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Summary

“Noble passion” - Oriental themes in Jan Potocki’s writings

The title of the dissertation refers to the phrase used by Jan Potocki in one of his letters to Adam Kazimierz Czartoryski, in which he explains that his interest in Orient is not an obsession, but a noble passion. It may be said that this “passion” accompanied the count throughout his life. It was also a crucial element of his writings. This resulted in the fact that Potocki was perceived as a prominent Orientalist. Therefore, the fact that until now the Potocki’s passion was not subject to any in-depth research may be surprising. The dissertation at hand is a humble attempt at filling this gap.

In the dissertation, an attempt is taken to show that the Orient is a universal theme which is common to all Jan Potocki’s writings, and even exceeds them. Nonetheless, the main aim of the dissertation is to prove the thesis that the count’s fascination with the East is an expression of his personal and honest interests, and that it was not given rise by a then-contemporary fad. Simultaneously, his interests should be understood as an account of changes taking place in the European (and Polish) consciousness during the Enlightenment, which was influenced by contacts with cultures from outside Europe. It is vital to prove the seemingly paradoxical statement that in Enlightenment Poland Orientalism was a display of westernisation of Polish culture and an expression of its belonging and connection with the European cultural circle. The “Oriental” Potocki contributed to it significantly.

In the dissertation, the key terms “the East” and “the Orient” are used interchangeably. The rich history of shaping and using these terms is a reflection of numerous social and cultural phenomena and processes occurring over centuries and territories. The point of reference for the dissertation is the Enlightenment perspective, which was clearly outlined in France by the end of the 17th century, when the phenomenon which may be referred to as “the Oriental turn” in Western Europe was developing. It is justified by the fact that Jan Potocki, although born in Pików in Podolia, was raised in cosmopolitan atmosphere. First of all, he was a man of the

Enlightenment and a citizen of the international/transnational “Literary Republic”, the centre of which was located in France. Antoine Galland, one of the scholars who have formed the French (and European) Enlightenment perspective on the East, and whose works must have been known to Potocki, included Arabs, Persians, Turks, Tatars, Asian peoples as far as China, Muslims, Pagans and the idolatrous nations in the Oriental nations. Therefore, the Orient is the area inhabited by the above-mentioned nations. Maghreb, and Andalusia (although with certain reservations) must be included in the list, as they without a doubt are (or were) part of the Orient, despite the fact that they are located in the south and the west. The symbolic meaning of the East as a complex cultural system is here essential - the cultural space, in which cultural patterns different from the Western ones (which were then understood as European) are followed. The fact that both regions appear both in Jan Potocki’s biography and writings is also vital.

François Rosset puts it that *Jan Potocki’s works are polymorphic and unprecedented in their entirety, deviating from norms, unique* (see: F. Rosset, *Szkic do portretu*, in: F. Rosset, D. Dtiare, *Z Warszawy do Saragossy. Jan Potocki i jego dzieło*, translated by A. Wasilewska, Warsaw 2005, p. 13). Therefore, they are a serious challenge for the researcher and - first of all - they require using various research tools. The aim of this dissertation is to conduct a cultural analysis of Jan Potocki’s writings in which his “noble passion” is reflected. Stephen Greenblatt stresses the fact that on the one hand, it requires conducting *an in-depth immanent analysis of literary texts*, and on the other hand – *a complete cultural analysis will eventually force the researcher to go beyond the text and define the relationship between the text and the values, traditions and practices present in a given culture* (see: S. Greenblatt, *Kultura*, in: S. Greenblatt, *Poetyka kulturowa. Pisma wybrane*, eds. K. Kujawińska-Courtney, translated by A. Rajca-Salata, Kraków 2006, p. 147). Therefore, in the dissertation at hand, research methods which are based on the assumption that literature is a trace of reality are used. Thus perceiving and understanding this reality may (and should) take place through literature. I believe and want to prove that the works of Jan Potocki constitute a source which provides such an opportunity. On the one hand, the author of *The Manuscript Found in Saragossa* may be perceived as a typical representative of the Enlightenment, but on the other hand, he far exceeded this typicality. By expressing characteristic trends of the Age of Enlightenment in his writings, Potocki also shaped them to a certain extent.

Literary anthropology turns out to be helpful in analysing and interpreting Potocki’s writings, due to the Oriental specificity of his works, which to a great extent results from his

contacts with otherness and diversity. For the same reason, research tools applied in imagology, which is concerned with studying literary imagery of otherness have been used as well.

While studying the “Oriental Potocki”, the tools deriving from comparative studies have been applied as well. The choice of the method seems both accurate and inevitable, as the problem of mutual cultural influences is discussed. It is necessary to stress the fact that comparative studies date back to the Enlightenment. Comparative studies were one of the methods of making aware of and becoming familiarised with social and civilisation changes, which result from more frequent contacts with non-European cultures. The count has provided a great input in the development of comparative studies (and anthropology), both in terms of addressing the Oriental themes in his writings, and also in terms of the way he investigated and presented them. It may be said that comparison and looking for analogies - thus certain comparative activities - are methods used by Jan Potocki, by means of which he tried to describe and - first of all - understand other worlds and cultures, in which he became immersed while travelling and writing. Therefore, Potocki's writings and travel literature constitute both the comparative and anthropological discourse.

