Abstract of the doctoral thesis „In the background of life and literature. The image of a domestic servant in the literature of the second half of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century: from the loyal Jan to the wayward Hanka”

The subject of the research is the domestic servant as the literary character of Polish works from the second half of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century. The growing interest in domestic service on the basis of such sciences as history, sociology or law has not encourage to such studies at the level of literary studies yet. Meanwhile, a huge, undeveloped space is visible in this research field. Sociological, historical or legal sources say a lot about the situation of domestic service in the analyzed period, but they do not answer the basic question: what was the daily life of the servants of that time.

Assuming that the literature of positivism – focused on the realistic reconstruction of the world – could fill this gap, the purpose of the doctoral thesis was to recreate the image of everyday life of the domestic servants living in the second half of the 19th and early 20th century. The research problem consisted in finding the answer to the question to what extent the literary creation of the domestic servant could correspond to his actual image and the actual life situation in the analyzed period.

The basic source of this work were selected prose and dramatic works published in the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries. Sociological, historical, legal and demographic publications were widely used, as well as contemporary guides, press publications etc.

The subject of the thesis dictated using of interdisciplinary analysis. Methodological syncretism enabled simultaneous exploring such various research categories as mimesis, anthropology of the literary character, the poetics of everyday life or ‘history from below’. There were references to cultural anthropology, sociology of literature, geopoetics or ‘geoculturology’.

The analysis brought two important reflections. Firstly, the literary servants were presented (by the authors of the works in which they appear) in a way that allows to fill gaps, which could not be covered by research conducted within other humanities. Numerous examples of daily activities of domestic servants, both professional and private, show these characters as „pureblooded” figures and types of real people, corresponding to contemporary historical sources.

Secondly, the presence of domestic servants of positivist literature turned out to be complex. On the one hand, this group was treated by the authors with great disregard. The servant is usually a second or even third plan, deprived of identity, biography and contribution to the development of the action. On
the other hand, a kind of evolution of the group and serving as a type is noticeable. This observation has enabled to organize the structure of this thesis, which indirectly presents the transformations to which the domestic service was subjected during the following decades of the 19th century.

The first chapter concerns the type of a ‘loyal’ servant. The analysis of such characters as Mikołaj Suchowolski from the work *Stary sługa* by Henryk Sienkiewicz, Jakub Zarzecki from *Holota* by Józef Ignacy Kraszewski and Ambrożowa from *Jedza* by Eliza Orzeszkowa helped to separate the basic features of the type, including old age, religiousness and close relationship with the employer.

The second chapter was consist to the image of an ‘arguing’ servant. The heroes of this part of the work – e.g. Marcysia from *Moje służby. Dziennik Marcysi* by Cecylia Walewska, Franciszek from *As* by Adolf Dygasinski and Konstanty from *Lalka* by Bolesław Prus are a good examples of the still small, but already visible changes in this social group. These servants are undoubtedly faithful, but they are already starting to look for their own interest in their work.

The next part of the dissertation is an analysis of a ‘hurt’ servant. Her representatives (because this group turned out to be strongly feminized) such as Kaśka Kariatyda from Gabriela Zapolska's novel, Józefowa from Maria Konopnicka's work or Czernicka from *Dobra pani* by Eliza Orzeszkowa are examples of heroes who have suffered harm from an employer, society or the system, which includes stereotypes and conventions. The consequences of harm to most of them turned out to be tragic.

In the fourth chapter, attention was focused on the type of a ‘wayward’ servant. Seeking freedom or rebellious against the serfdom, the domestic worker openly fights with his employer. The stories of such character as Paulina Kielkówna of *Wiry* by Henryk Sienkiewicz, Basia from *Na rozstajnych drogach* by Leonard Sowiński or Franka Chomcówna from *Cham* by Eliza Orzeszkowa show that the defiance has its limits, for which the expected freedom rarely awaits.

The last chapter of the dissertation covered the analysis of the most popular type of positivism’s servant. a ‘ghost’ servant is a silent, nameless, transparent figure, whose closer to the stage prop, nothing meaningful element of the scenography than a real human being. Looking at the image of the domestic service in the greatest works of the positivism – *Lalka* by Bolesław Prus, *Nad Niemnem* by Eliza Orzeszkowa and *Rodzina Polanieckich* by Henryk Sienkiewicz – aimed to point out to this disturbing and, unfortunately, common trend in contemporary literature.

The subject matter discussed in this work certainly deserves further insightful studies. The potential of home service – as a social and professional group, but above all as a literary character (in different literary periods) – is still huge. Its use can be an opportunity for many humanities, with literary studies at the forefront.