

***What are the “signs” of dulska-ness?
A new approach to the definition of the term***

***Czym „objawia się” dulszczyzna?
Nowe spojrzenie na definicję terminu***

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Keywords

dulska-ness, *The Morality of Mrs Dulcka*, philistine, petty bourgeoisie, falsehood

Słowa kluczowe

dulszczyzna, *Moralność pani Dulskiej*, filister, mieszczaństwo, zakłamanie

Abstract

This paper aims to present a new, extended definition of the term “dulska-ness” (in Polish *dulszczyzna*). The final conclusions have been drawn on the basis of an analysis of the conduct of the Dulski family and people directly linked to its members. The content of the paper has been presented as a table to make it easier to follow the analysis and clearly emphasise key findings and conclusions.

Abstrakt

Celem niniejszego artykułu jest przedstawienie nowej, rozbudowanej definicji terminu „dulszczyzna”. Wyciągnięciu wniosków końcowych posłużyła analiza postępowania poszczególnych członków rodziny Dulskich oraz osób bezpośrednio związanych z tą rodziną. Prezentowane treści zostały przedstawione za pomocą tabeli, która ułatwia śledzenie prowadzonej analizy oraz umożliwia bezpośrednie uwypuklenie najważniejszych spostrzeżeń i wniosków.

What are the “signs” of dulska-ness? A new approach to the definition of the term

Communication disruptions may be caused by various factors and take various forms. One of the reasons for such disturbances is distorted family relations and the coexistence of a number of individuals endowed with a “strong” character. A model example of irregularities in everyday communication within a family are relations in the household of Aniela and Felicjan Dulski, both characters of Gabriela Zapolska’s tragic farce *The Morality of Mrs Dulska*. The reader is left with the conviction that the life of the characters in the play is clearly focused on following orders given by the despotic Aniela, whose behaviour exemplifies so-called petty bourgeois morality understood as a set of qualities typical of people referred to as philistines or prigs¹.

The Morality of Mrs Dulska belongs to the classics of literature describing the life and priorities of the middle class of the time (Zapolska’s contemporaries). The peculiar behaviour of Mrs Dulska, going beyond the scope of philistinism and priggishness, came to be called dulska-ness (in Polish *dulszczyzna*), while the concept as such has permanently entered literary studies (and even colloquial speech) to describe misconduct and a negative attitude to others.

This paper aims to create a new, extended definition of “dulska-ness” based on the conclusions of an analysis of the behaviour of characters featured in the play. All of them are individualists whose manners reflect their special and – if juxtaposed with other characters – one-of-a-kind qualities. A desire to offer a new definition does not mean that the notion is not already used in specialist literature and – first and foremost – in the dictionaries of literary terms and of the Polish language. The main motivation to provide a comprehensive description of the term is the condensed nature of available definitions. It is also noteworthy that, as a word close in meaning to

¹ A very interesting explanation of notions “philistine” and “prig” (in Polish *filister* and *koltun* respectively) has been offered by Tomasz Weiss in his paper on *The Morality of Mrs Dulska*. In the author’s opinion, “philistine” is a “financially secured person who – with a view to protecting peace, which enables the use of material assets – is a determined opponent of changes of all kinds”, while “prig presents a negative approach to reforms and ‘novelties’ – similarly to a “philistine” – and is in addition dull-witted and stupid”. See T. Weiss, *Introduction* [in:] G. Zapolska, *The Morality of Mrs Dulska*, Revision, BN I 187, Kraków 1972, p. XXXV-XXXVI.

philistinism and priggishness, *dulska-ness* can be found in the dictionary of synonyms².

Before embarking on the analysis and offering my own concept of the notion, let me present selected definitions of the term available in specialist literature. The definitions below will then be used to delineate general trends while presenting qualities and contrasting them with the definition suggested herein in the concluding part.

“*Dulska-ness* – a notion derived from the surname of the main character of a play by G. Zapolska *The Morality of Mrs Dulska* which can be associated with the “petty bourgeois priggishness”, falsehood, deception, greed and dishonesty of Mrs Dulska toward others”³.

“*Dulska-ness* – a notion describing petty bourgeois mentality, an attitude to life that consists in maintaining the appearance of decency, lack of understanding for intellectual needs and lack of compassion in enforcing one’s own principles”⁴.

