), a Jewish magazine that advocated assimilation for Polish Jews. In this letter Eliza wrote: "For some time now, I would like to learn about everything that deals with history of

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<sup>140</sup> Hertz, Aleksander. *Żydzi w kulturze polskiej*. Więzi: Warszawa, 2003. p.170.

<sup>141</sup> Detko, Jan. *Eliza Orzeszkowa*. Warszawa: Wiedza Powszechna, 1971. p.49.

Israelites."<sup>142</sup> Subsequently, under S.H. Peltyn's instruction, Eliza began to study the Talmud and historical works dealing with Jewish history by Ludwig Gumplowicz (1838-1909), Tadeusz Czacki (1765-1813) and Heinrich Graetz (1817-1891).<sup>143</sup> In addition to these studies, Eliza wrote to Maria Konopnicka about her pursuits in learning Hebrew: "A few years ago I began to study Hebrew in order to write my great work about Jews. But I have begun to experience problems with my eyes, and I will not be able to return to my studies of the Hebrew language."<sup>144</sup>

During Eliza's long literary career, she wrote several novels and articles concerning Polish-Jewish relations. Novels such as *Eli Makower* (*Eli Makower*, 1875), *Meir Ezofowicz* (*Forsaken*, 1878), *Mirtala* (*Mirtala*, 1883) and short stories such as *Daj Kwiatek* (*Give me a Flower!*, 1877), *Silny Samson* (*Strong Samson*, 1877), *Gedali* (*Gedali*, 1884), *Ogniwa* (*The Links*, 1894) and also article such as "Jews and the Jewish Question" (1882) expressed Eliza's personal observations on the political and social interaction between Poles and Jews during the late nineteenth century.<sup>145</sup> Eliza hoped that her Jewish novels and articles would serve to help facilitate Jewish assimilation into

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<sup>142</sup> Pauszer-Klonowska, Gabriela. *Zwykłe Sprawy przewykłych ludzi*. Lublin: Wydawnictwo Lubelskie, 1978. p.73. \*Translation\*- "Od dawna już pragnę gorąco poznać się ze wszystkim, co się tyczy społeczności izraelskiej."

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, p.73.

<sup>144</sup> Konopnicka, Maria. *Korespondencja*. Volume II, 1879-1910. Edited by Edmund Jankowski. Wrocław, Warszawa i Kraków: Zakład Narodowy Imienia Ossolińskich (Wydawnictwo Polskiej Akademii Nauk), 1972. p.27. \*Translation\*- "Ja parę lat temu zaczęłam się uczyć po hebrajsku w zamiarze napisania wielce uczonego dzieła o żydach, lecz zachorowałam na oczy i prawdopodobnie nigdy już do zamiaru tego nie wrócę."

<sup>145</sup> Stępnik, Krzysztof, ed. *Twórczość Elizy Orzeszkowej*. Lublin: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej, 2001. p.197. See article by Szabłowska, Monika.

Polish culture. She believed such assimilation would be a positive and logical complement to the 1862 emancipation of the Jews by bringing the two different cultures together in a single national community.

Though most Polish Jews appreciated Eliza Orzeszkowa's informed and sympathetic understanding of their situation and traditions, many of these Jews had little desire to assimilate into Polish culture. Before Jews were emancipated in 1862, conversion to Catholicism followed by baptism was a necessary first step for any Jew who wished to become a member of the gentry (*szlachta*).<sup>146</sup> Many of these relatively few Jews who had entered the gentry also joined the Polish intelligentsia and thereby facilitated their assimilation into Polish society through their many contributions to Polish arts and letters. Other assimilated Jews had achieved prominence through their success as entrepreneurs or managers in commerce, manufacturing, transportation and banking.<sup>147</sup> Throughout the nineteenth century, many young Jews were leaving ghettos to embrace the greater opportunities for employment and education in urban areas. The social, cultural and economic aspects of urbanization challenged traditional Jewish ideals and interest. The Jewish masses were thereby torn between the ideals of the past and of the future. To many Jews, assimilation was the unavoidable choice.<sup>148</sup> According to Aleksander Hertz, "the anti-Semites, saw assimilation as the

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<sup>146</sup> Hertz, Aleksander. *Żydzi w kulturze polskiej*. Więzi: Warszawa, 2003. p.125.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.147-148

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.165-166.

pernicious infiltration of Polish culture by elements that carried alien and hostile values."<sup>149</sup> Furthermore, Hertz writes "the Jewish side saw assimilation as defection and the assimilationists as defectors from the Jewish cause. Assimilation was harmful to Jewish life because it impoverished it, and the assimilationists were traitors to their own people."<sup>150</sup>

In Grodno, Eliza Orzeszkowa interacted with the Jewish community that was stratified socially and economically according to class and occupation. One member of this community, Doctor Zamkowski, enhanced Eliza's knowledge about the Jews of Grodno, their lives and traditions.<sup>151</sup> Eliza explored the Jewish community in Grodno by visiting female merchants in the market place and also by walking around Grodno's Jewish neighborhood and observing its inhabitants. Eliza gained the trust and sympathy of this Jewish community by her honesty, by her advocacy of Polish solidarity with Polish Jews, and by her criticism of Polish chauvinism.<sup>152</sup> As Eliza explored the Jewish community in her hometown, she also expended her circle of friends to include members of the Jewish intelligentsia. In Warsaw, Eliza's close circle of Jewish friends included the publisher Franciszek Salezy Lewental (1839-1902), the writer Stanisław Posner (1869-1930), the lawyer Leopold Méyet and Doctor Henryk Nusbaum (1849-1937).

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<sup>149</sup> Ibid., p.163.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., p.163.

<sup>151</sup> Godelewski, Franciszek. *Pani Orzeszkowa. (Wspomnienia.)* Warszawa: Dom Książki Polskiej SP. AKC, 1934. p.40.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., p.40.

All of these men were members of the Jewish intelligentsia and supported the assimilation of Jews into Polish culture.

Given these ensuing friendships, it is not surprising that Orzeszkowa believed that the assimilation of Polish Jews into Polish society would diminish overtime the dislike and distrust that many Poles and Jews felt toward one another? Besides, Orzeszkowa believed that assimilating Jews into Polish society would strengthen it politically and economically and thereby facilitate the eventual achievement of Polish political autonomy or independence. Finally, Orzeszkowa perceived her assimilated Jewish friends primarily as friends and not as either Poles or as recent assimilated Jews.

Eliza Orzeszkowa's first publication on Polish- Jewish relations was *Eli Makower*, a novel that dealt with Jewish separatism from the Polish community and of Jewish economic exploitation of the landed gentry. After the failure of the January Uprising of 1863, many Polish landowners were slowly losing their estates because of the heavy taxes imposed by the Russian authorities. Some Jews who sought financial opportunities served as agents in the sale of estates and were often able to make enormous profits by doing so. The title protagonist in the novel *Eli Makower* was portrayed as one of the agents who tried to make a profit by selling Orchów, the estate of Mieczysław Orchowski. Eli's father Judel and Mieczysław's father Kajetan were connected to each other in the past of which Eli Makower was ignorant. Kajetan Orchowski had helped Judel Makower financially

when his family faced poverty and starvation. Judel reminded Eli of Kajetan's assistance and urged him to stop the sale of Mieczysław's estate. Furthermore, Judel told Eli that Poles and Jews should embrace brotherhood and have respect for each other. At the end of the novel, Eli Makower and Mieczysław Orchowski "joined in a long handshake. Their faces reflected shining, honest, sincere emotion, faith in the future and confident hope."<sup>153</sup> In reality, however, this "faith in the future and confident hope" for improvements in relations between Poles and Jews was unlikely to be realized. The Polish landowners blamed their downfall on Jewish greed and Jewish financial manipulations as well as on the confiscatory and vengeful policies of the Russian government. This attitude along with a Polish disinclination to engage in self-criticism, limited any efforts of national reconciliation and cooperation between Poles and Jews.

In another novel *Meir Ezofowicz*, Eliza Orzeszkowa addressed the issue of Jewish fanaticism and separatism from Polish culture. Her main character is Meir, a member of prosperous merchant family from Szybów. His character is destined to enlighten the Jewish population of Szybów of their blind obedience to tradition toward Orthodox Judaic doctrines propagated by Rabbi Todros to Szybów's Jews.<sup>154</sup> Rabbi Izaak Todros was respected and admired by many Jews of Szybów for his vast

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<sup>153</sup> Kolodziej, Joyce. *Eliza Orzeszkowa's Feminist and Jewish Works in Polish and Russian Criticism*. Bloomington Indiana University, Ph.D Dissertation, 1975. p.318.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, p.331.

knowledge of the Kabbala and Talmud.<sup>155</sup> Meir Ezofowicz acknowledged Rabbi Todros's finer qualities but he believed that the Rabbi's devotion to the Jewish traditions and his separatism from the Polish community bordered on fanaticism. His forefathers influenced Meir, Michał and Hersz Ezofowicz, who both had studied the writings of Maimonides (1135-1204) had both eagerly participated in the reforms to improve the status of Jews of the Polish Commonwealth.<sup>156</sup> Rabbi Todros's ancestors did not recognize the teachings of Maimonides whose teachings supported the progress of the Jewish nation. According to Todros's ancestors, these teachings rather threaten the true integrity of Judaism.<sup>157</sup> Meir's opposition to Rabbi Todros assured the resentment of the Jewish community of Szybów against Meir because no one dared to challenge the principal local religious authority. Furthermore, Meir was accused of treachery against his own people when he uncovered Jankiel Kamionker's plot to burn down the distillery, which he was leasing from a Polish landowner in order to cover up Jankiel's illegal operations.<sup>158</sup> In the end, Meir Ezofowicz was accused of blasphemy and betrayal; and a council of elders, which included Rabbi Todros, sentenced him to be excommunicated.<sup>159</sup> Meir left the village with the intention of

