

# Zofia Sinko

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## "Proza fabularna w czasopiśmie polskich 1801-1830", Zofia Sinko, Wrocław 1988 : [recenzja]

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Literary Studies in Poland 23, 135-142

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1990

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# Book Reviews

## Comptes rendus de livres

Zofia Sinko: **Proza fabularna w czasopismach polskich 1801–1830 (Fiction Prose in Polish Periodicals 1801–1830)**, Ossolineum, Wrocław 1988, pp. 290.

The study is meant to give a survey of changes in the fiction which was published in Polish periodicals between 1801 and 1830. Polish literature in general—critical writing, poetry, drama and the novel—was then undergoing a significant change: apart from works and opinions still connected with the tradition of the Enlightenment there appeared new tendencies which announced the advent of Romanticism. Fiction in periodicals is only a small section of this general process, but it certainly is not a negligible factor; the study is the first to deal with it as separate subject of investigation. It answers the question of the extent and the still continuing popularity of forms inherited from Polish late-18th-century literature, and also traces the appearance of new kinds of prose thus far unknown or only sporadically present in Poland. The main issue is that of tradition *versus* innovation: the former is represented by various types of tales (*contes*)—allegorical, Oriental, philosophical, and moral—while the latter appears in the form of sentimental novellas, Gothic stories, or short novels with plots presented against the background of historical events and with frequent introduction of mystery and terror.

At the time of king Stanislaus Augustus Poniatowski (1764–1795) Polish fiction in general, and tales, parables or novelettes in particular, described a well-ordered, just, rational and intelligible world in which vice met with proper punishment, and virtue with due reward. Tragic love was replaced by tender sentiments, unusual events (sometimes verging on the miraculous) had a didactic point. Quite a different image of man and of the world began to appear in the new kinds of fiction published by periodicals at the beginning of the 19th century.

We now see Werther-like lovers—victims of passion, outlaws and criminals, mediaeval knights, feudal castles and the wild scenery of the mountains. The suggestive sombre background was chosen to fit the tempestuous feelings of rebels, renegades, and solitaires who were often modelled upon Byronic heroes. These new themes and new ways of their handling appeared at the turn of the second and third decade of the 19th century while still coexisting with older forms of tales and novellas until the very end of the period under consideration.

The basis of the present research is as broad as possible: the author has examined nearly all Polish periodicals which appeared in Warsaw, Vilna, Lwów, Cracow, and Poznań in the first three decades of the 19th century; the number of titles amounts of fifty seven. Daily papers, but not their regular literary supplements, have been left out. The periodicals in question are different in kind ranging from learned journals to popular literary magazines and to journals for women in which poetry, fiction, and essays appeared side by side with news about the latest Paris fashions.

Fiction in magazines consisted to a large extent of translations from foreign periodicals and from collections of tales and stories. Also popular novels of the day (mostly French ones) attracted the interest of the editors who published them in fragments or in abbreviated form. The authorship as well as the title of the original was sometimes indicated, but the prevailing practice was just to say that a given text was a translation from French, German, English, or Russian. Translations from Russian, by the way, although not many in number, are a new feature in comparison with the preceding period. Some of the foreign works were adapted in order to present Polish social and geographical conditions; this kind of procedure, fairly frequent in the 18th century in other genres, was now first applied to fiction. The aim was to diversify Polish narrative prose and to win the readers for new genres by introducing familiar circumstances.

Some items appeared in periodicals two or even three times, usually under an identical title, but there are also cases when titles were changed. We have to deal here mostly with republications which was quite a common practice of the period, sometimes with new translations.

Original productions take only a modest place among translations and their reissues. Their segregation from the mass of foreign material

proves a difficult task because translators often failed to acknowledge their sources or even signed adaptations of foreign texts with their own names. The principles of dividing the material had, consequently, to be based on general criteria. One group of texts includes translations, adaptations and texts of unknown provenance which, however, clearly follow the pattern of Western sources and conventions. The other group consists of productions dealing with Poland's legendary or historical past, or with Polish contemporary life, customs and manners. Chapters II to VIII are devoted to the prose which was taken over from foreign sources or which may be connected with such sources, while Chapter IX deals with texts which are characterized by typically Polish thematic features.

The survey begins in Chapter II with the discussion of small productions, which continue the tradition of the former period, such as allegorical, Oriental, and philosophical tales (including two by Voltaire), and short didactic stories. Their plots and motifs were sometimes an expression of consciously adopted philosophical or ethical systems, but in most cases the aim was practical and didactic: to teach honest virtue and life wisdom. The texts are mainly anonymous and either date back to the 18th century or imitate 18th-century productions. In the group of tales of known authorship we find the names of S. Johnson, D.D. Cardonne, F. Blanchet, J.B. Du Halde, J.S. Boufflers, L.S. Mercier and O. Goldsmith. Among 19th-century followers of this tradition we see P. Baour-Lormian, A. Sarrazin, A.F.F. Kotzebue, and A.H. Lafontaine.