“*Dulska-ness* – a notion derived from the surname of the main character of a play by Gabriela Zapolska *The Morality of Mrs Dulska* which means philistinism, hypocritical conduct of the middle class, moral duplicity”⁵.

“*Dulska-ness* – falsehood, hypocrisy, priggishness; behaviour that meets the principle of [...]: washing one’s own dirty linen at home”⁶.

“*Dulska-ness* – petty bourgeois deception, priggishness, moral duplicity”⁷.

All the relevant personality traits have been presented in the table⁸ below to make it easier to follow the content and make the paper more transparent. The presentation of characters in the play starts with the main role – Aniela Dulska.

² A. Dąbrówka, E. Geller, R. Turczyn, *Dictionary of synonyms*, Warsaw 1996, p. 103.

³ *Dulska-ness* [in:] *Dictionary of literary and grammatical terms*, eds. Z. Dominów, M. Dominów, Poznań 2010, p. 47-48.

⁴ *Dulska-ness* [in:] E. Olinkiewicz, K. Radzymińska, H. Styś, *Encyclopaedic dictionary. Polish language*, Wrocław 1999, p. 149.

⁵ *Dulska-ness* [in:] S. Sierotwiński, *Dictionary of literary terms*, Kraków 1994, p. 59.

⁶ *Dulska-ness* [in:] T. Miłkowski, *Practical dictionary of literary terms*, Warsaw 1997, p. 69.

⁷ *Dulska-ness* [in:] *Small dictionary of the Polish language*, eds. S. Skorupka, H. Auder-ska, Z. Łempicka, Warsaw 1968, p. 141.

⁸ Unless marked otherwise, all the citations in the table come from: G. Zapolska, *The Morality of Mrs. Dulska: a petty-bourgeois tragic-farce*, translated and introduced by Teresa Murjas, Bristol 2007.

CHARACTER	BEHAVIOUR	PERSONAL TRAITS
Aniela Dulaska	Aniela is a vigorous and energetic woman. She gets up early in the morning and thinks that all servants and others in the home should do the same. She gives commands and orders. “Cook! Hanka! Time to rise!... What’s that you say? Early? You royal highnesses! [...] Do hurry up, girl!” (Act I, Scene I, p. 4)	egocentrism; despotism
	She scolds Hanka for the way she starts a fire in the stove, because the servant uses too much wood*. She considers herself superior. “Is that how you start a fire? Well, is it? It must be a punishment from God! Get back to your cows, yes – to the cows where you belong, a respectable home is no place for you” (Act I, Scene II, p. 4)	inflated self-esteem; penny pinching
	She delegates tasks to her husband and daughters. Her orders must be fulfilled without objections. “Felicjan! Felicjan! Get up!... The office won’t wait, you know... Hesia! Mela! You’ll be late for school! [...] Felicjan! Are you up yet?” (Act I, Scene II, p. 8)	a wish to control loved ones
	In her opinion, she is the most important person in the home and the entire household functions only due to her efforts. “I’m coming! Hesia! Mela! Felicjan! A family of somnambulists. Well, well, I do declare, we’d have had to pack our bags by now, were it not for me...” (Act I, Scene II, p. 9)	egocentrism
	She blames the caretaker for leaving a new broom in the rain. “Why has the caretaker left that new broom in the yard? It’s pouring rain...” (Act I, Scene II, p. 9)	penny pinching; intellectual parochialism
	She speaks bluntly about her son’s contacts with coquettes. When Zbyszko po-	hypocrisy; falsehood

<p>Anielska Dulaska</p>	<p>ints out that his mother herself rents an apartment to a girl of this kind, Dulaska explains that this is just business. She does not bow to the coquette, while the money she earns from rent is not kept for herself but is used to pay taxes.</p> <p>[Dulaska to Zbyszko – P.R.] “Mind your tongue. I suppose you think you’re still in the company of coquettes. [...] But I do not acknowledge her. [...] Pardon me, but I think you’ll find that I don’t keep that kind of money to myself. [...] I use it to pay the taxes”.</p> <p>(Act I, Scene V, p. 21-22)</p>	
	<p>She wants to control her husband. She admonishes him not to lose his wages; she doles out cigars to him, which she keeps in the stove.</p> <p>“Only be careful not to go and lose it [wage – P.R.]. What are you waiting for? Ah! A cigar... Zbyszko, bring your father a cigar from the stove”.</p> <p>(Act I, Scene VI, p. 24)</p>	<p>a wish to control loved ones</p>
	<p>She is not able to sympathize with others. This can be seen in her conversation with the Tenant, whose lease she wants to terminate because the lady tried to commit suicide after discovering her husband’s love affair.</p> <p>Dulaska perceives this as a sign of weakness, but first and foremost as an embarrassment. Instead of feeling sorry for and helping the Tenant, she prefers to get rid of her so that no one associates Dulaska’s tenement building with a commotion that broke out after the unconscious woman was found.</p> <p>Dulaska permits herself to say that it would have been better for the Tenant if she had died – this would have helped the lady redeem her sins (sic!). She prefers to rent the apartment to a coquette than to an honest, but unhappy woman.</p> <p>“An ambulance on the doorstep of my very own fine, stone tenement building – an ambulance!!! May as well have been a saloon, after a drunken scuffle. [...]</p>	<p>backwardness; lack of compassion; placing one’s own interests over the good of the others</p>

