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"Słownik literatury polskiego oświecenia", pod red. Teresy Kostkiewiczowej, Wrocław 1990 : [recenzja]

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Słownik literatury polskiego oświecenia (A Dictionary of Polish Enlightenment Literature), ed. by Teresa Kostkiewiczowa, Ossolineum, 1st ed. Wrocław 1977, 2nd ed. Wrocław 1990.

The second edition of *A Dictionary of Polish Enlightenment Literature* is already in press. It is an important publication. There is general scarcity of all types of lexicons, literary guides or encyclopaedias in the field of Polish theory of literature. This acute gap is only partly filled by the recent works appearing in the series *Vademecum Polonisty* (The Polish Philologist's V.) ed. by Janusz Sławiński, by the *Słownik polskich pisarzy współczesnych (Dictionary of Contemporary Polish Writers)* published last time over a dozen years ago, *Bibliografia literatury polskiej "Nowy Korbut" (The Bibliography of Polish Literature "N.K.")*, or the monumental, two-volume work *Literatura polska. Przewodnik encyklopedyczny (Polish Literature. An Encyclopaedic Guide)*, which by its very nature requires successive supplementation, enlargement and updating in the course of years.

A Dictionary of Polish Enlightenment Literature, published within the mentioned series *Vademecum Polonisty*, continues to be the only publication of its kind in Poland. A analogous *Dictionary of Old-Polish Literature* is in press, and dictionaries of 19th- and 20th-c. Polish literature are under preparation.

In its one, almost 850 pages long volume the *Dictionary* embraces 119 articles, arranged in alphabetical order and connected with one another by a system of mutual references characteristic of encyclopaedic works. However, these articles are not devoted to particular writers or works, as it happens in typical dictionaries, but concern – as we are told in the introduction – a certain number of the most important cultural-literary problems and phenomena of Polish Enlightenment, “such as the era’s literary currents and directions; general cultural phenomena connected with literary creation; forms, institutions and centres of literary life; aesthetico-literary consciousness of the era; the artistic forms used in literary practice, and lastly – literary trends of foreign provenance as reflected in some elements of their reception.” The *Dictionary* is therefore an attempt at outlining the whole of Enlightenment literature and culture through the crucial, “central” questions of formation and functioning of literature and its

cultural background; it brings a series of summary pictures composing a synthetic view of literature and culture of the era.

The *Dictionary* was produced by the Institute of Literary Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences, which enlisted the co-operation of a large group of scholars specializing in various fields, from many university and academic centres (47 authors in the first edition, and 49 in the second). They are above all literary historians and theoreticians, but also philosophers, historians, art historians, and even Romanists and Latinists; one of the articles (Utopia) was written by the Italian Slavist from the University of Rome, Sante Graciotti.

The authors of particular entries are for the most part scholars known for their various works on literature or on various forms of culture of the Enlightenment or its proximate eras. However, relatively few of the articles presented tend to sum up previous studies. The majority take up issues that have not been tackled so far, and new themes, thus making a first attempt at delineating the boundaries of and describing the phenomena presented; some of them are simply reconnaissances in their particular fields. Thus at the time of its publication the *Dictionary* significantly anticipated detailed studies, and even now in many cases it brings the fullest description of the phenomena it isolated, at the same time showing the need and perspectives of further studies.

The articles present basically their authors' own, "private" investigative standpoints, their individual models of interpretation of the phenomena under discussion. This can be seen e.g. in different treatment of the three literary currents that co-existed in the period of Enlightenment. Classicism and sentimentalism are presented almost exclusively as the sphere of literary phenomena, while rococo—a little more extensively (at least in the first part of the entry)—as a symptom of a certain aesthetic and moral-cultural attitude manifest—also—in literature.

The role of the editor—Teresa Kostkiewiczowa—is significant, both as the author of the whole conception of a *Dictionary of Polish Enlightenment Literature*—unconventional and innovatory in comparison to other encyclopedic publications—and as the author of the selection of essential problems and the author or co-author of 16 articles fundamental to the description of the literature under discussion, penetrating deeply the literary consciousness of the era and

describing the essential aesthetic categories of Enlightenment. These are among others two (from the three) articles discussing the main currents of the era (sentimentalism and classicism), articles concerning the most important fields of poetic creation together with their typology and aesthetic consciousness (Kinds and Genres of Poetry, Poetry—Theories, Oratory, Rules, Lyric Poetry, and Erotic Poetry), some of the main literary genres of Enlightenment (Elegy, Ode, Satire—co-author with Maria Grzędzińska) and borderline spheres between literature and sociology of literary life (Literary and Theatrical Criticism).