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<sup>155</sup> Ibid., p.332.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., p.330.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., pp.330-331.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., p.333.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., p.334.



coming back and helping his people to understand the true meaning of a united Polish nation.<sup>160</sup>

Eliza Orzeszkowa expressed her personal opinion on this issue in an argument that "Jews should abandon their 'superstitions' and that Poles should discard their alcohol. Both should move together toward 'civilization'."<sup>161</sup> Eliza was greatly disappointed that her publications on Polish-Jewish relations did not diminish the anti-Semitic prejudices of many Poles. In the outbreak of the anti-Semitic riots of 1890 in Warsaw, Orzeszkowa wrote to Maria Konopnicka: "From Warsaw, this poison spills all over the country, and I do not have to explain to you, my dear Mary, that this deteriorating public conscience will bring danger in the future."<sup>162</sup> In responding to Orzeszkowa's letter in March 1890, Konopnicka asserted " I am not a big supporter of the Jews, but I hate the injustice and the oppression. I am not going to praise them; but if they are persecuted, I will support them."<sup>163</sup> Why did Konopnicka, a positivist, reveal "anti-Semitic" prejudice in her letter? Was she reaffirming the same views as Prus and other positivists had expressed during the 1880s? Eliza Orzeszkowa and Maria Konopnicka both supported social and

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<sup>160</sup> Ibid., p.334.

<sup>161</sup> Porter, Brian. *When Nationalism Began to Hate. Imagining Modern Politics in Nineteenth-Century Poland*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000. p.163.

<sup>162</sup> Konopnicka, Maria. *Korespondencja*. Volume II, 1879-1910. Edited by Edmund Jankowski. Wrocław, Warszawa i Kraków: Zakład Narodowy Imienia Ossolińskich (Wydawnictwo Polskiej Akademii Nauk), 1972. p.53. \*Translation\*- " Naturalnie stamtąd trucizna rozlewa się po całym kraju i nie tobie , droga Mario, tłumaczyć trzeba, jakie zepsucie sumienia publicznego i jakie na przyszłość groźne siejby z sobą roznosi."

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., p.54. \*Translation\*- "Wielką zwolenniczką Żydów nie jestem; ale nienawidzę ucisku i niesprawiedliwości. Chwalić ich, gdyby byli spokojni nie potrafiła. Ale kiedy są prześladowani, po ich stronie staję."

political equality among Poles and Jews, but Eliza Orzeszkowa more vigorously and publicly denounced Polish anti-Semites. Perhaps Konopnicka did not share Orzeszkowa's determination to effect positive changes in relations between Poles and Jews. One can only wonder why Konopnicka portrayed Jews positively in her published short stories even though she did not particularly like Jews. Eliza Orzeszkowa herself was "questioned" about alleged "anti-Semitic" undertones in one of her books, *Mirtala*, by the publisher Franciszek Salezy Lewental (1839-1902).<sup>164</sup> It is virtually impossible to imagine Eliza Orzeszkowa as an anti-Semite principally because she dedicated almost fifty years of her life in the support of Jewish causes. She viewed the anti-Semitic riots of 1890 in Warsaw, as a harbinger for what could well be a dangerously unstable future for Polish Jews.

The "predicated danger" would not come until the summer of 1941 when the Nazis took over Grodno. Upon their arrival, the first act that they committed was to destroy Orzeszkowa's monument in Grodno after referring to her as "diese Judenmutter" (the Jewish mother).<sup>165</sup> Until Orzeszkowa's death in 1910, she was an outspoken critic of Polish anti-Semitism and a frequent advocate of Jewish interests in Russian Poland. But, in 1941, it was not from Warsaw as in the 1880s and 1890s, but from Nazi

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<sup>164</sup> Stępnik, Krzysztof, ed. *Twórczość Elizy Orzeszkowej*. Lublin: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marii – Skłodowskiej, 2001. See article by Szablowska, Monika: "Kreacja bohatera żydowskiego w powieściach Elizy Orzeszkowej." p.205.

<sup>165</sup> Pauszer-Klonowska, Gabriela. *Zwykłe Sprawy przewyżkłych ludzi*. Lublin: Wydawnictwo Lubelskie, 1978. p.72.

Germany that catastrophe arrived to overwhelm the Jewish people of Poland.

## Chapter V

**Eliza Orzeszkowa as an Advocate of Women's Emancipation**

"A woman amounts to no more than a "zero" unless a man stands next to her as a complementary digit. According to the law and human traditions, a woman is not a human being; rather a woman is a thing."<sup>166</sup>

As a writer and a woman, Eliza Orzeszkowa consistently pledged her devotion to promoting public acceptance of every woman's right to political equality and the opportunity to obtain employment suitable to her needs. Her critical assertions that "a woman is a thing" in her novel *Marta (Martha, 1873)*, is a harsh and realistic description of the predicament of women in the political, economic and social context of the mid-nineteenth century Poland. As a young woman, Orzeszkowa was trained to become "one of the ladies" and without revealing any of her own inhibitions. Her obligations to "high society" involved enjoying her privileged lifestyle while feigning ignorance of lack of interest in social and political problems. After Orzeszkowa completed boarding school in Warsaw in 1852, she was "promised" in marriage to Piotr Orzeszko after a single uneventful encounter at a society ball. An arranged marriage was then the preferred means of the Polish gentry for maintaining the social class

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<sup>166</sup> Orzeszkowa, Eliza. *Marta*. Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1970. p.157.

equilibrium and for advancing the growth, prestige and economic assets of one's family. "I knew I had to get married soon, that was my mother's wish; and our tradition demands it. Whom should I marry? I did not really care."<sup>167</sup> Eliza's ill-considered decision to marry Piotr caused her grief and unhappiness before she finally decided to divorce him and undertake a fresh start as an independent woman. As a writer who advocated for women's rights, Orzeszkowa believed that a self-critical evaluation of her past was essential in facilitating her new departure and as a challenge in promoting popular awareness of women's rights in the age of political and social defeat for the Polish people.

The Polish feminist movement emerged during the nineteenth century three principal phases. The first phase is commonly known as a pedagogical (pedagogiczna) one, in which Klementyna Tańska Hoffmanowa (1798-1845) served as the principal spokeswoman of the movement. Hoffmanowa derived her ideal vision of a Polish woman on the basis of both "Christian/Conservative" and "civil rights" ideologies.<sup>168</sup> Klementyna Hoffmanowa was the "first pioneer" of women's participation in the public eye in partitioned Poland.<sup>169</sup> She emphasized the necessity of training and encouraging "professional women" and also of creating and promoting the goal of "useful work for the unmarried woman."<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> Bigay-Mianowska, Aleksandra. *Spółeczeństwo polskie w twórczości Elizy Orzeszkowej*. Kraków: Księgarnia Stefana Kaminskiego, 1942. p.111. \*Translation\*- "Wiedziałam, że muszę wyjść za mąż bardzo rychło, bo tak sobie życzyła matka i wymagają tego zwyczaję. Za kogo? wszystko mi było jedno."

<sup>168</sup> Zmigródzka, Maria. *Orzeszkowa. Młodość pozytywizmu*. Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1965. p.189.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., p.191.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid., p.192.

The Russian suppression of November uprising of 1830 silenced the Polish feminist movement during the ensuing decade; but, by the 1840s, the Polish women's movement entered its second phase popularly identified as that of the *Entuzjastki* (the Enthusiasts). The Enthusiasts were feminists whose principal objective was to achieve "personal and intellectual freedom" for all women.<sup>171</sup> These Enthusiasts were influenced by the novels of George Sand and by many of the theories propounded by Henri de Saint Simon and during the 1840s disseminated Romantic ideologies of 1830s and pushed for political and social reforms. For example, they believed in every woman's right to intellectual freedom. Moreover, the "cult of love" and rebellion against "arranged" marriages were also on their agenda.<sup>172</sup>

*Pierwiosnek (The Primerose)*, edited by Paulina Radziejowska Krakowska (1788-1852), was the first Polish newspaper for women to publish and support the Enthusiasts, but eventually *Przegląd Naukowy (The Scientific Review)* in Warsaw took over from the *Pierwiosnek* the publication of the Enthusiast's work, thereby enabling them to find a much larger audience. The circle of the Enthusiasts included Narcyza Żmichowska (1819-1976) a writer, journalist and social worker, Wincenta Zabłocka, Anna Sokołowska Skimborowiczowa and Kazimiera Jaczewska Ziemięcka. In addition, the Enthusiasts demanded education and broader legal rights for

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<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, p.192.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, p.192.

women, as well as an opportunity for women of all social classes to develop independent convictions.<sup>173</sup>

The third phase of the Polish women's movement began after the January Uprising of 1863 whose suppression by the Czarist government had persuaded many Poles by the early 1870s to embrace Polish Positivism. The failure of the January Uprising and the liberation of the peasants in Poland revealed economic and social differences that were experienced by all social classes but were especially difficult for female population of the middle and upper classes.<sup>174</sup> Many women lost their husbands, brothers, fathers and fiancés during the uprising; and after 1863, they had limited chances of obtaining appropriate marriage proposals and financial support. The majority of these women did not possess any type of professional skills that would enable them to survive on their own. Nonetheless, the women's movement in Poland did not disappear after the January Uprising.