<p>Anieli Dulaska</p>	<p>Have you ever seen an ambulance parked outside a genteel tenement building? No, you have not! And then all that publicity in the papers!” (Act I, Scene IX, p. 33-34)</p>	
	<p>During her conversation with Juliasiewiczowa, Dulaska says that buying magazines and going to the theatre is needless luxury, which prevents people from living economically. Such entertainment is worth nothing. All that matters is saving and securing a proper income. “I always borrow and that is quite adequate. If I fail to borrow, then the world does not collapse around my ears, because I’ve been unable to read some tall story or other in the print. [...] ‘Oh’ has nothing to do with it. A guaranteed income is the bedrock of existence” (Act I, Scene X, p. 40 and 41)</p>	<p>intellectual parochialism; lack of ideological orientation; money making; regarding wealth as a symbol of human value</p>
	<p>When on the tram, Dulaska tells Hesia to duck so that the girl looks like a child entitled to a half-price ticket, rather than a regular one. [Dulaska to Juliasiewiczowa – P.R.] “How are things with you? I am terribly out of sorts. [...] On the tram. Another fracas. When Hesia is seated, she clearly looks very much like a child of less than one meter high. I say to her repeatedly, keep your head down... [...] And just to annoy me she sits bolt upright stretching her neck out, there follows a scene* with the conductor, all eyes fixed on us ...” (Act II, Scene XII, p. 85-86)</p>	<p>a wish to save money at all cost</p>
	<p>The character cannot come to terms with the fact that her son may enter into a misalliance by marrying a servant. She wants her son to abandon the idea at any cost. Her main drive is a fear of losing her social status. Dulaska is more concerned about what people say than her son’s life and the consequences of his reckless decisions. Even though she wants to “handle” the case amicably, she does everything to avoid paying Hanka a penny.</p>	<p>Fear of losing her social status; fear of losing her reputation; miser</p>

<p>Anieli Dulaska</p>	<p>“Sweet Jesus! What if someone asks me a question about my daughter’s in law family...” (Act II, Scene XV, p. 101) [Dulaska to Juliasiewiczowa – P.R.] “Have mercy! Help me!... Save me from this affair. This marriage means the ultimate bane. How will I ever look people in the eye?” (G. Zapolska, op. cit., Revision, BN I 187, Kraków 1972). (Act III, Scene IV, p. 113)</p>	
<p>Zbyszko Dulski***</p>	<p>Although he can meet with many other women, Zbyszko seduces Hanka, a servant in his family household. He looks down on her and plays with her feelings. He knows he is not in love with her and that their relationship has no future. “Come over here! Show me that pert little snout of yours! Why so angry?... [...] If you’re nicer to me then I’ll stay at home” (Act I, Scene VII, p. 26 and 27)</p>	<p>falsehood</p>
	<p>He flirts with Juliasiewiczowa knowing that Hanka sees everything. [Zbyszko embraces Juliasiewiczowa – P.R.] “Do you know something... you are so very... so... [Juliasiewiczowa to Zbyszko – P.R.] That girl – you should have seen the way she looked at us! If I were you...” (Act I, Scene XII, p. 50)</p>	<p>arrogance; duplicity</p>
	<p>He makes an attempt to fight priggishness, but quickly suffers a heavy defeat. The prig inside him reappears when Juliasiewiczowa refers to his material status after the potential marriage with Hanka. When he learns that after marrying the servant he would be doomed to a life of poverty and constant struggle with financial problems, he changes his decision and takes his word back. A drive to “possess” is stronger than a duty to solve problems in an honourable way. Having been played by Juliasiewiczowa, Zbyszko comes to the conclusion that it may be better for him to</p>	<p>hypocrisy; cult of money and pleasure dominating over common sense, integrity and one’s own conscience</p>

