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**LOOKING AT ROMANTICISM *EX CATHEDRA*: THE LECTURES
OF LUDWIK OSIŃSKI. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS¹****ROMANTYZM WIDZIANY *EX CATHEDRA*.
WYKŁADY LUDWIKA OSIŃSKIEGO. UWAGI WSTĘPNE**

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Słowa kluczowe: romantyzm, klasycyzm, Ludwik Osiński, literatura porównawcza

The argument between the Classicists and the Romantics in Poland resonated not only in literature and the press, but also in academia. Ludwik Osiński's lectures given at the University of Warsaw illustrate the "academic" significance of this polemic with new tendencies in culture and its significance for literary studies.

Let us begin with a quotation:

Osiński's literary fame, earned through his translations of tragedies and his odes, drew numerous listeners to the start of his course on literature. The most spacious room of the university was barely enough to contain them all. Apart from young academics from all departments, it was also attended by ladies of high society and numerous personages of the more enlightened Warsaw public. The crowds remained constant throughout the twelve years of the lectures, until the very last one in 1830².

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² All quotations translated by Przemysław Szkodziński. „Sława literacka Osińskiego, nabyta przekładami tragedii i odami, ściągnęła mnóstwo słuchaczy na otwarcie kursu literatury. Najobszerniejsza sala uniwersytetu zaledwie objąć ich mogła. Oprócz młodzieży akademickiej wszystkich wydziałów znajdowały się na nich damy wyższego społeczeństwa i mnóstwo osób oświeconych klas publiczności warszawskiej. Natłok ten nie zmniejszał się przez lat

This is how Franciszek Salezy Dmochowski, Osiński's student and the editor of his *Selected Works*, wrote about Osiński's presentations published more than thirty years later as *Lectures on Comparative Literature*³.

The great popularity of Osiński's lectures suffices to demonstrate that they are a worthy source of data for the study of the debate between the Classicists and the Romantics. The high attendance was probably assured not only by Osiński's literary fame, as evidenced in the above quotation, but also by his role in the public life of Congress Poland. He served in numerous public positions, among them chief manager of the National Theatre, a member of the Society of the Friends of Learning, and a frequent guest among the higher strata of Warsaw society. Finally, he was also famous as a talented public speaker. The lectures were held, albeit irregularly, between the years 1818 and 1830, on Saturday afternoons⁴. Another attendee of these meetings, Andrzej Edward Koźmian, writes in his memoirs:

The hour of Osiński's lecture was a festival, a banquet, and places were highly sought after. Attendees would come running to his lecture room as they might to a concert hall, rather than to an academic presentation⁵.

There is no doubt that this public character of the lectures encouraged Osiński to proclaim from the lectern his opinions about contemporary cultural phenomena. No other academic literary course of the time avoided expressing judgment on current literary life⁶. However Osiński in particular, with his audience of students as and high society, found himself in a position which allowed him to popularize a particular vision of art and aesthetic ideas, even though this may have overshadowed his delivery of detailed poetic and historical knowledge.

Yet by reading his introductory lecture we can recognize the assumptions that motivated his work in general. The text can be considered as an invaluable interpretative frame for his whole course of comparative literature. The cornerstone of his discourse are "the rules". These enabled Osiński to conceptualize the subject of literary studies. If we asked what the main goal was that he set for himself as a lecturer, the following quotation might serve as an answer:

By investigating the forms of classical beauty and comparing them with each other, whilst relying more on our feeling than on pedantic, textbook thought, we shall arrive at a way that should be taken to craft works that are both fresh and worthy of recommendation. Thus I have no doubt that we shall further

dwanaście, aż do ostatniej prelekcji mianej w 1830 r.", F.S. Dmochowski, *Życie, dzieła i epoka Ludwika Osińskiego*. In: *Dzieła*, L. Osiński, Warszawa 1861, vol. 1, p. XIII.

³ L. Osiński, *Wykład literatury porównawczej czytanej w Uniwersytecie Warszawskim*. In: *Dzieła*, L. Osiński, vol. 2-3, Warszawa 1861.