In the 1870s and 1880s, Polish women's efforts to achieve social and educational progress were favorably recognized by the male leadership of the Positivist movement. Women such as Eliza Orzeszkowa, Maria Konopnicka, Józefa Śmigielska-Dobieszewska (1820-1889) and Józefa Kamocka (1833-1897) contended that human rights should be provided for Polish women.<sup>175</sup> American

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<sup>173</sup> Bigay-Mianowska, Aleksandra. *Spółeczeństwo polskie w twórczości Elizy Orzeszkowej*. Kraków: Księgarnia Stefana Kaminskiego, 1941. pp.103-104. I have not yet been able to find additional information about Wincenta Zabłocka, Anna Skimborowiczowa and Kazimiera Ziemięcka.

<sup>174</sup> Kolodziej, Joyce. *Eliza Orzeszkowa's Feminist and Jewish Works in Polish and Russian Criticism*. Bloomington Indiana University, Ph.D Dissertation, 1975. p.16.

<sup>175</sup> Bigay-Mianowska, Aleksandra. *Spółeczeństwo polskie w twórczości Elizy Orzeszkowej*. Kraków: Księgarnia Stefana Kaminskiego, 1941. pp.104-105.

universities beginning with Oberlin College in 1834 were the first educational institutions in the world to enroll women into their lecture halls. In Europe, the University of Zurich began to accept women in 1864, and the Sorbonne in Paris followed suit around 1869.<sup>176</sup> Polish women were practically forced to study abroad because the universities of Austria, Germany and Russia did not accept female students.<sup>177</sup> On the whole, only a small percentage of the Polish female students succeeded in their studies due to limited enrollment, insufficient financial resources, family matters, and health reasons. The first vocational school for women in Warsaw was opened in 1874 and in its first six years of existence hosted an estimated number of 743 female students. Tailoring, floriculture, bookbinding, shoemaking and bookkeeping were some of the most popular courses there among female students.<sup>178</sup>

After the Russian suppression of the January Uprising of 1863, Eliza Orzeszkowa developed a feminist ideology in part out of traditional liberal reformism and primarily in response to Russian Poland's pressing socio-economic needs.<sup>179</sup> The defeat and dismantling of the Polish insurgency led to a collapse of traditional economic, social and political structures without any immediate hope of their resurrection. As Czarist government severely restricted Polish personal and political rights, the

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<sup>176</sup> Ibid., p.110.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., p.109.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid., pp.100-101.

<sup>179</sup> Zmigródzka, Maria. *Orzeszkowa. Młodość pozytywizmu*. Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1965. pp.191-192.



fabric of the Polish society changed. In *Z różnych sfer (From different classes)*, Orzeszkowa wrote about "people who were poor and outcast, people who had no future prospects, people who had no notion of how to achieve a better life under the circumstances of abject depression and defeat."<sup>180</sup> Orzeszkowa graphically described in this and another writings the nature of a Polish society that was spiritually and physically confined by Russian bondage. In a letter dated June 4, 1880, to T.T Jeż, Orzeszkowa asserted "fortunes have disappeared and everywhere there is financial ruin and bankruptcy. Out of all of this we have derived various types of moral and social aberration and deviancy. We can see that this financial ruin is producing a hoard of a parasites who cling to limited resources and exploit them mercilessly."<sup>181</sup> Moreover, "in the end, everyone who is working can only claim half of his or her earnings because the other half is consumed by unemployed people This non-working group includes a majority of women: old-maids, widows and the daughters of lower grade officials and of landed gentry."<sup>182</sup> Orzeszkowa did not blame these women for their unfortunate circumstances. Instead, she primarily blamed Polish men for trying to maintain pre-1863 social relationships and attitudes after the Russian suppression of the

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<sup>180</sup> Detko, Jan. *Orzeszkowa Wobec Tradycji Narodowo-Wyzwoleńczej*. Warszawa: Czyelnik, 1965. p.54.

<sup>181</sup> Orzeszkowa Eliza. *Listy Zebrane*. Volume VI. Edited by Edmund Jankowski. Wrocław, Warszawa i Kraków: Zakład Imienia Ossolińskich (Wydawnictwo Polskiej Akademii Nauk), 1967. p.97. \*Translation\*- "Fortuny upadają, ruiny i bankructwa, z winny i bez winy ponoszących je ludzi nader częste. Stąd zaś pochodzą i pochodzić muszą różne moralne wykolejenia i krzywizny. Pomiedzy wielu innymi do zaznaczenia ukazuje się ta krzywizna i klęska, iż ruiny i bankructwa wytwarzają rój pasożytów, czepiających się cudzej pracy i wyzyskujących ją niemiłosernie."

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, p.98. \*Translation\*- "Iż każdy pracujący posiada na własność połowę zaledwie zapracowanych zasobków, drugą konsumują nie pracujący. Pomiedzy tymi ostatnimi- większość kobiet, starych panien, wdów, najliczniej córek obywatelskich lub małozłacheckich, na panienki hodowanych."

January Uprising had thrown the traditional Polish class structure into dysfunctional disarray. Orzeszkowa's has referred pejoratively to a "mass of parasites" was indicative of her anger at the economic dependency of Polish women upon men.

Immediately after 1863, Orzeszkowa sought employment because she was aware of her precarious financial situation. At that point in her life, she was less influenced by the idea of the emancipation of women than by the need to obtain a job in order to survive. In *O Sobie*, Orzeszkowa wrote: "My motives were simple, I was aware that my personal wealth and possessions would soon disappear. I wanted to work because I was disgusted with the notion of anybody helping me."<sup>183</sup>

Eliza Orzeszkowa widely propagated her criticism of the unpreparedness and naiveté of women of all classes and nationalities in partitioned Poland. Throughout the 1870s and 1880s, her published works including *Kilka Słów o Kobietach* (*A Few Words about Women*, 1873), *O kobiecie* (*About a Woman*, 1891) and various short stories and novels in which she presented a comprehensive view of the status of women in Russian Poland. In Orzeszkowa's opinion, the class hierarchy of women in partitioned Poland was characterized by four principal social groups: women of the nobility, women of the landed gentry, urban working women, and women of rural society, who could in turn be subdivided into the three categories of *szlachta zaściankowa* (impoverished gentry

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<sup>183</sup> Orzeszkowa, Eliza. *O Sobie*. Edited by Julian Krzyżanowski. Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1974.

\*Translation\*- "Motywy moje były bardzo proste: spostrzegłam, że wkrótce nie będę miała majątku. Pracuję, pragnęłam pracować, miałam wstręt do przyjmowania pomocy czyjejkolwiek."

living as peasants in small villages), wives of peasant farmers, and peasant women hired for seasonal labor on country estates or on other peasants' farms.

As a general rule, Orzeszkowa described all women regardless of social status from a personal perspective. "From early childhood onward, a woman prepares to become a wife, a mother and a housewife. Alas, she understands that her purpose in life is to be part of a family and that to achieve this purpose in life she must get married."<sup>184</sup> Furthermore, "if a woman does not become a wife, a mother or a housewife, what place in society can she possibly have? What purpose in life should she serve?"<sup>185</sup> Unmarried women were considered by most Poles to be spinsters, or even ridiculous and malicious characters.<sup>186</sup>

Virtually all members of the Polish society believed that marriage was the true basis for every woman's happiness and self-realization. By way of critically evaluating this underestimation of women's potential, Orzeszkowa favorably pointed out that unmarried women in the United States and Great Britain usually devoted more time to their own personal, intellectual, and physical improvement than any Polish women. Furthermore, many American and British women did not blush or lower their eyes when love and marriage were mentioned. Rather than behave like

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<sup>184</sup> Orzeszkowa, Eliza. *Kilka słów o kobietach*. Lwów: A.J.O. Rogosz, 1873. p.14. \*Translation\*- "Kobieta od dzieciństwa słyszy, że przeznaczeniem jej, celem życia jest zostać żoną, matką, gospodynią. Innymi słowami celem kobiety jest życie rodzinne, a więc małżeństwo. Ażeby zatem dojść do zamierzonego celu, powinna wyjść za mąż."

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, p.41. \*Translation\*- "Kobieta nie będąca żoną, matką i gospodynią, czemże jest w społeczności dzisiejszej? Jakie ma pole do użytecznej i podnoszącej ją moralnie pracy? Do jakich ma dążyć celów?"

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, p.41.

lunatics under such circumstances, they understood that their minds and hearts needed to be in harmony with those of their marriage partners.<sup>187</sup> From the early stages of their mature lives, these American and British women carefully observed social interactions and through such observation learned the true laws of life.<sup>188</sup> For example, in Eliza's book *Kilka Słów of Kobietach*, Orzeszkowa argued: "In a young American woman you can rarely discern any virginal ignorance or the naïve gracefulness which characterizes a European woman in transition from childhood to adulthood. It is a rare coincidence for any American woman, regardless of her age, to be timid or unaware."<sup>189</sup>

How was Orzeszkowa able to defend her statement about American women? From what sources did Orzeszkowa obtain her information? It is not clear whether or not Orzeszkowa established any personal or professional contacts with American women. But, Orzeszkowa did in fact maintain professional relationships with female writers from Russia, Germany and Sweden. Orzeszkowa's circle of "international" friends included Anna Sacharowa from Russia, and the Germans Laura Brix and Malwina Blumberg, both of whom translated many of Orzeszkowa's books into German. Of equal importance was Ellen Wester from Sweden, who translated Orzeszkowa's books into Swedish and who was also involved in promoting Orzeszkowa's candidacy for the

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<sup>187</sup> Ibid., p.34.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid., p.35.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., p.35. \*Translation\*- " U młodej Amerykanki nigdy prawie dostrzec nie można tej dziewiczej nieświadomości ani tego naiwnego wdzięku znamionującego w Europejce przejście z dzieciństwa do lat młodzieńczych. Rzadko się przyrafia, aby Amerykanka jakiegokolwiekbądź wieku była nieśmiała lub nieświadoma."