In the stream of 18th-century tradition in Polish periodicals the inheritance of J.F. Marmontel deserves special attention; it is dealt in Chapter III. In his own time the French writer introduced a new kind of fiction and a new name: the *conte moral* (moral tale) which was a fairly comprehensive paradigm for both humorous and sentimental treatment of the content. The constant feature of Marmontel's pattern was a clearly posited moral thesis and an attractive plot as its demonstration. This feature was shared by Marmontel's conscious or unconscious imitators at the end of the 18th and at the beginning of the 19th century. Moral tales belonging to this group which appeared in Polish translations or adaptations were by Mme de Genlis, J.N. Bouilly, M. Edgeworth, A. Opie, W. Irving, Kotzebue, Lafontaine, J.H.D. Zschokke and A.F.F. Langbein.

Chapter IV deals with the group of mostly anonymous stories (up to twenty in number) which are devoted to sensational or extraordinary events; one of them is a translation of Goethe's *Der Prokurator* which is a tale that, in turn, follows the pattern of the facetious novellas of the *Decameron*. The group also includes some items dealing with murders, sudden deaths by poison, and with court trials. Of particular interest is the translation of a short story by A.G. Meissner taken from his serial *Skizzen* which contained a special section of *Kriminal-Akten und Geschichten*. Such stories were a new feature both in European and Polish literature foreshadowing the birth and growth of the detective story and novel.

Another frequent theme of novellas (the group is dealt with in Chapter V) were tragic adventures of lovers and sufferings of great passion; the presentation was highly emotive, often verging on frenzy. The list of obstacles to the lovers happiness included wars, fatal mistakes, tyranny of parents, unrequited love, breach of faith, and bigamy. The outcome was usually the death of one or both lovers by suicide or of broken heart. Suggestive scenery plays an important part and the graveyard is a favourite background. Texts which appeared in Polish periodicals are mostly anonymous and very numerous—more than sixty in number. Some novelettes of this type (e.g. by Baculard d'Arnaud) appeared in translation in the preceding period, but the new mass reception of the genre is characterized by the introduction of a different scale of values: there is no didactic point which was so characteristic of the 18th century—exuberant passions are no longer condemned, but meet with approval. Among works of known authorship one has to mention here a novella by P.S. Dupont de Nemours, a well-known physiocrat and economist, entitled *Mademoiselle Dzieżbicka*. It deals with the tragic love of a Polish heroine (the author actually spent some time in Poland) and the translation appeared in seven Polish periodicals in the years 1804–1828.

Chapter VI is devoted to larger novels of manners and of sensibility (sometimes in letter form) which were often published in fragments or in abbreviations. There appeared in Polish periodical the works of Mrs. Pichler (a popular Austrian author of sentimental and historical novels), of Mrs. Opie, of H. Clauren (the pseudonym of C.G.S. Heun), of Chateaubriand (*Les Aventures du dernier Abencérage*), of Zschokke, G.H. Ducray-Duminil, L.N.P.A. Forbin and of numerous anonymous authors.

Gothic stories (presented in Chapter VII) offered their readers versified fare of sentimental or sensational plots combined with the irrational and the fantastic. It is possible here to distinguish three kinds of treatment. In one group we have stories which introduce the supernatural (ghosts, vampires and devils) directly into the world which is being presented by the author. Such elements contrasting with the readers' empirical world take a key position in the structure of the plot and create dramatic tension. A good example among the translations is *The Vampire*—a tale begun by Byron and finished by his physician J.W. Polidori. A different type of gothic fiction is represented by stories which follow the traces of Mrs. Radcliffe: supernatural events are rationally explained at the end of the story while horror is usually dispelled by a serene *dénouement*. A representative example in Polish periodicals is W. Irving's short story *The Spectre Bridegroom* which appeared five times in the leading magazines between 1822 and 1830. The third type of Gothicism in a broad sense of the term which is represented among Polish translations are tales of chivalry and of robbers (*Ritter- und Räuberromane*) with plots usually set in the Middle Ages and presented against the background of Gothic castles and of wild nature. The acknowledged master of the genre (now totally forgotten) was Ch.V.P. d'Arincourt, the author of two famous novels *Le Solitaire* and *Le Renégat* which both had their Polish versions. There were also translations of tales of chivalry by W.G.A. Blumenhagen and A. Bestuzhev, as well as a translation of the famous robber story *Jean Sbogar* by Ch. Nodier. Except for the last item, the translated tales about "Gothic" rebels and contestants were typical mass literature, but their importance should not be overlooked: they gave support to the great manifestoes of rebellion and of individualism which were proclaimed by the heroes of great Romantic works.

A different kind of the fantastic and the extraordinary was represented in Polish periodicals by translations of Irving's short stories including *Rip Van Winkle* and *Thomas Walker and the Devil* in which traditional plots of European literature were taken over to be presented in the historical and social realities of the New World. Readers of Polish magazines were also introduced to the writings of E.T.A. Hoffmann; there was information about his life and work and there appeared translations of his two short stories—*Artushof* and *Marino Falieri* which foreshadowed his later pronouncedly fantastic production.