The first chapter of the dissertation sets out with outlining the history of the relationship between Europe and the East as well as their impact on European culture. The most important displays of European Orientalism understood as *a set of various trends in European material culture, traditions, art and literature, expressed in various forms of making references to the culture of the Eastern nations: India, Persia, Turkey, China and Arab countries* are discussed (J. Reychman, *Orientalizm* in: *Słownik literatury polskiego Oświecenia*, ed. T. Kostkiewiczowa, Wrocław 2002, p. 364). For obvious reasons, both European and Polish Enlightenment were the focus of the dissertation at hand. The presentation of the influence the Oriental culture had on the Old-Polish culture was limited to a minimum. Although it is a significant and widespread phenomenon, it is necessary to bring up the fact that the influence of Polish culture (especially the Old-Polish culture) on shaping the intellectual and creative profile of Potocki was of slight significance. The son of the Incisor Regni, although impeccably educated and erudite, grown up in a different, French culture. Nonetheless, he was not deeply interested in the history of Slavic nations. Therefore, the then-existent tradition of Sarmatian Orientalism was basically alien to him and did not concern him much; it failed to constitute a source of inspiration or a reference point for him. The aim of mentioning the most important topics pertaining to the presence of the East in Polish culture in previous ages is to provide the historical context, which allows for observing the evolution which Orientalism underwent, and grasping its characteristic features in the Enlightenment period.

The second chapter entitled *Jan Potocki's roads to Orient* refers to the symbolic meaning of the road. The "noble passion" of the writer did not come from nowhere, and it was not a short-lasting caprice triggered by the Oriental fad in Europe. It was a true fascination with the East deepened by his vast knowledge on this subject matter. The considerations in this chapter are devoted to determining the sources of this passion and describing Potocki's wide experience with the Orient. One of the foundations of his passions were intellectual travels sparked by reading Oriental writings and texts about the East. His interests are also strictly connected with his enthusiasm for linguistics, which are mentioned at the end of the chapter.

The third chapter entitled *The résumé of the travels of the son of the Incisor Regni* discusses Potocki's actual journeys to the East. For Jan Potocki they were a source of knowledge, experience and pleasure deriving from - as the author himself maintains - *jaunt to a different part of the world* (see: J. Potocki, *Podróże*, translated by J.U. Niemcewicz, J. Olkiewicz L. Kukulski, ed. L. Kukulski, Warsaw 1959, p. 217). The count has elevated travels to the rank of art; therefore, the way in which it became a tool for learning the world and the factor which shaped the writer's mindset is worth exploring. The "documents" which are a record of his journeys (drawings and written accounts) are analysed as well. An attempt at reconstructing the image of the Orient as seen by Potocki and indicating the factors which shaped this image was thus possible.

In the fourth chapter entitled *Magically letting the reader fly to the East - the literary world of the Orient as seen by Jan Potocki*, the impact of Potocki's vision of the East on the content and the form of his Oriental writings has been determined. The first part of this chapter focuses on the analysis and interpretation of the elements of the settings used in his writings. The methods of shaping the Oriental space and creating an Eastern protagonist are examined. Furthermore, the motifs and themes used by the writer are studied. Contrary to Andrzej Stoff, who maintains that the analysis of the extent to which exotic settings are coherent with the non-literary reality is pointless and unnecessary, such an analysis was carried out (see: A. Stoff, *Egzotyka, egzotyzm, egzotyczność. Próba rozgraniczenia pojęć*, in: A. Stoff, *Studia z teorii literatury i poetyki historycznej*, Lublin 1997, p. 222 and subsequent pages). It is assumed that the way of creating the setting, which always involves its deformation (to a greater or a lesser extent), is an expression of various cultural phenomena, sources of meanings and information - the author's intents, knowledge and attitude towards the presented reality.

The second part of this chapter focuses on formal issues. Firstly, the genology of Potocki's Oriental writings has been discussed - whether and to what extent his works depend on Oriental patterns, and whether they constitute an implementation of "European" genres

which only include Oriental elements. Secondly, the way the Oriental motifs function in Potocki's writings has been investigated, with particular focus on the writings in which they constitute one of many elements composing his settings. The next stage is the examination of the methods of creating the person who speaks. Attention was paid to the position from which they speak, whether it belongs to the Orient and whether the method of narration reveals the author's attitude towards the presented content. The research into the formal aspect of Potocki's writings is complemented with a sub-chapter devoted to language used by the writer. The author's techniques used in order to "Orientalise" his writings and equip them with Oriental style are studied as well.

The final chapter *The functions of Orientalism in Jan Potocki's writings* discusses the question of usefulness. The aims of introducing oriental motifs into Potocki's writings and the roles they serve are indicated in this chapter. They differ in accordance with the writings in which they appear, and the time a given piece of writing was created. This observation allows for indicating how Potocki's "Oriental" works fit into general trends of European Enlightenment. Moreover, it also reveals the author's attitudes towards the Orient. The second part of this chapter presents the displays of "noble passion" exceeding the literary and travel aspects, but significantly complementing this *grand tout oriental*. This involves Potocki's scientific projects concerned with the Orient as well as geopolitical issues perceived by the count as the most useful form of expression of his "noble passion".

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