Nobel Prize in Literature in 1905 and also in 1909.<sup>190</sup> It is possible that through her contacts with these women, Orzeszkowa's might have discussed issues regarding women's status and women's emancipation in English-speaking countries.

In Poland, from the mid-1850s to the end of the nineteenth century, a woman's family background best defined her position in society. A very common practice among Poles was to determine woman's social position by the size of her dowry. Before the failure of the January uprising, Polish women of the wealthy landed gentry enjoyed the comfort and stability provided by their families. These young women began their "educational training" by learning foreign languages (especially French, German and Italian), music, drawing, dancing, and finally how to behave in adult company in ways that would demonstrate their aristocratic upbringing.<sup>191</sup> According to Orzeszkowa, "parents always stressed that from their early childhood onward, everything worthy of respect included family origins or background, wealth, and beauty. The adjective 'appropriate' was commonly applied to behavior and dress and was used to suppress aspirations toward independence."<sup>192</sup> In the fourteenth issue of the newspaper *Kraj* (*The Country*) in 1883, Orzeszkowa asserted that "from the beginning, parents along with teachers try to eliminate their daughter's willpower and to manipulate them to grow up in their

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<sup>190</sup> I have not been able to obtain biographical information on Anna Sacharowa, Laura Brix, Malwina Blumberg and Ellen Webster.

<sup>191</sup> Bigay-Mianowska, Aleksandra. *Spółeczeństwo polskie w twórczości Elizy Orzeszkowej*. Kraków: Księgarnia Stefana Kaminskiego, 1941. p.82.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*, p.82.

parents' likeness. They do not support the growth of independent thoughts and feelings regarding moral duties. In reality they raise their daughters to become 'complete zeros' and elevate their mental passivity into virginal deification and mildness."<sup>193</sup> Such parents often employed foreign tutors for their daughters in order to bring more prestige and distinction to their households.<sup>194</sup> English governesses were deemed to be highly desirable, French teachers were considered to be "bourgeois" whereas Swiss and German governesses were viewed as being very plebian.<sup>195</sup> In *Kilka słów o Kobietach*, Orzeszkowa described "how wealthy Polish parents were amazed and outraged when they found out that their professional governesses from famous Parisian institutions like Sacré Coeur and St. Claire were in fact Parisian ex-laundresses or ex-dancers. When these women's hands and feet began to hurt from washing and dancing, many such women decided to come to Poland to begin to educate our young generation."<sup>196</sup>

Upon completing their "educational training", young daughters of wealthy Polish families began to consider and accept marriage proposals. Finding a suitable husband was an arduous activity that required one to travel in carriages and to attend

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<sup>193</sup> Ibid., p.106. \*Translation\*- "Rodzice od lat najmłodszych starają się przy pomocy nauczycielek, aby ich córka zatraciła własną wolę zupełnie, nie rozwijają w niej samodzielności myśli, poczucia moralnego obowiązków, a po prostu robią z niej wielkie zero i podnoszą tę bierność umysłową do apoteozy cnoty i łagodności, która staje się upragnionym ideałem domowego wychowania."

<sup>194</sup> Ibid., p.98.

<sup>195</sup> Orzeszkowa, Eliza. *Kilka słów o Kobietach*. Lwów: A.J.O. Rogosz, 1873. p.176.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid., p.178. \*Translation\*- "Zdarzały się fakta, że rodzice z największym zdumieniem i oburzeniem, dowiadawali się, iż zamiast uczennicy sławnych zakładów Sacré Coeur lub St. Claire, posiadają paryską praczkę lub eks-baletnicę, której gdy ręce od prania albo nogi od tańczenia zaboląły, wyjechały do nas dla kształcenia młodego pokolenia."

various social engagements. From the point of view of Polish men, marriage was merely a way to obtain their wives' dowries and to enhance their status in social circles.<sup>197</sup> The majority of Polish women became bored and dissatisfied with their marriages. In Eliza's novel *Nad Niemnem*, Emilia Korczyńska is a perfect example of a sickly and delicate privileged woman living with *globus histericus*.<sup>198</sup> Women like Emilia were afraid of windy weather, house drafts and sunlight. As Emilia observed, "from the wind I get vertigo, from drafts I get neuralgia, and from the sun I get migraines."<sup>199</sup> In their free time, these women did sewing, read French novels, and dreamt about living abroad in exotic places like Egypt. They were offended by their husbands' lack of patience and understanding.<sup>200</sup> Nevertheless, not all women were like Emilia from the novel *Nad Niemnem*. Some women became very active in high society and developed an interest in meeting foreigners from exotic places and in introducing these people to elite social circles in partitioned Poland. Idalka from Eliza's novel *Dwa Bieguny* (*The Two Poles*, 1892) was one such woman who was infatuated with her Romanian count. The drawing rooms of such women were only open to individuals with titles and considerable personal wealth.<sup>201</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> Bigay-Mianowska. Aleksandra. *Społeczeństwo polskie w twórczości Elizy Orzeszkowej*. Kraków: Księgarnia Stefana Kaminskiego, 1941. p.84.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*, p.78.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*, p.78. \*Translation\*- " Od wiatru dostaje zawrotu głowy, od przeciągów newralgii, od słońca migreny."

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*, p.79.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*, p.80.

After the Uprising of 1863, the social status of several classes of Polish women changed as a result of political repression, economic depression and an increasingly unpredictable future. The wealthy landed gentry lost its privileged position as the most powerful social class in Poland. Once deprived of their moral and financial privileges, women of this social class were not prepared to earn a living. "Masses of parasites" began to appear among the gentry in the form of unwedded daughters, jobless sons, and useless wives. Nonetheless, not all women of the gentry class and not all daughters of lower-ranking officials stayed at home and waited for "the miracle" of marriage. Many of them took jobs in the garment trade where pay was low and working conditions were poor. In her novel *Marta*, Orzeszkowa wrote about a gentle woman who had lost her husband and been left penniless with a small child. The capitalistic exploitation of Marta in a garment sweatshop illustrated the common effects of the system of mediation and of moral decline of improvised Polish gentry women.<sup>202</sup> Orzeszkowa received an overwhelmingly favorable response from women who read *Marta*. For women in partitioned Poland and in Germany, and in the Austrian-Hungarian Empire, *Marta* was their inspiration to make their lives better. In *O Sobie*, Orzeszkowa wrote: "There were some women who, after reading my novel, cried and worried about the future. Some years later, I would encounter

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<sup>202</sup> Detko, Jan. *Eliza Orzeszkowa*. Warszawa: Wiedza Powszechna, 1971. p.112.



women who told me that their reading of my novel *Marta* put them on the path to a moral and intellectual awakening."<sup>203</sup>

Eliza Orzeszkowa was able objectively and realistically to portray the sad fate of Polish gentry women because she herself was one of them. She strongly believed in opening several exclusive male professions to women. The jewelry business, for example, could be readily accessible to women because it did not require great physical strength but only manual dexterity and an understanding of "fashionable taste". In Russian Poland, the majority of jewelers did not hire women because they believed that women should give priority to their "moral" family obligations. The trades of candy making, tapestry waving, and arts and craft were not considered to be suitable employment for Polish women, whereas in France and England such jobs were open to many women.<sup>204</sup> Orzeszkowa herself was not trained in any particular trade or profession; but, by means of her literary career, she managed to establish her financial security. Her mother, Mrs. Pawłowska, did not financially support or otherwise encourage Eliza's literary career because she believed it was not a suitable profession for a woman.

Eliza Orzeszkowa vigorously advocated women's rights as a means to obtain education and greater professional employment for

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<sup>203</sup> Orzeszkowa, Eliza. *O Sobie*. Edited by Julian Krzyżanowski. Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1974. \*Translation- "Były podobno wiele takich, które, czytając ją, zalewały się łzami, uzczuwały wielką trwogę przed przyszłością. Dużo później, spotykałam dość wiele kobiet, które mówiły mi, że pierwszą pobudką, która zwróciła je na drogę moralnego i umysłowego kształcenia się, było przeczytanie Marty." For a discussion of the similar Czech women's movement in the Austrian-Hungarian Crownlands see: *Women, State, and Party in Eastern Europe*, chapters by Bruce Garver: "Women in the First Czechoslovak Republic" and Karen Freeze: "Politics of the Czech Women's movement in the 1890's."

<sup>204</sup> Orzeszkowa, Eliza. *Kilka słów o kobietach*. Lwów: A.J.O. Rogosz, 1873. pp.196-197.

women. In 1886, Orzeszkowa and Maria Konopnicka established an underground organization under the name of "The Circle of Women of Crownland and Lithuania".<sup>205</sup> This was not a well-known feminist organization primarily because it was clandestine and illegal, and also because it has not yet been mentioned in any biography of Eliza Orzeszkowa or Maria Konopnicka. What was "The Circle's" overall agenda and purpose? Why was "This circle" never mentioned in the studies about Orzeszkowa or Konopnicka?