⁴ J. Bieliński, *Królewski Uniwersytet Warszawski*, vol. 3, Warszawa 1912, p. 322.

⁵ „Godzina prelekcji Osińskiego była festynem, bankietem chęciwie poszukiwanym. Zbiegano się do sali jego, jeśli nie jak na prelekcję literacką, to jak na koncert”. A.E. Koźmian, *Ludwik Osiński. Ustęp ze wspomnień jednego z żyjących autorów*, Poznań 1857, p. 16.

⁶ At that time literature was taught at the University of Warsaw by Kazimierz Brodziński and in Vilnius first by Euzebiusz Słowacki and then by Leon Borowski.

conclude the necessity of the existence of certain rules in art, which I have briefly outlined in this introduction⁷.

The professor's aim was to convince the audience that the rules exist and are necessary. If we interpret the project of the lectures as a whole in this context, we should take notice of two aspects of Osiński's main thesis.

Firstly, it is a required framework which helps us understand the role Osiński ascribes to investigating and teaching literature. The theory that allows the scholar to organize the facts appears to be more important than the facts themselves. As a consequence three disciplines of literary studies, listed in Osiński's introductory lecture, are situated hierarchically. Theory overshadows history, but they are both subordinated to criticism, which passes judgement on the basis of rules defined by theory. It is worth mentioning that, in accordance with the mainstream beliefs of late Classicism, the models are more important than the rules, with the rules being derived from the models⁸. This belief may be interpreted as potentially weakening the rigor of the Classicists' doctrine. It justifies the favorable opinion of works which cannot easily be judged according to the known parameters, and it makes way for the category of the creative genius who can transform the rules. On the other hand, it also enables "the laws" of literature to aspire to the status of empirical knowledge, derived from observed and investigated facts, similar to the laws of physics or biology⁹. Through the analysis of selected works, Osiński conducts yet again an experiment whose aim is to prove the existence of particular relations in aesthetics, right in front of his audience. This "empirical" aspect of the rules-models relation is important for Osiński's methodological polemics with Romanticism, which will be discussed later. For the moment, let us notice that the structure of the entire course is strictly connected with the assumptions mentioned previously. As a consequence, they may be looked at as a part of Osiński's lectures as important as their actual subject matter. The structure of the course can be presented as follows:

- The material is ordered by genre and not chronology. This is a common feature of all texts originating from the tradition of Poetics and Rhetoric.
- Within the specific genres, works are discussed chronologically. There is at least one major, meaningful exception to this – concerning comedy – when the works recognized as a model (those of Molière) precede earlier but less

⁷ „Śledząc klasyczne piękności, porównywając je ze sobą, a więcej zawierając uczuciu niżeli szkolnej pedantyzmu rozwadze, poznamy drogę, jaką postępować przystoi, aby dojść do utworzenia płodów i nowych, i godnych zalety. Tym sposobem, nie wątpię, utwierdzi się w nas przekonanie o koniecznej potrzebie pewnych w sztuce prawideł, o których w tym wstępie kilka słów nadmieniałem”. L. Osiński, *Wykład...*, vol. 2, p. 8.

⁸ On the category of *bons modèles* and its changes in late classicism, although mostly in connection with literature (as a form of *mimesis*) and not literary studies, see: P. Żbikowski, *Klasycyzm postanisławowski. Doktryna estetycznoliteracka*, Warszawa 1984, pp. 98–105 and M. Stanisław, *Wczesnoromantyczne spory o poezję*, Kraków 1998, pp. 19–58.

⁹ Another procedure adapted from science (e.g. anatomy) that was used to make literary criticism more objective was comparison. For more about this category and Osiński's notion of comparison see T. Bilczewski, *Porównanie i przekład*, Kraków 2016, pp. 82–89.

appreciated texts. Model works are mentioned first, because they are necessary for deriving the rules of the particular genres.

- Particular texts are elaborated according to the rules specific to each genre. This is most clearly visible in the first chapter, where the *Iliad* is judged in terms of unity, variety and likelihood.

The lectures become not only a presentation of the rules derived from investigation of the models, but also an elaborate proof for the existence of the rules. These are the methodological consequences of Osiński's main thesis, that result in the goals and the structure of his teachings.