History treated as a background or as a source of plots is characteristic of the group of texts discussed in Chapter VIII. A large number of historical stories consists of cliché images of actual historical characters involved in memorable events, but the aim of the authors was not a faithful presentation of the chosen period, or of characters of the past. What was done was either to describe some heroic deed to be given as example, or to present the romantic adventures of royal lovers. Like some of the Gothic stories these tales were forerunners of the historical novel as evolved by Walter Scott who looked upon men as products of their time and described their doings as part of the changing historical process. There were complete translations of his novels in book form, while periodicals of the third decade of the 19th century were publishing fragments and summaries of his diaries and novels. Among Scott's followers we find in periodicals an American and two Germans: J.F. Cooper was represented by an abbreviation of his *Spy*, while K.F. Van der Velde (rather exceedingly praised as the German Walter Scott by his contemporaries) had several strongly abbreviated novels published in Polish periodicals; also some translations of the historical fiction by Mrs. Pichler fall into this compartment.

Original Polish fiction (which is discussed in Chapter IX) was successfully competing in magazines with translated works. Part of it followed the general 18th-century didactic line established by Polish essay periodicals in the preceding period, and in particular the example of the Polish didactic novel of the 18th century. New tendencies were, however, making their appearance: fiction began to deal with characters and events of the national past taken from chronicles, folk tales, or from local tradition, while the treatment often approached that of the Gothic genre.

The growth of Polish historical fiction was stimulated by the general European tendency which culminated in the birth of the historical novel, but the genre had also a local political role to play: tales of the past were intended to stimulate the interest in the history of a country which shortly before had lost its independence.

The final chapter of the study deals with the characterization of separate periodicals and with the general evolution of fiction in their columns. In earlier magazines (mainly those of Warsaw and Vilna) up

to the end of the second decade of the 19th century we find mainly didactic and sentimental tales. At the end of the second and in the third decade fiction grows more diversified: we can observe motifs, characters and plots which were then being developed by Romantic literature.

In the second half of the 18th century Warsaw was the only important centre of periodical literature. It maintained its leading position at the beginning of the 19th century; a big growth of periodicals is to be observed in the comparatively stable period of the Kingdom of Poland (1815–1830) which was established by the Congress of Vienna. A considerable number of periodicals also grew up in Vilna—the second centre of Polish culture in the period under consideration, and in Cracow which was a free republic from 1815.

The amount and kind of fiction in separate periodicals depended on their character and their destination. In serious learned journals stories and tales had only a modest place while literary and entertaining magazines relied upon fiction to a larger extent. They satisfied their readers' curiosity in the literary novelties of the day, but also their eagerness for sensibility and for sensationalism: the female part of the reading public was here taken into consideration. In fact, most of the periodicals which are discussed in the study were addressed to an ever increasing circle of new readers. The social process which is reflected here is the migration of some groups of the gentry to towns, a gradual strengthening and advancement of the bourgeois element, and the appearance of the group which was to become the intelligentsia. These processes meant the birth and growth of a new type of culture—the culture of the middle classes.

Apart from some exceptions, fiction in periodicals does not represent high levels of literature, but it still reflects the tendencies which were announcing the advent of fully developed Romanticism in the country. Plots and motifs introduce, though often in conventionalized and banal form, such elements as irrationalism, unrest, strong emotionalism, and a sense of tragedy in the view of man and of the world. Interest in the past, especially in the Middle Ages does not fail to manifest itself; the love for bucolic landscape is replaced by new aesthetic values which are now discovered in the wild landscape of the mountains. Original Polish prose differs from the general characteris-

tics of foreign works by its stronger didactic tendency, and by being more clearly oriented to reach a large number of readers (this feature is particularly noticeable in Cracow magazines).

Among foreign texts in Polish journals we observe an increase in the number of translations from German now almost equal to that of translations from French which were dominant in the preceding period. German literature was considered as something new, original and unusual both in Poland and in other countries. Translations from English literature held, just as before, the third place while the new literatures—Russian and American—made their first appearance among translations.

A bibliography divided according to the separate chapters of the book supplements the study.

*Sum. by the author*

**Jerzy Snopek: Objawienie i oświecenie. Z dziejów libertynizmu w Polsce (Revelation and Enlightenment. From the History of Libertinism in Poland), Ossolineum, Wrocław 1986, 288 pp.**

Look at the first man and you will discover the reason why he failed to be obedient, as I, the Eternal Father, required. Conceit, born from self-love and relish for his companion, made him desert the perfect obedience and drew him into disobedience. Through that conceit he lost the life in grace and his original innocence and fell into impurity and the greatest destitution, into which he drew his whole kind, I said.

(St. Catherine from Siena)

No, my dear priest, no rules in this world are rigid, nothing is worth reproof nor admiration, nothing deserves punishment nor prize; there is no deed which assented here to be unworthy, would not be justified five hundred miles away. In other words, there is no objective evil nor there is any immutable good.

(D.A.F. de Sade)

The above quotations express two different kinds of philosophy of life. The first one—fideistic, based on the dogmas, has been expressed by God's revelation, through the saint's mouth, as the only true one. It is a heresy to doubt it; and the relativistic and rational second conception, articulated by one of the enlightened heroes of the famous marquis, was said to have been nothing else but heresy.

Jerzy Snopek's book, supplied with a subtitle *From the History of*