In 1891, a committee of Warsaw feminists organized a secret celebration of Eliza Orzeszkowa's twenty-fifth anniversary in the literary world. This committee included Doctor Anna Tomaszewska-Dobrska, Paulina Kuczalska-Reinschmit (1859-1921), a writer, who was well known for her publication *The Sisters* in 1908, and Doctor Teresa Ciszewiczowa.<sup>206</sup> Over one hundred of women assembled in Warsaw from all parts of Russian Poland and also from Galicia, but Orzeszkowa did not.<sup>207</sup> Instead, Orzeszkowa welcomed the delegation to Grodno on the next day. This 1891 meeting in Warsaw marked an important change in the Polish women's movement because for the first time the word "feminist" was used.<sup>208</sup>

Orzeszkowa vigorously campaigned for women's right through her articles in Polish magazines such as *Tygodnik M6d i Powieści*

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<sup>205</sup> See : <http://www.feministki.org.pl/index.html>- Kalendarium -historia kobiet w Polsce. I was unable to contact PSF Centrum Kobiet to verify the information provided on their website regarding "The Circle of Women of Crownland and Lithuania". However, the search continues to find out more about this organization, its members and their agenda.

<sup>206</sup> I was unable to locate the birth and death dates for the two physicians.

<sup>207</sup> Jankowski, Edmund. *Eliza Orzeszkowa*. Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1964.p. 388.

<sup>208</sup> See: <http://www.feministki.org.pl/index.html> - Kalendarium-historia kobiet w Polsce.

(*The Weekly Journal of Fashions and Novels*), *Swit* (Dawn), and *Bluszcz* (Ivy). Beginning in the 1870s, Orzeszkowa's articles about women were translated and published abroad in such places as Russia, France, Germany and Sweden. Even after Orzeszkowa's death, her articles continued to be published in women's magazines. Articles such as the "*Berlinska Hausfrauenzeitung*" (*The Berlin Housewife's Journal, open letter to German women from Orzeszkowa*), translated in German in 1892 and later published in Polish magazine in 1896), "*Neiskolko słow o żenszczinach*" (*About Polish Women*), originally published in 1881 and translated into Russian 1902, "*A propos des femmes d'il y a un siècle la Pologne*" (*Few Words About Women a century ago in Poland*), originally published in 1870 and translated into French in 1975) contained some of Orzeszkowa's remarkable observations and thoughts regarding the situation of women in 1870s and 1880s.

In 1906, Eliza Orzeszkowa celebrated her fortieth anniversary as a writer. Once again, Polish feminists organized a committee to honor Orzeszkowa as a writer and a feminist. Dr Anna Tomaszewicz-Dobrska, the writer, Iza Moszczeńska (1864-1941) and Aniela Szycówna were part of the committee; but unfortunately Orzeszkowa did not participate in the celebration due to her worsening illness. This 1906 women's convention in Warsaw was the first legal meeting of Polish feminists.<sup>209</sup> Issues such as education, social and economic problems, and ethics were discussed in daily workshops and among informal gathering of

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<sup>209</sup> Jankowski, Edmund. *Eliza Orzeszkowa*. Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1964. p.590.

women.<sup>210</sup> The 1906 celebration of Orzeszkowa's career was seen by some of her friends as a pretext for the feminists to use her name as a "decoration" for their meeting and agenda.<sup>211</sup> Despite having heard about this gossip, Orzeszkowa sent a letter to the committee, thanking its members for their participation in the celebration.<sup>212</sup> Orzeszkowa was a veteran participant in the women's issues, and she was fully aware that her involvement was appreciated and sought by other women. Even if Orzeszkowa was not directly involved with the feminists, her long and illustrious literary career established her as one of the most effective voices for women's rights in the period when women's interests and problems were neglected and marginalized by exclusively male political and administrative organizations.

In *Kilka słów o kobietach*, Eliza contended "a women should be properly educated because such education would help them cope with any type of situation. If a woman wants to become an individual prepared for rational and intrinsically worthwhile life, she needs to study twice as hard as any man. A woman should study all academic disciplines to enhance her knowledge. She should first understand herself and then learn to understand people and types of social relations. A woman should only enter marriage after she has become mentally and physically ready for it."<sup>213</sup>

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<sup>210</sup> Ibid., p.595.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid., p.595.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid., p.595.

<sup>213</sup> Orzeszkowa, Eliza. *Kilka Słów o Kobietach*. Lwów: A.J.O. Rogosz, 1873. p.142-143.

In her semi-fictional biography of Eliza Orzeszkowa *Opowieść o Pani Elizie Orzeszkowej* (*The story of Eliza Orzeszkowa*), Gabriela Pauszer-Klonowska notes that Orzeszkowa "did not play piano well but spoke several languages, fluently; she laughed too loud and moved ungracefully and she could not readily distinguish people according to their birth and social class. She was friendly and open to everyone. She was in need of lessons on social etiquette because her schoolgirl mannerisms were inappropriate for any future wife to-be."<sup>214</sup> Despite this characterization, Orzeszkowa in real life was a magnificent woman, a writer and an individual who sought a better future for women in a period when Poles, as well as Europeans and Americans, questioned the utility and propriety of many social and political assumptions and conditions.

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<sup>214</sup> Pauszer-Klonowska, Gabriela. *Opowieść o Pani Elizie Orzeszkowej*. Warszawa: Ludowa Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza, 1973. p.58.

## Chapter VI

**Eliza Orzeszkowa Among Polish Friends and Critics**

"The thought never occurred to me that I was a Lithuanian because I lived in Russian Lithuania. I am a Pole -- and that's that."<sup>215</sup>

Eliza Orzeszkowa's personal life and her literary career were often criticized and viewed negatively by the Polish public during her lifetime and for decades thereafter. For young Poles of the early twentieth century, Orzeszkowa was an old-fashioned representative of the Positivist movement that had shaped late nineteenth century Polish society and culture. Moreover, this movement was now perceived as irrelevant to twentieth century problems and issues. To suggest that she had become anachronistic by the time of her death in 1910 meant ignoring her fifty year-long successful literary career and her involvement in improving the lives and enhancing the civil liberties of Poles, as well as several ethnic minorities, among them Jews. Her biggest disappointment and regret during the 1870s and 1880s arose from her literary works having been insufficiently appreciated by her fellow Poles, including fellow-Positivists of the Warsaw and Kraków Schools, her immediate family, including her mother,

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<sup>215</sup> Orzeszkowa, Eliza. *Listy Zebrane*. Volume IV. Edited by Ludwik Brunon Swiderski. Warszawa i Grodno: Instytut Wzdawniczy "Biblioteka Polska" oraz Towarzystwo im. Elizy Orzeszkowej, 1938. p.114. \*Translation\*- "A potem mnie nigdy do głowy nie przychodzi po prostu, że jestem Litwinką. Polka- i koniec!"

Franciszka Pawłowska, and neighbors in the predominate Polish community of Grodno.

During her lifetime, Orzeszkowa was widely recognized as "an inflexible citizen, harsh moralist of social life, and a person of progress".<sup>216</sup> Despite her loneliness, the sacrificial and determined woman succeeded in conquering prejudice and establishing herself as a writer who was not afraid to face political persecution. Furthermore, she sought to break down the social and political barriers that jeopardized solidarity among Poles, particularly between the landed gentry, the petty gentry and the peasantry. She also sought to overcome the blind racism of many Poles toward Polish Jewry. Eliza Orzeszkowa was one of the few pioneering Polish reformers of the late nineteenth century who took upon herself to address these and other problems of the Polish society under Russian, Austrian and Prussian rule. Orzeszkowa was able to handle hostile Russian authority and censorship. But she found it more painful to deal with the spiteful criticism and arrogance of her fellow Polish countrymen and impossible to overcome the enormous rift between herself and those Poles whom she defined as the "others".<sup>217</sup>

These "others", according to Tadeusz Godlewski, a close friend of Eliza Orzeszkowa, made a mockery of her involvement in social and political issues and her appreciation of Polish Jewry. Throughout her literary career, Orzeszkowa demanded respect for

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<sup>216</sup> Jankowski, Edmund. *Eliza Orzeszkowa*. Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1964. p.17.

<sup>217</sup> Godelewski, Franciszek. *Pani Orzeszkowa. (Wspomnienia)*. Warszawa: Dom Książki Polskiej Sp. AKC, 1934. p.63.

Polish Jews and appreciation of their need to assimilate rather than arguing for their complete annihilation or for staying prejudiced against them.<sup>218</sup> One of "the others" was Mrs. Zaleska, an aristocratic lady and resident of the city of Grodno, who lived across the street from Orzeszkowa. Apparently, Mrs. Zaleska was connoisseur of fine arts; she spoke mainly English and French at her residence and kept an Italian painter Mr. Vial, and an Irish lady in-waiting as her houseguests.<sup>219</sup> Mrs. Zaleska detested Orzeszkowa, and particularly criticized her anti-clericalism, advocacy of democratization, and negative influence on young people.<sup>220</sup> Mrs. Zaleska's house was only open to individuals who belonged to higher social classes. On the other hand, Eliza's home was as humble as she was unpretentious. Jews called it the "House of Abraham", open to any individual who was in despair.<sup>221</sup> Tadeusz Godlewski, while visiting Mrs. Zaleska, was faced with an uncomfortable situation at dinner when the hostess sarcastically joked that he would probably enjoy eating "fish prepared in a Jewish style" since he was a frequent guest of her "neighbor's" (Eliza).<sup>222</sup> In contrast to Eliza Orzeszkowa, Mrs. Zaleska was a prime example of an arrogant, judgmental and biased attitude, evident in minor comment made at the dinner table.