Along with many outstanding authors of the *Dictionary* one should also mention Barbara Otwinowska, author of 7 entries which show the roots of the literary consciousness of Enlightenment in previous eras as well as literary and aesthetic categories of the 18th c. based on European and ancient tradition, categories disappearing (Humour) or flourishing in the period of Enlightenment (Imagination, Taste, Genius, Imitation, Rhetoric). One should also note the significant participation of Zofia Sinko, who wrote articles about Enlightenment prose (Romance, Conversations, Novel, Novella) and West-European inspirations for the literature of the era as well as literary contacts with abroad (Ossianism, Youngism, Gothicism, Rousseauism—together with T. Kostkiewiczowa), and lastly Elżbieta Aleksandrowska, who prepared the entries concerning the periodical press of the era, learned and literary societies as well as the problems of literary geography, social background and generation stratification of Enlightenment authors.

The construction of articles in the *Dictionary* is generally uniform, and leads from the presentation of the subject, description of the character, type and boundaries of a concept or phenomenon, explanation of terminological problems, through a discussion of tradition and models, the then consciousness of the phenomenon, its types, kinds and genres, up to the outline of its development. This construction is not "rigid," which allows it to be each time adjusted to the problem under discussion. In this connection certain types of entries can be distinguished: summary articles, charting from the historical perspective the development of one literary kind or genre or a section of the era's social-literary life, e.g. periodical press, libraries, censorship, theatre, educational system; monographs concerning one institution

of literary or social life, particular “cultural facts” (Society of Friends of Science, National Theatre, Kołłątaj’s Circle, Commission of National Education, *Monitor* periodical and others); and finally the entries that distinguish some phenomena of higher order such as literary, cultural, world-view currents, sets of ideological and aesthetic tendencies characteristic of Polish Enlightenment.

It should be strongly underlined that although belles-lettres are the dominant subject of interest in the *Dictionary*, yet the scope of this publication is much larger. Already in defining the literary tendencies typical of Enlightenment, such ideological currents were shown for which literary realizations are only one of many types of exemplification, and not the most important, for that matter (e.g. Gothicism). In other entries we have to do with facts, doctrines or tendencies which at first sight seem to be only indirectly connected with literature (gardens, cafés, physiocratic doctrines), but nevertheless constitute an important element of the overall culture of the era, of which literature is an inherent part.

The authors of the *Dictionary* clearly placed emphasis on two types of questions: the literary, aesthetic and linguistic consciousness of Enlightenment and the role played in the creation of literature of the late 18th c. by the modern institutions of literary life then arising. A certain vacillation is also seen in the *Dictionary* which reflects the bias of the current research into the literature of the era, a vacillation between what is doubtlessly literature, i.e. a certain type of aesthetic object susceptible of analysis and interpretation in literary and aesthetic terms – and what only belongs to the communicative aspect of literature as a certain linguistic *communiqué*, i.e. publicistic, political and occasional writings, etc.

From among the “mixture” of subjects within the alphabetic system, there emerges, however, a certain order, manifest in the mentioned character of the articles. The group of “primary” entries is prominent. They embrace above all three literary currents – classicism, sentimentalism, rococo – co-existing on the principle of “division of roles,” or “competence” even within the output of each particular writer; classicism, which became the literary expression of the drive to socio-political changes of our country, sentimentalism, clearly predominating in lyric works, and the refined culture of rococo, based on the social life of the salons.

A special complementation of the entries presenting the development of Polish literature in the late 18th c. is the article entitled "Enlightenment," which discusses the set of coexisting or mutually opposed currents making up the broad cultural formation which was an integral and coherent part of the phenomena present at that time almost all over Europe. This general outline is supplemented by the entry Old-Polish Culture, presenting the cultural formation characteristic of the so-called Commonwealth of the Gentry that existed from the end of the 16th c. until the middle 18th c. and the remnants of which were present until the end of the 18th c. This formation arose as a result of contact of various cultures and traditions and was the expression of the whole specificity of culture and customs of the territory of the Commonwealth of Two Nations. Gradually ousted by Enlightenment in the second half of the 18th c. it still continued to mark the typical mentality and customs of the majority of population which remained outside the scope of influence of Enlightenment currents connected with the culturally dominating centre.

The above are almost only articles of synthetic character and for the most part they sum up earlier studies and publications. This group of entries is extended by a series of articles discussing various tendencies inspired by foreign literatures, partly based on literary tradition (Horatianism), above all however manifesting the reception of aesthetic, poetic and socio-philosophical ideas developing almost at the same time abroad, such as Youngism, Voltairianism, Rousseauism, Gessnerism. The sets of ideas in question are not "equipondérant" concepts, some of them rather designate each a special set of literary tendencies (such as Ossianism, Gessnerism, Youngism), others embrace besides literature also socio-political and philosophical thought (Rousseauism, Voltairianism) and even express certain general tendencies and ideas whose reflection in literature is marginal, although significant of the overall picture of the late 18th-c. literature (Libertinism, Jacobinism, and even Physiocracy).

Of similar character are the entries: Philosophy, Nature, and also Deism, charting the intellectual horizons of the men of the era, main directions of their thought and comprehension of the world, formation of their ideas of history and contemporaneity and at the same time the emergence of new intellectual and world-view systems in the culture of Enlightenment.

