

# Alina Siomkajło

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## "Oświecenie", Mieczysław Klimowicz, Warszawa 1977 : [recenzja]

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# Book Reviews

## Comptes rendus de livres

Mieczysław Klimowicz, **Oświecenie (Enlightenment)**, PWN, Warszawa 1972. 3rd edition 1977.

Mieczysław Klimowicz's book opened in 1972 the series *Historia Literatury Polskiej* (The History of Polish Literature) edited by the Institute of Literary Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences<sup>1</sup>. That the *Oświecenie* meets the demand and expectations of the readers is proved by the fact that it has already run through three editions.

*Oświecenie* is meant as an university guide as well as a book to be read by a wider public interested in the humanities and it is the first synthesis of the 18th century in Poland with the ambition of comprising the whole knowledge of the epoch. In accordance with a new analytic approach, the age of Enlightenment in Poland has been defined as stretching from 1730 to 1795, which means enlarging the area of study in comparison with the hitherto available handbooks, where the Enlightenment was usually confined to the years 1764–1795.

While taking into consideration the essential connections of literature of the Polish Enlightenment with Classicism, the author also shows the adaptation of decadent trends of the Baroque on the one hand, and the influence of new currents which were becoming active at the time, such as rococo, sentimentalism or the first signs of pre-Romanticism, on the other. Historical penetration of the

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<sup>1</sup> The series, whose editor-in-chief was Kazimierz Wyka, has by now five volumes. After Klimowicz's *Enlightenment* there appeared: *Barok (Baroque)* by Czesław Hernas (1973) and *Renesans (Renaissance)* by Jerzy Ziomek (1973)—both discussed in vol. III of *Literary Studies in Poland*—followed by the first volume of *Literatura polska 1918–1975 (Polish Literature 1918–1975)* in 1975 and *Pozytywizm (Positivism)* by Henryk Markiewicz in 1978.

all-European movement into Polish literature and the relations of the latter with the life of the nation are presented in Klimowicz's book from many various and interdisciplinary points of view. Despite its complicated structure, the book is marked by clarity of composition, owing mainly to the author's combining several types of presentation specific to such publications. Against the background of historical events Klimowicz shows portraits of writers through reconstructing their literary careers. Those portraits-biograms are intermingled with reconstruction of the evolution of literary genres and development of styles. The author combines also the synchronic approach with the diachronic one in order to interpret ideas, institutions, programmes, literary practice and their interrelations in their tendencies to bring about social, economical, educational, political and aesthetic changes, in their aspiration to modernity.

The internal division of the Polish Enlightenment into periods is based on changes in political and cultural configurations, which condition changes in literature. Part I of the book, "The Early Enlightenment" (1730—1764), presents the first signs of the Enlightenment ideas which appear at the end of the 17th and the beginning of the 18th century, within the still predominant Sarmatian culture. Part II deals with the years 1765—1787, when the liberal Classicism of the Enlightenment is being formed in the reign of king Stanislas August Poniatowski. This period is marked by important cultural events: there appear new scientific and public institutions (the National Theatre, The Commission of National Education), journalism develops with such periodicals as "Monitor" and "Zabawy Przyjemne i Pożyteczne" (Pleasant and Useful Amusements), the poetry of the Confederation of Bar is written. Literature, and especially Classicist poetry, flourishes with prominent writers of the epoch: Adam Naruszewicz, Ignacy Krasicki, Stanisław Trembecki, Tomasz Kajetan Węgierski, comedy being represented by Franciszek Zabłocki, and the sphere of literary theory by Krasicki, Adam Kazimierz Czartoryski, Filip Neriusz Golański and Franciszek Ksawery Dmochowski. The predominant model of culture and thinking is that imposed by the French school.

The decline of Classicism was brought about partly by the spread of the rococo style in Polish culture, the turning point in aesthetics being the rococo programme of Józef Szymanowski.

At the same time in literature, philosophy, and art in general there appeared a trend called sentimentalism, in Poland connected especially with the work of Franciszek Dionizy Kniaźnin and Franciszek Karpiński. Part III of the book introduces problems of development and clashing of those styles which anticipate some of the democratic watchwords of the future Romanticism.

Part IV, covering the years 1787–1795, is concerned with political literature connected with the activities of the Four-Years' *Sejm* (*Diet*, 1788–1792), the Confederation of Targowica, and patriotic literature of Kościuszko's insurrection. In this period such forms as polemical writing, rhetorical prose, memoirs, "political" comedy, bourgeois drama, and tragedy on national subjects are ennobled and enter into literature; there is also development of opera and vaudeville. Classicist poetic genres become useful for conveying patriotic messages, democratic tendencies of literature find their way to drama, which expresses ideas of national and social freedom. Also the world of the folk hero enters into literature.

The peak period of the Polish Enlightenment (1787–1795) with its new generation of writers: Stanisław Staszic, Hugo Kollątaj, Franciszek Salezy Jezierski, Julian Ursyn Niemcewicz and Jakub Jasiński, is at the same time the period of great changes, when modern Polish nation is formed and the middle class becomes the most expansive social class.

Finally, the last phase of the Polish Enlightenment is marked by especially active theatrical life and development of drama. These aspects of the age had long awaited detailed treatment since they were of minor interest for the authors of hitherto written handbooks and guides to the literature of the period. Klimowicz presents the history of the Enlightenment theatre in a detailed and consequent way from its very beginnings at the court of August III, through the school and magnate theatres, up to the great triumph of the art on the national stage directed by Wojciech Bogusławski.

The essential feature of the Polish literature of the Enlightenment period the author sees in its serving the programme of secular and democratic reforms, whereas the tragedy of 1795—the third partition of Poland—accounts for the principal crisis of the Enlightenment.

Sum. by *Alina Siomkajło*  
Transl. by *Maria-Bożenna Fedewicz*