Mrs. Zaleska was not the only one in Grodno's Polish community who regarded Orzeszkowa as a threat or nuisance on

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<sup>218</sup> Ibid., p.64.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid., p.14.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid., p.14.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid., p.14.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid., p.15.



account of her advocacy of controversial political and social issues. Wilhelmina Zyndram Kościałkowska (1844-1926) in this community also fit the category of "the others" even though she cooperated with Orzeszkowa on a personal and a professional level. Eliza and Wilhelmina knew each other fairly well, but regarding literary ideas each took a separate route. In her fictional writings, Eliza tried to expose and suggest remedies for many of the serious problems plaguing Polish society. Kościałkowska apparently was not interested in investigating those problems. Although she was an established writer, her heart was not set upon seriously debating and investigating political and social topics, as was Eliza's. "You write to me Wilciu, that something has happened between us... Well, I should be honest with you ... this something is your indifference toward me, your indifference."<sup>223</sup> Orzeszkowa's concept of this indifference was based upon personal observations. Wilhelmina adhered to a more conservative social outlook than Orzeszkowa, who became the first Polish Positivist woman to become a supporter of John Stuart Mill, August Comte, and Herbert Spencer. Eliza wanted to establish her true identity as a serious writer, a patriot and a person with progressive ideas. Her truly female nature revealed itself in her investigation of controversial women-centered

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<sup>223</sup> Orzeszkowa, Eliza. *Listy Zebrane*. Volume IV. Edited by Ludwik Brunon Swiderski. Warszawa i Grodno: Instytut Wydawniczy "Biblioteka Polska" oraz Towarzystwo im. Elizy Orzeszkowej, 1938. p.32. \*Translation\*- "Piszesz, Kochana Wilciu, że pomiędzy nami coś przebiegło, jakieś ćmy przeleciały. Otóż, skoro postanowiłam być dziś zupełnie szczerą, powiem Ci, że tem czemś mroźnem i bojącem, tą ćmą ciemną i senną jest od kilku lat stale i niezachwiane okazywana mi przez Ciebie obojętność, obojętność."

issues that were dismissed by many Poles, especially by people like Mrs. Zaleska or Ms. Kościółkowska.

Orzeszkowa frequently faced hostility from the outside world, a hostility triggered more often by personal decisions and actions rather than by any published political or social opinions. Following her disastrous marriage to Piotr Orzeszko and the difficult divorce, Eliza's reputation was damaged by vicious gossip, and she received little support or understanding as a woman at the time of crisis. Orzeszkowa thus became an easy target for ridicule by Poles in her native city of Grodno as well throughout the Kingdom of Poland. In Warsaw, Mrs. Ilnicka (date of birth unknown), the editor of a popular magazine *Bluszcz* (*Ivy*), met Orzeszkowa when Eliza was a twenty-one year old divorcee in need of financial support. Mrs. Ilnicka's dislike of Orzeszkowa was the result of her divorce and abandonment of Piotr Orzeszko when he was exiled to Siberia for his participation in the Polish Insurrection of January 1863. Mrs. Ilnicka was a fanatical Polish patriot who contended that Eliza's refusal to follow her husband into exile was a mistake that had turned many individuals against her. Unthinkable to any Pole was the notion of leaving one's husband sentenced to a forced exile for his support of the patriotic Insurrection. On the contrary, all Polish women were expected to sacrifice their personal happiness and join their husbands in exile and enroute to an uncertain and unpredictable future.

Orzeszkowa explained her actions somewhat differently: "I chose not to depart with my husband for Siberia because I did not love him. At that time, I did not think about how this decision might be perceived, but later it came back to haunt me; and my sense of guilt is ever present."<sup>224</sup> Not surprisingly, Orzeszkowa came to perceive that an "imaginary" structure in the shape of "a Great Chinese Wall" had been erected between Mrs. Ilnicka and herself. In letter dated July 10, 1880 to T.T Jeż, Orzeszkowa complained that Ilnicka " a woman several years older than myself, and on account of my divorce, has completely removed herself from my life and now predicts my future based on her conviction that no divorcee can ever be a talented or noble human being. As far I am concerned, none of her predictions have ever come true."<sup>225</sup> Eventually, Orzeszkowa and Mrs. Ilnicka became friends on a professional level, but Orzeszkowa's deep resentment over Ilnicka's hostile reaction to the divorce never disappeared.

Mrs. Ilnicka was not the only Warsaw citizen who regarded Orzeszkowa as an embarrassment. Hendryk Sienkiewicz, one of the main figures of the Warsaw Positivism movement, had no particular need or desire to interact with Orzeszkowa either professionally or personally. Sienkiewicz became Eliza's most severe critic and

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<sup>224</sup> Orzeszkowa, Eliza. *O sobie*. Edited by Julian Krzyżanowski. Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1974. p.105. \*Translation\*- " Nie pojechałam z mężem moim na Syberię, a dlatego, że go nie kochałam. Wówczas nie rozumiałam dobrze tego, co czynię; potem stało się to dla mnie wyrzutem sumienia, który trwa dotąd."

<sup>225</sup> Orzeszkowa, Eliza. *Listy Zebrane*. Volume VI. Edited by Edmund Jankowski. Wrocław, Warszawa i Kraków: Zakład Imienia Ossolińskich (Wydawnictwo Polskiej Akademii Nauk), 1967. p.106. \*Translation\*- " Powtarzam: kobieta o kilkanaście lat ode mnie starszej, która mię dla rozwodzenia mego od siebie odsunęła, najhaniebniejszą przyszłość mi wróżąc i twierdząc, że kobieta, która rozwodzi się, ani szlachetną, ani utalentowaną być nie może. Ani jedna przepowiednia pani Ilnickiej się sprawdziła się, ani jednego ze zdań jej o mnie ogół nie podzielił."

Eliza resented him for not having accepted her as his intellectual equal. The author of *Nad Niemnem* and *Cham* was in Skienkiewicz's personal opinion, to be regarded as an old-fashioned and boring writer.<sup>226</sup> In his 1882 review of Orzeszkowa's *Z różnych sfer* (*From different classes*, volume 1-3, 1879-1882) in the newspaper *Słowo* (The Word), Sienkiewicz called the novel a "hideous piece of work".<sup>227</sup> In one of her letters to Ignacy Baranowski (1833-1919), Orzeszkowa thanked him "for arranging a meeting between myself and Sienkiewicz. As a reader, I am an admirer of his genius. As a Pole, I am grateful for the way, in which he gloriously displays us (Poles) to the whole world."<sup>228</sup>

This arranged meeting never changed the existing antipathy and cooperation between Eliza Orzeszkowa and Hendryk Sienkiewicz, despite her admiration of and gratitude to him. In a letter to Aurelli Drogoszewski dated April 16, 1903, Orzeszkowa reported that "no one knows my honest opinion about the author of *The Trilogy*, but now you are going to be the first and probably the last one to know. Someone has mentioned that Sienkiewicz is not a visionary. That is an absurdity. In reality, his visions are clear, deep and expressive... But on the other hand, his thoughts are neither vast, nor intense; and his inner feelings are not

<sup>226</sup> Jankowski, Edmund. *Eliza Orzeszkowa*. Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1964. p.254.

<sup>227</sup> Paszka, Jerzy, ed. *Studia o twórczości Elizy Orzeszkowej*. Prace Naukowe Uniwersytetu Śląskiego w Katowicach nr. 1058. See article by Bursztynska, Helena: "Szkoła realistycznego doświadczenia." p.31.

<sup>228</sup> Orzeszkowa, Eliza. *Listy Zebrane*. Volume IV. Edited by Ludwik Brunon Swiderski. Warszawa i Grodno: Instytut Wydawniczy "Biblioteka Polska" oraz Towarzystwo im. Elizy Orzeszkowej, 1938. p.63. \*Translation\*- "Ogromnie też dziękuję za spotkanie z Sienkiewiczem. Jako czytelniczka, jestem wielbicieleką jego geniuszu, jako Polka, wdzięczną mu jestem za chlubę, którą przynosi nam przed szerokim światem."

passionate ... His works have not delved deeply into social life, have shed no tears, given no help to the needy, and do not seek to uplift those poor folk who have been forgotten.”<sup>229</sup>

Orzeszkowa continued her personal attack on Sienkiewicz in another letter to T.T. Jeż: “Sienkiewicz is continuing in his assertions that there are none! There are no Polish socialists! There are no gamins! There are no unhappy peasants! There are none of these and there never can be any. I think he is sleeping on a bed made out of rose petals -- what a fool!”<sup>230</sup> The worst disappointment ever endured by Orzeszkowa occurred when Sienkiewicz won the Nobel Prize in Literature instead of her after both of them had been nominated for this award in 1905. Eliza Orzeszkowa and Hendryk Sienkiewicz, as of the two most respected and accomplished Polish writers of their era, never managed to establish a friendly and productive relationship.