A very important group of problems is introduced by articles analyzing the most important literary and aesthetic categories of Enlightenment, above all Taste, Genius and Imagination, but also Feeling, Imitation, Humour and others. Among the three basic categories of the age, taste signified both the predispositions of the author and the general cognitive disposition of man such as is necessary to any action of perceptive character; genius referred to various subjective dispositions of the author that distinguish him clearly from other people, whereas imagination, the most universal category of Enlightenment, particularly relevant to the current of sentimentalism (and which reached its prime only in Romanticism) represented both cognitive and creative capabilities (dream, illusion). In the current of sentimentalism, close to imagination in cognitive respect, was the category of feeling, tenderness, derived from rhetoric and characteristic of the then typical convictions about forms and possibilities of cognition and interpersonal contacts. If some categories (i.e. imagination) were only arising, others were disappearing – the concept of humour, formed in the 16th and 17th c., was still present in the period of Enlightenment, but was gradually ousted by such concepts as taste, genius, or talent.

In the mentioned articles there appear a number of very significant observations, unfortunately dispersed in many entries, concerning the aesthetic consciousness of the era, the lines of formation and evolution of the basic categories inherited from earlier eras. They seem to present the fullest and so far most essential analysis of the aesthetic foundations of Polish literature in the second half of the 18th c.

The general entries of summary character, such as periodical press, learned, literary and other societies, are accompanied by several mini-monographs of the major institutions and cultural facts of the era, two most important Polish periodicals of the Stanislaus Enlightenment, which contributed to shaping the new consciousness: the literary *Zabawy Przyjemne i Pożyteczne* (1770–1777) and the leading socio-political periodical *Monitor* (1765–1785) born out of the King's inspiration, which was to play an important part in the country's reform; then the National Theatre – the first professional public stage in Poland; the Commission for National Education – the equivalent of the present Ministry (Department) of Schools and Education – established in 1773 for the organization and reform of schools. These entries

present the institutions which significantly contributed to the formation of Polish Enlightenment. There is also a supplementary article devoted to the Society of Friends of Science in Warsaw (1800–1832), whose activity focussed the efforts aimed at the organization and reconstruction of science and intellectual life in partitioned Poland.

A numerous group of entries in the *Dictionary* consists of purely “literary” articles, devoted either to particular literary genres or—less frequently—to some kinds of poetry connected e.g. with political or historic events, such as Occasional Political Literature, Poetry of Polish Legions or even Neo-Latin Poetry. Here also the authors concentrate on systematic phenomena much more than on concrete literary accomplishments, which constitute only an exemplification. In articles discussing literary genres the emphasis is similarly placed on the situation of the genre, its presence or emergence, as a certain phenomenon characteristic of the era’s culture and susceptible of typological systematization. Here also the problem discussed in each of the articles is that of the then consciousness of the genre, its separate character and relation to earlier developmental forms. Among more than 20 entries devoted to literary genres it is worth while to mention such articles as: Ode, where we find not only an expressive characterization of the genre but also a presentation of changes in the consciousness of the genre and poetry at large in Stanislaus’ time—and also Elegy, which—although confined by the boundaries of the era—is the fullest presentation of the genre to be found in Polish literary studies.

The groups of questions presented here are complemented by articles discussing the facts characteristic of literary life (e.g. literary distinctions), the problems of literary geography and important culture-creative centres (Puławy) as well as the stylistics and poetics of Enlightenment literature.

Such a presentation of literature and culture of Enlightenment necessitated the acceptance of certain assumptions common to the whole volume, which—together with the system of inter-entry references—would bind a series of articles discussing various cultural phenomena of one era into a coherent and—despite eventual shortcomings—synthetic picture. The basic assumption was to embrace with this description a relatively long time which—unlike in traditional approaches—did not more or less cover the reign of Stanislaus

Augustus, but the period of almost eighty years from the 1740s (and sometimes even earlier), when one could already talk about currents precursory to the Enlightenment, up to the 1820s, which saw the Romantic breakthrough. This assumption, several years ago innovatory (especially in respect of the beginning of the 19th c.), although it continues to be questioned until now, has become a permanent part of research into the literature of this period, which clearly testifies to the influence exerted by the *Dictionary of Polish Enlightenment Literature*.

The way of presenting the widely-conceived literature of the era manifest in the selection of entries and in the character of their elaboration decides that the *Dictionary* is an attempt at a new synthesis of Enlightenment literature and culture, exposing specific problems, taking up issues earlier unnoticed or presenting in a different light already known themes, and only in a few cases synthetizing earlier studies.

It seems that its conception was very sound. Any maximally objectivized information of encyclopedic type soon becomes outdated in view of the influx of new studies. Despite the passage of 13 years since the date of completion of editorial work on its first issue, the *Dictionary* has retained its value both as a certain view of the literature and culture of Enlightenment, as the expression of a definite methodological consciousness and as a sum of knowledge about the era.

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Transl. by Agnieszka Kreczmar



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