<p>Zbyszko Dulski</p>	<p>“repay” Hanka, and thus regain his freedom and ability to carouse in all-night cafés without any constraints.</p> <p>“Oh! And I’ll now be out carousing again! Around the clock!... [...] Until I find a proper wife... with a dowry, a tenement building – with a devil – with a demon...” (G. Zapolska, op. cit., Revision, BN I 187, Kraków 1972).</p> <p>(Act III, Scene X, p. 130)</p>	
<p>Hesia</p>	<p>Hesia resembles her mother. They share the same features of character and attitude to others. Like Dulski, Hesia shows no respect for Hanka, purely because the girl is just a servant.</p> <p>[Hesia to Hanka – P.R.] “Why are you laughing, you idiot? Tidy up at once!”</p> <p>(Act I, Scene IV, p. 16)</p> <p>“Carry those, you twisted old crone”.</p> <p>(Act I, Scene VIII, p. 30)</p> <p>“Do you honestly imagine, clod brain, that Zbyszko will really take you to be his lawful, wedded wife?”</p> <p>(Act III, Scene I, p. 107).</p> <p>As with Hanka, Hesia has little kindness for her sister Mela, who – by contrast – is honest and selfless. Hesia is especially ruthless when Mela is not much in favour of her manners and plans for the future (Hesia tells her sister that she wishes to follow in their brother’s footsteps and go out “carousing”).</p> <p>[Hesia to Mela – P.R.] “Clod brain!...”</p> <p>(Act I, Scene III, p. 15)</p>	<p>Hesia is arrogant and dishonest. She looks down on Hanka because Hanka is lower in the social hierarchy. Like Zbyszko, she looks for fun and pleasure in life.</p>
<p>Juliasiewiczowa****</p>	<p>Juliasiewiczowa’s manners confirm what Aniela Dulski thinks of her (see footnote no. ****).</p> <p>She is a very cunning person, who – upon Dulski’s request – comes up with an idea on how to “handle” the business with Hanka and liberate Aniela from the spectre of embarrassment and scandal. It is Juliasiewiczowa who decides to call Tadrachowa – Hanka’s godmother – to learn as much as possible about the servant. She hopes to find out something</p>	<p>Clever and cunning; she knows well that corruption may help her “silence” Hanka and Tadrachowa</p>

Juliasiewiczowa	<p>compromising about the girl and to talk Zbyszko out of his intentions.</p> <p>[Juliasiewiczowa to Dulaska – P.R.] “We may happen to find out a thing or two about this Hanka... she may already have had some fun in that village of hers” (G. Zapolska, op. cit., Revision., BN I 187, Kraków 1972).</p> <p>(Act III, Scene IV, p. 114)</p> <p>When after her conversation with Tadrachowa, it turns out that Hanka is a kind and honest girl, Juliasiewiczowa decides to get rid of her by paying her compensation that would “silence” the servant. Despite Dulaska’s reluctance, Juliasiewiczowa manages to implement her plans and smooth out the situation.</p> <p>Likewise – by using manipulation – she talks Zbyszko out of his intention to marry Hanka.</p>	
<p>* The Polish word is “smolak”, a colloquial word for pitch wood. After: <i>Smolak</i>, [in:] http://sjp.pwn.pl/sjp/;2522096 (access 1 March 2015).</p>		
<p>** The original text uses the Polish word “secesja” (of Latin origin; English: art nouveau) to show that Dulaska happens to get words confused; this time she confused it with “scene”, “quarrel”. Footnote after BN.</p>		
<p>*** Zbyszko is a person with a quite complex psyche. The audience of the play finds out that the son of the Dulskis takes an attempt to fight priggishness at their home, which leads to a number of arguments with his mother. One of the signs of his rebellion against the customs established at home are his frequent visits to night cafés and get-togethers with artistic bohemians, commonly known to be critical of philistines. Alas, as he states himself, priggishness is a curse looming over his whole family. For that reason, even Zbyszko’s behaviour is filled with priggish and philistine manners.</p>		
<p>**** A relative of the Dulski family. In Anieli’s opinion, Juliasiewiczowa and her husband live an extravagant life, fail to save money and spend it on trivia (magazines, theatre). However, the character displays certain features of a prig, e.g. when resolving the Hanka “issue”. Quite telling were the words Dulaska said to her: “Help me! You have the cleverness of a thief – you will figure out something”, see G. Zapolska, op. cit., Revision., BN I 187, Kraków 1972, p. 113).</p>		