The Warsaw Positivist “School” advocated progressive ideas in such areas as emancipation of Jews and the peasantry and granting women equal rights. This school included many influential Polish writers of the late nineteenth century, among them Bolesław Prus, Aleksander Świętochowski, Piotr Chmielowski

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<sup>229</sup> Ibid., pp.136-137. \*Translation\*- “Prawdziwego zdania mego o autorze Trylogii nikt nie wie, a teraz Pan pierwszy i zapewne ostatni wiedzieć będzie, bo wypowiem je tu aż do dnia, naturalnie dla Pana. Ktoś powiedział swiezo, że Sienkiewicz nie jest wizjonerem. To absurd. Własnie, że wizje jego są dziwne, jasne, rozległe.... Ale myśl Sienkiewicza nie jest ani rozległa, ani głęboka, i uczucia nie są ani gorące, ani liczne. Praca jego nie zataczała widnokręgów szerokich, nie szła w głąb społecznego życia, nie płakała z płaczącymi, nie ujmowała się za skrzywdzonymi, nie dobywała na jaw zapomnianych.”

<sup>230</sup> Jankowski, Edmund. *Eliza Orzeszkowa*. Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1964. p.255. \*Translation\*- “Sienkiewicz kontynuuje swoje “nie ma!” I tak: socialistów Polaków, nie ma ! Uliczników, à propos mojej Sielanki nieróżowej nie ma ! Wychodzących na złodziejów i pijaków nie ma ! Chłopów nieszczęśliwych à propos ludowych poezji Konopnickiej nie ma! I nie tylko nie ma, ale nawet być nie może. To dopiero położył się na różach- głupiec!”

and Henryk Sienkiewicz. Contemporary women writers were often misunderstood and publicly criticized for their literary ideas and publications. Only a few managed to secure and maintain a respectful relationship with their fellow male writers and with the Polish reading public. Maria Konopnicka, a poet, Maria Rodziewiczówna (1863-1944), a romance novelist and finally Eliza Orzeszkowa, a positivist, were the only three Polish women of the late nineteenth century who were able to remain self-supporting writers while achieving preeminence in literary works primarily addressed to women's needs and issues. Orzeszkowa and Konopnicka tended to focus on social and political problems in contrast to Rodziewiczówna's writings about romance. One of the aspirations shared by Orzeszkowa and Konopnicka was an enormous desire for the re-birth and liberation of Poland from foreign oppression.<sup>231</sup> Secondarily, both women advocated the enlargement of civil liberties that were then severely curtailed in the lands of partitioned Poland. In a letter to Maria Konopnicka dated December 6, 1907, Orzeszkowa wrote: "I wish you good luck with regard to the personal protest you have sent to Oxford University. It was fair, clear and necessary. God Bless you."<sup>232</sup> In her letter, Konopnicka expressed her anger, disbelief, and criticism of Oxford University for having awarded Emperor William II of Germany with an honorary doctorate of civil law. "Rapist of

<sup>231</sup> Godelewski, Franciszek. *Pani Orzeszkowa. (Wspomnienia)*. Warszawa: Dom Książki Polskiej SP. AKC, 1943. p.31.

<sup>232</sup> Konopnicka, Maria. *Korespondencja*. Volume II, 1879-1910. Edited by Edmund Jankowski. Wrocław, Warszawa i Kraków: Zakład Narodowy Imienia Ossolińskich (Wydawnicwo Polskiej Akademii Nauk), 1972. p.160. \*Translation\*- "Następnie winszuję Wam protestu przesłanego do Oksfordu. Płomienny, śmiały, jasny, zasłużony. Błogosławić Was za niego należy."

all human laws" and "the executioner of Polish children" were two of the several titles attached to William II by Konopnicka. She could not get over the fact that such a distinguished university could thereby severely disgrace itself.<sup>233</sup> Maria Konopnicka, the author of *Nasza Szkapta* (*Our Old Nag*, 1893), *Mendel Gdanski* (*The Danzing Mendel*, 1893) and *Pan Balcer w Brazylji* (*Mr. Balcer in Brazil*, 1910), always maintained a friendly and supportive relationship with Orzeszkowa. Konopnicka never became part of "the others". For the rest of her life, Orzeszkowa regarded Konopnicka as a member of the family.

"The others" also included the editors and journalists of several Warsaw newspapers. In 1899, Eliza Orzeszkowa was publicly accused of cooperating with a Russian publishing house. Not only was she denounced for publishing a book in Russian, *Argonawty* (*The Argonauts*, 1898) but also, as someone suggested, she secured an enormous commission in the process. Orzeszkowa responded that: "I was forced to explain myself publicly; I have received sarcastic letters and finally an anonymous note informing me of a threat in a form of a dagger which should admonish all 'traitors'. There were moments when I thought I would die of sorrow and finally of embarrassment."<sup>234</sup> Warsaw was a semi-friendly place for Eliza's literary career in comparison to Kraków. In Galicia, she was accused of betrayal by the Kracovian

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<sup>233</sup> Ibid., p. 249.

<sup>234</sup> Orzeszkowa, Eliza. *Listy Zebrane*. Volume V. Edited by Edmund Jankowski. Wrocław: Zakład Imienia Ossolińskich (Wydawnictwo Polskiej Akademii Nauk), 1961. p.29. \*Translation\*- "Zmuszono mię do publicznego tłumaczenia się, do szerokiego rozprowadzenia w druku, co i jak było, a tymczasem przychodziły listy uszczypliwe, zdziwienie nad postępkiem moim wyrażające, i nawet anonim jakiś zagroził mi sztyletem, który karciał niegdyś zdrajców kraju. "

*Stańczyk* Stanisław Tarnowski (1837-1917). Mr. Tarnowski compared Eliza to Mikhail Muraviev, stating that she had done more harm to Poland than Muraviev had managed to do.<sup>235</sup> What sort of "betrayal" and "harm", according to Tarnowski, did Orzeszkowa allegedly perpetrate? Orzeszkowa might have been an individual with old-fashioned views, but one could never in good conscience question her loyalty to Poland. Why was Eliza so severely ridiculed and literarily "crucified" by the Warsaw and Kraków positivists?

In Grodno, Eliza Orzeszkowa experienced similar difficulties to those she encountered elsewhere in the Kingdom of Poland. Grodno was a depressing, dirty and muddy city in winter but it was splendidly attractive during the summer, especially with the beautiful Niemen River near by. Orzeszkowa's house was in some respect, an asylum where Polish souls could take refuge. Nonetheless, some local residents regarded her household as a threat to community decorum and respectability. Some neighbors were afraid to be black listed by the Russian authorities, as Orzeszkowa was, during her confinement in Grodno after she was deported from Vilno following the closing of her bookstore, for engaging in illegal distribution of Polish books and magazines. For others, her household was excessively intellectual.<sup>236</sup> Eliza's "family" residing there included Orzeszkowa's housekeeper, Monika Gorzkowska; and her two nieces Stanisława and Zofia, Maria Siemiaszkówna (1855-1916), Orzeszkowa's secretary and confidant;

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<sup>235</sup> Godelewski, Tadeusz. *Pani Orzeszkowa. (Wspomnienia)*. Warszawa: Dom Książki Polskiej SP.AKC, 1934. p.65.

<sup>236</sup> *Ibid.*, p.12-13.



Orzeszkowa's future husband Stanisław Nahorski, and finally her butler, Adolf Stojak.

At her home, Orzeszkowa conducted clandestine classes for young girls in Polish history and literature. These students were Eliza's hope for the future, for keeping Polish culture alive. Most of the frequent visitors to Eliza's house included Maksymilian Obrębski (date of birth unknown, Eliza's close friend since 1863), Tadeusz Baranowski, Piotr Chmielowski, Jan Karłowicz (date of birth unknown), a university professor, Maria Konopnicka, Józef and Lucyna Kotarbińscy, Leopold Mèyet, Henryk Nusbaum, Erazm Piltz, Maria Rodziewiczówna, Hipolit Wawelberg (1843-1901), an entrepreneur and social activist, and many more.<sup>237</sup> None of these individuals belonged to the above category of "the others". These individuals had the utmost respect and admiration for Eliza's efforts to promote social and political reforms. They supported her by endorsing these efforts and by openly defending her viewpoints expressed in her public speeches as well as in her fictional and non-fictional publications. Importantly, her friends did not judge Eliza for having divorced Piotr Orzeszko or for her carrying an intimate relationship with married Stanisław Nahorski. To these friends and admirers, she was a realist and a reform-minded ideologist, which was rare among the great Polish positivist writers of the later nineteenth century.

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<sup>237</sup> Godelewski, Franciszek. *Pani Orzeszkowa. (Wspomnienia)*. Warszawa: Dom Książki Polskiej SP.AKC, 1934. pp.17-18.