Secondly, it is clear that the thesis about the "necessity of some rules in art" is also polemical in nature. Osiński's work undoubtedly embodies some coherent system of assumptions concerning literature, worthy of description on its own merit and not only for the relationship that it has with the development of Romanticism. On the other hand, the situation of performance, as described at the beginning of this paper, leads to an involvement with new tendencies in culture. In my opinion, both ways of reading the *Lectures* are justified and they should be taken as complementary perspectives of looking at the whole project of the course in comparative literature. However I would like to highlight that analyzing what and how Osiński said about Romanticism instead of looking at his work in the light of Romanticism seems to remain an untested research approach.

From this perspective, let us examine some features of the text that have been mentioned previously. The introductory lecture seems to be built from key words of late Classicism. On the first page alone, one finds references to "models", "perfection", "rules", "Greece and Rome". This particular excerpt would be eminently suitable for anthologising, given its representative character, which is markedly Classicistic. As such, it serves as a statement by Osiński as a literary authority on which aesthetic opinions he favors. What is more, the genre-based structure of the material is not only traditional, but also an alternative to chronological structuring – increasingly postulated at the time and used for instance by Kazimierz Brodziński in his lectures given at the University of Warsaw from 1823¹⁰. Finally, the thesis claiming the existence of literary rules, which is key to Osiński's entire discourse, is directly set against the Romantics' opinions in his text.

To introduce that confrontation, Osiński has to name his opponents. The adjective "romantic" occurs probably only twice: in the introductory lecture and in his remark on Schiller's *The Maid of Orleans* subtitle. Other references are made to "somebody", "the judges of art", "some experts on art", "contemporary writers", "our century", "the new way", "the new theories". It is no accident that the contemporariness and novelty is highlighted in these terms, since the main objection raised to those standpoints which are criticised are that they lack respect for the traditional way of understanding literature¹¹. This is connected especially with two aspects of it: respecting the rules

¹⁰ See: K. Brodziński, *Literatura polska*. In: *Pisma, idem*, vol. 3, Poznań 1872.

¹¹ The "new way" in literature had been already mentioned by Osiński when he accepted the post of professor (see: J. Bieliński, *Królewski Uniwersytet...*, p. 468).

and imitating the models. The accusations of these two main “sins” come up repeatedly in the lectures:

When it so happens that more than one judge of art is against its rules, only because the greats would often not adhere to them; why, then, would such a judge not try to learn the secret of the greats’ achievements in impression and result – which is, in turn, the triumph of art?¹²

Or:

Yet it is much more hurtful to witness the progressive diminishing of respect for the true masters of art, to hear the calamitous instructions of our contemporary writers who dare – in their madness – to claim that Dante was courageous enough to treat the path set by Homer and Vigil with disdain; also, that the profound Shakespeare was most fortunate to not have been acquainted with Euripides¹³.

They are part of a more general cultural diagnosis: “It seems that our century looks for its own advantage by rising up against everything, which is honored by the judgment of time and more enlightened people”¹⁴.

As can be seen, the ideas that are presented by Osiński as the object of his opposition are those which attack the core of his beliefs concerning literature. Lack of rules is a serious threat regarding not only aesthetics, but also the moral order in art. Those, who neglect the importance of obeying the rules are the victims of “madness”. As the effect “wickedness” is taking place of “decency”¹⁵.

In the light of the sample remarks quoted above, the main aim of the lectures may be also interpreted as a part of the Classical-Romantic polemic. The term romanticism is not defined in the lectures. While introducing this phenomenon into his discourse Osiński uses the phrase “the new school of writers, called romantic”¹⁶. We can assume that for him “the romanticism” is the new group of authors, and at the same time the group that prefers novelty in culture over tradition. The reader’s attention is drawn to the fact that Osiński generally does not refer to the aesthetic qualities preferred by the Romantics, but only to the rules by which they formulated their ideas on literature. In this context he pursues a methodological polemic with Romanticism. That is not

¹² „Kiedy nie jeden z sędziów sztuki dlatego jedynie przeciw jej prawdom powstaje, że ich często wielcy ludzie nie zachowywali; czemuż razem nie docieka tej tajemnicy, przez którą oni wielkie osiągnęli wrażenia i skutki, co znowu triumfem jest sztuki”. L. Osiński, *Wykład...*, vol. 2, p. 306.