Table: Analysis of behaviour and personality traits of selected characters in the play by Gabriela Zapolska

By including a description of the manners and personality traits of the characters of the play, the table provides much information on the construction of Zapolska’s characters. Mainly, however, the material makes it pos-

sible to create a wide definition of “dulska-ness”. On the basis of the above interpretations and available dictionary definitions it should be noted that: “dulska-ness” is a term that has appeared in literary studies because of the play written by Gabriela Zapolska, *The Morality of Mrs Dulka*. The notion refers not only to the conduct of the title character, but also to the behaviour of her other family members who – like Aniela – represent the conservative middle class of Lvov locked in “their own world”. The concept should be used to describe people that stand out for their egocentrism, despotism and feeling of superiority over others only because of their higher material or social status. People stuck in their “dulska-ness” want to exert control over others, being committed to a belief that wealth is a trait of human dignity. To attain their goals, they lie and cheat. They are hypocrites and have no compassion for others. Money-making and a thirst for a comfortable life deprive the petty bourgeoisie of ideals, while a negative attitude to culture results in intellectual parochialism and a lack of any interest in developing one’s own personality.

Duplicity and excessive concern for one’s own image are fixed traits appearing in the majority of the profiles of Aniela Dulka. Some studies draw particular attention to the hypocrisy of the main character, who – being a ruthless person – does not shy away from taking a moralising tone in relations with others⁹. No wonder Roman Taborski used the following statement to describe the character’s manners: “Dulka is full of irrepressible energy, she terrorised her family and took the dominant position in the whole household”¹⁰.

The above portrays the Lvov middle class in a very unfavourable light. As it appears, the family of Aniela and Felicjan Dulski is “contaminated” with priggishness that has seized them completely and prevents them from establishing any genuine relations with society. The devastating consequences of these priggish manners are particularly visible in the attitude of the title character. The only person to take up the fight with the family curse is Zbyszko – however, even he is doomed to fail. Filled with ambitions and determination to fight (certainly sparked by his relations with young Polish artists forming the artistic bohemia), the young man is defeated and – instead of taking responsibility for his affair with the servant and having been lured by Juliasiewiczowa – he chooses to live a comfortable life and abandons the pregnant Hanka. The genes of priggishness have not skipped Hesia either. In the play, the girl appears to be dishonest and arrogant, while her conduct is a pure exemplification of the maxim *Carpe diem*. The way she acts has been

⁹ See e.g. *Lexicon of literary characters*, eds. M. Kisiel, M. Pytasz, Katowice 1995.

¹⁰ R. Taborski, “*Morality of Mrs Dulka*” by Gabriela Zapolska, Warsaw 1987, p. 49.

accurately summarised by Joanna Kisielowa, who portrayed the character as “great material for a genuine representative of petty bourgeois mentality”¹¹.

The only positive members of the Dulski family are Felicjan and Mela. The reader cannot learn much about Mrs Dulska’s husband, for throughout the play he utters only one statement: “The devil take the lot of you!!!”¹². This short sentence is very suggestive – Mr Dulski has had enough of the developments under “his” roof and ignored other family members with pregnant silence. Another positive character – although left in the shade of despotic Aniela – is Mela. The exact opposite of her sister (Hesia), Mela is portrayed as honest, empathic and naïve. She is the only family member not overpowered by priggishness and able to sympathise with the betrayed Hanka, whom she treats with due respect and kindness.

In *The Morality of Mrs Dulska*, Gabriela Zapolska showed the fate of a family embroiled in a serious crisis, whose behaviour confirms popular stereotypes about the morality of the middle class based on duplicity and the cult of money. Felicjan and Mela are not able to change the present state of affairs – quite the opposite: it is they who are exposed to the curse of priggishness looming over the family and repeatedly causing even deeper communication disruptions in the Dulski family.

¹¹ J. Kisielowa, *Hesia from the Dulsk*, [in:] *Lexicon of literary characters*, Katowice 1995, p. 71.

¹² G. Zapolska, op. cit., Edit. 2 revised., BN I 187, Kraków 1972, p. 101.