Eliza Orzeszkowa also received great support from many contemporary writers in neighboring countries. In the Czech crown lands of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, her "circle" of intellectual admirers included the Parnassian poet Jaroslav Vrchlický (1862-1923), the feminist editor and writer Eliszka Krásnohorská (1847-1926), Edvard Jelinek (1855-1897), the author of many works on Czech-Polish relations and on Polish and Ukrainian culture, Václav Kredba (1834-1913), a co-founder of the Central School Foundation and an editor of pedagogical journals, and Adolf Cerný (1864-1952), an internationally renowned Slavist.<sup>238</sup> In one of her letters to Václav Kredba, Orzeszkowa wrote; "I respect the Czech nation for its enormous social and civic virtues, I have an inner affection for this country and it's suffering."<sup>239</sup> Overall, Eliza enjoyed her visits and correspondence with members of this intellectual circle. But not all of her published works were recognized or appreciated by the broader Czech reading public. For example, all of her publications dedicated toward advancing women's rights encountered a critical reception.<sup>240</sup> Overall, her works evoked little popular interest and found an appreciative audience only among Czech literary scholars and editors. In sum, late twentieth century scholars have argued that none of Orzeszkowa's works

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<sup>238</sup> On Vrchlický, see Milada Součková. *The Parnassian: Jaroslav Vrchlicky*. The Hague: Mouton, 1964. On Jelinek, see *Masarykův Slovník Naučný* (Praha: Českošlovenský Kompas, 1929), III, pp.746-747. On Václav Kredba, see *Masarykův Slovník Naučný* (Praha: Českošlovenský Kompas, 1929), IV, p.165.

<sup>239</sup> Jankowski, Edmund. *Eliza Orzeszkowa*. Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1964. p.359. \*Translation\*- " ... poważam wysoko naród czeski za jego wielkie cnoty obywatelskie i społeczne, a kocham go za przebyte przez niego cierpienia , tak podobne do tych, których przebywać nie przestaje dotąd Ojczyzna moja."

<sup>240</sup> *Ibid.*, p.361.

transformed or had any great influence upon Czech national literature.<sup>241</sup>

In Imperial Germany, Eliza's publications eventually appeared in translations, creating "a breach in the wall of hatred for everything what was considered Polish."<sup>242</sup> *Laura Brix translated Marta and Meir Ezofowicz into German*, and one of most vehement "anti-Polish" German literary critics, Leopold Sacher-Masoch (1836-1895), acknowledged Eliza to be one of the best writers living in the lands of partitioned Poland.<sup>243</sup> By contrast, it is quite surprising that Eliza Orzeszkowa did not establish a closer literary relationship with French and English writers. She maintained personal and professional relationship with Polish and Russian intellectuals whom she regarded as sources of personal growth. Eliza's skill at managing her career and her personal life constituted an extraordinary achievement for a woman who was constantly the subject of malicious society gossip. "The others" did not appreciate the fact that Eliza was highly respected in some intellectual circles rather than being viewed by everyone else as a divorcee and a traitor all that constituted what "the others" narrowly defined as Polish patriotism.

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<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.*, p.363.

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.*, p.358.

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid.*, p.357.

## Chapter VII

**Conclusion**

"I have the feeling that the end is near. I feel sorrow in parting from my mother country and in not knowing her future."<sup>244</sup>

Up to the very end of her life and despite her progressing illness, Eliza Orzeszkowa continued to write for publication and to work with friends and neighbors in the Polish community of Grodno. Evident in all of Eliza's publications were her appreciation and respect for people of different nationalities, social status, religious beliefs, and political convictions. By the beginning of the twentieth century, Eliza had achieved international recognition as a motivator and activist of movements aiming to eliminate the social inequalities and political repression of the past century.

Orzeszkowa's literary works critically addressed a variety of domestic political and social issues which had adversely affected Polish society during the nineteenth century. Her involvement in the Polish Positivist movement complemented her efforts for a significant change in the status of women in the Polish society. Orzeszkowa was a feminist who advocated of those political and economic reforms that would provide greater civil

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<sup>244</sup> Orzeszkowa Eliza. *Listy Zebrane*. Volume IV. Edited by Ludwik Brunon Swiderski. Warszawa i Grodno: Instytut Wydawniczy "Biblioteka Polska" oraz Towarzystwo im. Elizy Orzeszkowej, 1938. p.90.  
\*Translation\*- "Jedynym uczuciem, którego doświadczam myśląc, że koniec już może bliski, jest żal rozstawania się z ziemią ojczystą i że nie dowiem się o jej przyszłych losach."

liberties and employment for women. Orzeszkowa's advocacy of such reforms as well as her promotion of understanding and mutual respect among Poland's various nationalities and religious denominations complemented her efforts to increase social harmony, economic prosperity and political stability within Polish society. Consequently, Orzeszkowa through her literary and political writings advocated strengthening the Polish nation through the assimilation of Polish Jewry and the emancipation of Polish peasants. In all of her publications up to her death in 1910, Orzeszkowa gave priority to reform and efforts to identify and overcome the shortcomings of Polish politics and society.

Orzeszkowa's determination to promote political and social reforms and to express her love for her country obliged her to endure personal and political criticism and also the detestation of various conservative circles. Despite false accusations and unfriendly opponents, Orzeszkowa's professional career thrived and brought to her both popularity and public admiration. Another enduring aspect of Orzeszkowa's life was her love for and devotion to her country and its people. Her personal patriotism never degenerated into national fanaticism or chauvinism but formed the basis of her claim that justice must be brought to the oppressed Polish people and their partitioned country.<sup>245</sup>

Despite Orzeszkowa's popularity as a writer and a Polish patriot, she never left Grodno to further her career. She believed that her place of residence should remain in Grodno and

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<sup>245</sup> Jankowski, Edmund. *Eliza Orzeszkowa*. Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1964. p.640.

were she to depart, she would be very disloyal to the ideals of her youth and to her native region. By 1899, Orzeszkowa began to experience feelings of depression, which made her feel dissatisfied with her life. In a letter to her friend Leopold Méyet in August 1899, she wrote: " I took care of many people, but I have not found anyone to take care of me. I have nobody with whom to share my thoughts and worries."<sup>246</sup> Orzeszkowa's depression was primarily based on her increased sense of loneliness. She had lost her second husband in 1897, and many other members of her household were now dead. Her students, upon finishing their studies, departed to study at universities or to get married.

Orzeszkowa continued writing until a sickness overwhelmed her body in 1910. Despite her doctor's arguments and pleas to limit the hours in which she wrote fiction and non-fiction works, Eliza refused to give up her passion to write. On May 18, 1910, Doctors Szumkowski, Von Talheim, and Zamkowski were unable to revive Eliza's weakened heart; she passed away with a last whisper "I am dying".<sup>247</sup> Her funeral took place on Monday, May 23, 1910. On this morning of her burial, as Eliza's body was removed from her house, over fifteen thousand mourners gathered to commemorate her life. Poles and Russians were not the only ethnic

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<sup>246</sup> Orzeszkowa, Eliza. *Listy Zebrane*. Volume II. Edited by Edmund Jankowski. Wrocław: Zakład Imienia Ossolińskich (Wydawnictwo Polskiej Akademii Nauk), 1955. p.170. \*Translation\*- " Wiele osób mię otacza, którymi opiekuję się, ale takiej, od której mogłabym otrzymać opiekę i pomocy nie ma, nie ma nikogo, z kim podzielić bym mogła swoje troski i myśli."

<sup>247</sup> Jankowski, Edmund. *Eliza Orzeszkowa*. Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1964. p.642.

groups to attend her funeral; the Jews of Grodno comprised the majority of the mourners.<sup>248</sup>

According to the editor of *Kurier Litewski* (*The Lithuanian Herald*) on May 22, Grodno appeared to look like a "city of the dead"<sup>249</sup> on that day. Eliza was buried next to her second husband, Stanisław Nahorski. Józef Kotarbiński, one of the main speakers at Eliza's funeral, summed up Eliza's life in a single sentence: "She was a person of great wisdom, and her heart lived for the whole epoch [of our times]."<sup>250</sup> At the end, Eliza was not alone. She was buried next to her beloved husband. Furthermore, people from all walks of life mourned the great woman whom they acknowledged to be their writer, supporter, and friend.

Eliza's biographer, Gabriela Pauszer-Klonowska, traveled in 1940s to Eliza's estate, Milkowszczyzna, in an attempt to gather additional valuable information for her research. Unfortunately, the estate had ceased to exist and its only remaining structures were an old barn and a crumbling shrine.<sup>251</sup> The cemetery where Eliza's father, Benedykt, and her sister, Klementyna were buried, was still located near what had been Orzeszkowa's estate. According to Pauszer-Klonowska, this cemetery had been neglected and was overgrown with weeds.<sup>252</sup>

From Orzeszkowa's former estate of Milkowszczyzna, Gabriela traveled to Ludwinów, Piotr Orzeszko's estate. But, when she

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<sup>248</sup> Ibid., p.644.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid., p.644.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid., p.645. \*Translation\* - "Ona była żywą mądrością i czującym sercem całej epoki."

<sup>251</sup> Pauszer-Klonowska, Gabriela. *Zwykłe Sprawy przewykłych ludzi*. Lublin: Wydawnictwo Lubelskie, 1978. p.13.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid., p.13.

mentioned Orzeszko's family name to the local residents, no one could help her. Furthermore, they were not sure if this Ludwinów estate was actually the same Ludwinów Gabriela was looking for.<sup>253</sup> Today, Orzeszkowa's former residence in Grodno does not look the way it did before the Second World War. Almost all of Orzeszkowa's personal belongings have vanished over the time as well material objects associated with family members. One exception is the grave of Klementyna, Eliza's sister, which Edmund Jankowski, a recent biographer of Orzeszkowa, identified in 1957. Orzeszkowa is still best remembered through her writings, all of which have stood the test of time, including her memoirs, novels, short stories, and pamphlets on social and political issues. Her ideals continue to be an inspiration for the present and future generations in an independent Poland. Orzeszkowa would take great pleasure in knowing that Poland and her people are now free!

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<sup>253</sup> *Ibid.*, p.17.



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