¹³ „Lecz boleśniej daleko postrzegać coraz bardziej nękające dla prawdziwych mistrzów sztuki uszanowanie, słyszyć te zgubne współczesnych nam pisarzy nauki, którzy śmieją, w obłąkaniu swoim, utrzymywać, że Dante miał dosyć odwagi pogardzić drogą przez Homera i Wergilego utworowaną; równie, że głęboki Szekspir, na szczęście swoje nie znał Eurypida”, *ibidem*, vol. 2, p. 90.

¹⁴ „Zdaje się jakby wiek nasz właściwej sobie szukał zalety, powstając na wszystko, co uświęcone sądem czasu i oświeconych ludów”, *ibidem*, vol. 3, p. 173.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, vol. 2, p. 4.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, vol. 2, p. 6.

surprising in the lectures, which very often refer to the methods of literary scholarship. Osiński teaches comparative literature and describes in the first place the masterpieces of European literature, so he concentrates mostly on different opinions about historical works of art and not contemporary literary production. There are, however, other reasons for this that may be concluded from the professor's arguments. According to him, the Romantic texts worth analyzing and judging have not been written yet. He asks:

We laboriously and wistfully muse on the inconceivable space of human thought, the richness of our imagination, the genius of certain works; but these ample lands – so easily discovered in our belief – what fruit have they given?¹⁷

This judgment on modern literature is to some extent supplanted by a discussion of older texts. Osiński does not refer to them as romantic works, but deliberately uses the examples often used by romantics. This reflects the intensive displacements made in the canon in the previous decades. The reliability of the opinions presented is rhetorically supported by giving some (very limited) praise to those texts which are particularly valued by the promoters of the new theories. This applies, for example, to Cervantes, Milton and to Shakespeare for whom, notably, Osiński is almost enthusiastic. This is illustrated by his analysis of *Macbeth*, which concludes that the high value of this text compared to the other to Shakespeare's plays is the result of its success in maintaining unity of action. Of course, that is not the only merit of Shakespeare, whose whole work has, according to Osiński, its advantages. It is though significant, how the rules of art are seen by him as always beneficial. In contrary to the opinion of those, who claim, that "profound Shakespeare was most fortunate to not have been acquainted with Euripides".

Shakespeare thus serves as an example confirming one of the most important Classicist rules¹⁸. Osiński's discussion of Shakespeare is characteristic of the professor's strategy of using Romantic authorities to confirm Classicist assumptions. To praise Racine's *Athalie*, he quotes Schlegel¹⁹. He bases his lecture on Molière on the article of Walter Scott²⁰. This mode of reasoning is introduced in the first lecture, where Dante, Shakespeare and Ariosto are named as writers who respect tradition and at the same time create new qualities in art²¹. That is how the masters of the Romantic style avoided the great sin of their successors: neglecting the past.

References to the same authorities are used in order to blur the difference between both worldviews. In his introductory lecture Osiński claims that trends which originate from common ancestors and models – such as Homer and Sophocles – can not differ in essence: "the name itself was a bone of contention, as a thing springing

¹⁷ „Mozolnie i tęskliwie filozofujemy nad nieogarnioną przestrzenią myśli ludzkich, nad bogactwem wyobraźni naszej, nad genialnością utworów; lecz te obszerne niwy, któreśmy w rozumieniu własnym tak łatwo odkryli, jakież nam plony wydały?“, *ibidem*.

¹⁸ See: *ibidem*, vol. 2, pp. 366–396.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, vol. 2, p. 397.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, vol. 3, p. 128. See: W. Scott, *Molière*. In: *The miscellaneous prose works, idem*, vol. 17, *Periodical criticism*, vol 1, *Poetry*, Edinburgh, 1835, pp. 137–215.

