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REVIEW

Agnieszka Łowczanin. 2018. *A Dark Transfusion: The Polish Literary Response to Early English Gothic. Anna Mostowska Reads Ann Radcliffe*. Berlin: Peter Lang.

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The book's long title has been aptly chosen since "dark transfusion" relates to the migratory and boundary-defying nature of the Gothic phenomenon both in literature and culture. This is one of the author's main theses which is supported by the development of Gothicism in the temporal dimension (early, Victorian, 20th-century Gothic, etc.) as well as in spatial (e.g. English, French, German, American). Emphasizing heterogeneous and supranational character of the Gothic, Agnieszka Łowczanin points to the so far neglected field of study into the literary and cultural response to this phenomenon in Central and Eastern Europe (partly with the exception of Russia). In this context, her monograph fills the scholarly lacuna in reference to Poland at the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries.

A Dark Transfusion is devoted to Anna Barbara Olimpia primo voto Przeździecka secondo voto Mostowska, a descendant of the Radziwiłł aristocratic family (c. 1762 – c. 1811), whose oeuvre has been regarded – also by herself – to be a response to the early Gothic romance in England associated with Ann Radcliffe. It must be observed that the analysis of the selected works of the Polish writer from Vilnius does not aim at cataloguing her borrowings of the popular Gothic props and motifs, but at presenting Mostowska's stories as an original sub/genre of Gothic fiction which she adapted to the needs and expectations of the Polish reader almost contemporaneous with the English reader of Radcliffe's romances, but living in completely different geopolitical, economic and cultural conditions. Agnieszka Łowczanin refers at this point to Edward Said's view that literature and culture (originally of the Orient) cannot be separated from socio-political and historical circumstances in which both artists and their audiences are set. Even more distinctly the connection between revolutionary upheaval in Europe, and particularly the Reign of Terror in France, and the Gothic horror in literature, was emphasized by the Marquis de Sade. The inhabitants of Polish territories shared similarly dramatic experiences toward the end of the 18th century when the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (the Kingdom of Poland united with the Grand Duchy of Lithuania) fell and Anna Mostowska's native Vilnius region was annexed by the Russian Empire.

Łowczanin's monograph traces the origin of the Gothic vogue in England and Poland, and focuses on the changing orientation of this phenomenon which gradually began to

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cater for middle-class tastes and the growing ambition of female readers. The author stresses differences in literary renderings of the Gothic in both the countries, observing that in Poland it was perceived as a link between the fallen Commonwealth and its glorious past, so that Gothicism played in this case a patriotic-educative function and in a certain sense also compensatory in the social dimension. The said difference resulted, at least partly, from the more practical expectations from literature, which was in keeping with the tradition of Enlightenment. On the other hand, Anna Mostowska is presented in the monograph as a precursor of Romanticism in Poland who admired picturesque ruins and untrammelled nature, and appealed to natural laws and human passions, creating an atmosphere of mystery and dramatic suspense. She also introduced into her stories elements of local folklore.

This broad historical and cultural-literary perspective provided by the monograph also made it possible for the author to deal with a very interesting phenomenon of rendering literary texts into foreign languages at the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries. Translations were usually done by writers who availed themselves of the opportunity to interfere in the text so that it should satisfy national tastes and expectations. Writers often borrowed ideas from others and used them in their own literary production, which was not considered reprehensible and the status of a 'creative' translator matched that of an original author. Translations greatly contributed to the transnational literary exchange in Europe, and in particular to the popularization of English Gothic romances in Poland which reached readers through their French versions. Agnieszka Łowczanin demonstrates convincingly that Anna Mostowska's oeuvre also falls into this category of writing and shows which of her works can be regarded as original (only three out of twelve), which as 'creative' adaptations, and which ones as translations with some regional overtones added by the Polish writer.

Another interesting issue addressed in the monograph is the ambivalence of the Gothic which consists in setting works of this kind in the past while making them involved in current problems. The comparative analysis of *Matylda i Danił* [Matylda and Danił] by Mostowska and *The Mysteries of Udolpho* by Radcliffe reveals that both the works brought up weighty matters for readers in late 18th-century England and early 19th-century Poland respectively. However, while the parallels found between the two works make it possible to describe them as proto-feminist, the Polish writer went clearly farther in this direction advocating the need to educate women and to make them socially and vocationally active, as well as assigning them new roles on family plane. It also appears that Anna Mostowska and Mrs. Radcliffe used the image of the Gothic castle with a view to different functions – in the case of *Udolpho* it was a literary rendering of Edmund Burke's aesthetics of the sublime, and in the case of *Matylda i Danił* an evocation of the medieval code of chivalry commanding, among others, respect for women. The Polish writer also used the supernatural apparatus not only to build up suspense, but also to convey a kind of historical-political message which is evidently didactic. Thus, the ghost of pagan Edgwarda which haunts the ruined castle in the above-mentioned story was meant to direct readers' attention to the harrowing experience shared by the inhabitants of Samogitia – the material setting of the story – subdued by Imperial Russia, and in this way to remind them of bygone autonomy and prosperity of their land.

In the conclusion of her monograph Agnieszka Łowczanin classifies Mostowska's works as Gothic fiction of the historical type, set in distant spatiotemporal past, whose

aim was to provide entertainment in an attractive, largely sensational, form (the first three volumes of Mostowska's stories were published in Vilnius in 1806 under the title *Moje rozrywki* [My Diversions]). However, according to Łowczanin, the writer's main objective was to revive chivalric past of the land and its inhabitants in order to make her readers aware of the cyclical nature of history and of a possibility of change in the status quo.

The monograph is original and of high academic standard. It is the first publication of this kind devoted to Anna Mostowska's oeuvre which is analyzed in relation to English Gothic romances of the second half of the 18th century typified by Horace Walpole, Clara Reeve, Mathew Gregory Lewis, and first of all Ann Radcliffe whose works the Polish writer directly referred to. The great merit of Agnieszka Łowczanin's monograph is also the fact that she takes into account historical background and realities of those times, and that she uses a range of scholarly approaches such as historicist, postcolonial, cultural, feminist and psychoanalytic.

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