²¹ *Ibidem*, vol. 2, p. 3.

from one source could not differ to such an extent”²². However during the lectures it transpires that rapprochement towards Romanticism and approval for texts deemed to be Romantic means an attempt to include them within the classical paradigm and, in the case of *Macbeth*, to be judged according to the rules. Osiński says: “The kinds of beauty cannot be either too numerous, nor too different from one another – and they can never be contrary to each other”²³. Doubting the difference between both aesthetics seems to be only a rhetorical strategy, part of the self-presentation of the scholar as an objective scholar.

How is Romanticism presented in general, and looked at *ex cathedra*? It is a new trend in culture, but it originates from the same models that had always been valued. Some displacements result from the close reading of several new authors of the Romantic school, and these were praised as truly talented, but not perfect. “Good models” and “imitation” are the main terms that serve Osiński to conceptualize literary tradition. As we can see, in his interpretation the Romantics also have their models which they imitate, both positively and negatively. They have not yet created prominent works of art, but they still have a chance to improve. They have only to realize their mistake concerning their attitude towards tradition: they need to recognize model authors and admit that their excellence depends on adherence to the rules. The rules are not arbitrary, but they spring from nature and they are realized somewhat involuntarily, whenever reason and emotions are adhered to.

In that context, the main goal of Osiński’s lectures seems to be to cast light on these correlations. The course is composed as a series of examples. Their analysis and comparison are supposed to lead to rules being derived and the necessity of these rules being asserted. Deriving the rules from the works of art on the basis of comparison as an empirical, scientific method is thought to guarantee the objectivity of the judgments. This objectivity is also rhetorically supported by citing authorities whose views would appear to be opposed to those of Osiński himself. As such, Osiński’s course of literature as a whole may be interpreted as a singular, polemical statement on new tendencies in art, divided into lectures. Seeing it in the context of the dialogue with Romanticism paradoxically allows us to consider it as a coherent and deliberate project, and not just a compilation or an epigonic copy of La Harpe.

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²² „[S]ame nazwisko zapaliło niezgodę, bo rzecz od jednego źródła pochodząca tak daleko się różnić nie mogła”. *Ibidem*, vol. 2, p. 6.

²³ „[R]odzaje piękności nie mogą być ani zbyt liczne, ani zbyt odmienne, nigdy zaś jedne drugim przeciwne”. *Ibidem*, vol. 3, p. 4.

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Streszczenie

Tematem artykułu jest przejawianie się sporu klasyków z romantykami w ówczesnym dyskursie akademickim na przykładzie wykładów Ludwika Osińskiego. To właśnie wykłady z literatury porównawczej prowadzone na Uniwersytecie Warszawskim najlepiej ukazują wagę polemiki z nowymi tendencjami w kulturze także dla świata akademii, choć odniesienia do nich często wyrażane był nie wprost. W artykule analizuję strategie retoryczne stosowane przez Osińskiego do odnoszenia się do nowej estetyki. Opisuję dialogiczne relacje między romantyzmem a przykładami literackimi wybieranymi przez Osińskiego, jego ocenami dzieł oraz jego przekonaniem dotyczącym literatury. Szczególnie istotne okazuje się zaprezentowane przez niego ujęcie relacji pomiędzy tradycją a innowacyjnością w kulturze. Umieszczenie wykładów Osińskiego w kontekście dialogu z romantyzmem pozwala zobaczyć jego kurs, często niedoceniany jako wtórny, jako spójny i przemyślany projekt.

Summary

Paper discusses the reflection of the argument between Classicists and Romantics in academic discourse on the example of Ludwik Osiński's lectures. The lectures in comparative literature that Ludwik Osiński gave at the University of Warsaw can best illustrate the academic significance of a polemic with new tendencies in culture, even though it is usually not expressed directly. In the paper the lecturer's rhetorical strategies employed to refer to new aesthetics are investigated. Dialogical association between Romantic style and Osiński's choice of examples, the judgments he made and concepts he used is described. Finally, the terms in which he articulates the relation between the old and the new in culture are examined. Seeing Osiński's lectures in the context of the dialogue with Romanticism allows to consider it as a coherent and deliberate project.

Biography

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