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## HOW TO STUDY EMOTIONS IN THE (POLISH) ENLIGHTENMENT?

### Abstract

The affective turn is one of the well-visible so-called twists in contemporary cultural research, which also has clear repercussions for literary research. The literature discussing the phenomenon itself, especially using the methodological solutions introduced by this phrase, is extensive. These methodological solutions are particularly willingly applied to new and newest phenomena, emerging and taking place since the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, contemporary affective research largely grows out of an interest in the emotions of old times, to refer to the works of Barbara Rosenwein. Thus, it seems fully justified to look at the broadly understood emotional phenomena in the 18<sup>th</sup> century using methods falling within the framework of the affective turn.

Of course, the affective turn will not contribute to discovering the existence of new emotions in the Enlightenment Age, because research into the emotionality of this period has a long tradition, especially in the study of sentimentalism. This term prompts reflection on the network of concepts and terms in the field of emotions concerning various cultures and literature of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The essential part of this paper is an attempt to answer the questions about what testimonies of Polish 18<sup>th</sup>-century emotionality are at our disposal today and with what methods they can be interpreted. In other words, it will be an attempt to consider what we can see - thanks to the sensitivity to emotions, also related to the methods of affective turn - in the emotional (mainly textual, but also, for example, iconic) Polish space of the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

**Keywords:** Polish Enlightenment, emotions in literature, emotional turn, emotions in diaries.

The question of how to study emotions in the (Polish) Enlightenment, raised in the title, should be supplemented with a subtitle-apposition: what benefits might such studies bring? In other words, an attempt to contemplate methods of studying emotions, and their specific solutions, will also concern potential new results of studies conducted in this respect. However, we can also ask a slightly different question: can the study of emotions in the Polish Enlightenment teach us something that we

would not know if we were to study these fragments of the (material and consciousness-related) reality of the Enlightenment with other methods?

The seemingly obvious methodological context of such questions leads to one of the so-called turns in contemporary cultural and literary research, namely the affective turn. The growth of source literature referring to this perspective is substantial and very dynamic, which has been emphasized by researchers tackling this issue. It concerns both works of a methodological nature and attempts to use theoretical concepts when studying specific materials, primarily literary and textual ones, but also memorials, the shaping of public space, intercultural or international relations in a given period. The list of possibilities here is very extensive; scientific imagination leads us to analyze more and more new solutions.

Their considerable part (at least in Polish practice) concerns events, texts, and emotions from the last eighty years, a relatively recent period. In other words, it tackles the affects that have existed since the Second World War and have been processed in the latest social and textual reality. Even if we, like in Agnieszka Daukszy's book on affective modernism, slightly expand the field of observation (she analyses the avant-garde and the body of work of Bruno Schulz), affect searches essentially focus on contemporary times. It is certainly an area that is very-well explained using these tools. It provides significant numbers of testimonies (or their appalling effacements) while revealing subsequent layers of affects, enabling us to express opinions about our reality directly. This statement naturally concerns the Polish situation and Polish studies in the areas of literature and culture.

However, we should note that studies on the quite distant past are important areas of research tied to the affective turn, and one of the classical works of this trend is Barbara H. Rosenwein's 2006 book on emotional communities in the Early Middle Ages. There are decidedly more studies on old emotions, and they have been accreting just as dynamically as other works from the field of affective studies, including synthetic and general approaches. For example, we can invoke a work by Damien Boquet and Piroska Nagy, researchers belonging to the groups studying medieval emotions, titled *Sensible Moyen Age. Une histoire des émotions dans l'Occident médiéval* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2015), or *The Routledge History of Emotions in Europe: 1100–1700* (2019), edited by Andrew Lynch and Susan Broomhall. Nevertheless, it is not about contemplations of specific methodological solutions but the usefulness of the category of emotion in studies on old literature, culture, ways of thinking, or consciousness, which has been proven by these works, by this method of constructing the methodological perspective.

Although the absence of emotions in studies on the (distant) past has been less severe recently than even a dozen or so years ago, it is still worth it to quote Barbara Rosenwein's words from her 2002 article "Obawy o emocje w historii" ("Worrying about Emotions in History"), which she began as follows:

As a medievalist, I have reasons to fear for emotions in history. I am not concerned about emotions themselves; people in the past — just like now — did express joy, sadness, anger, fear, and many other emotions; they had different meanings (just like they have now); they impacted other people, which is why they were also used by other people (just like they are now). What medievalists — and, in practice, all historians who care about their job — should be concerned about is the way in which historians have treated emotions in history.<sup>1</sup>

The recollection of this remark by Rosenwein constitutes one of starting points. Naturally, I invoke her not as a historian of the Middle Ages, but as a historian of the Enlightenment literature, gladly referencing the cultural perspective and thus using slightly different tools or methods of reading the past than historians "in general." Consequently, I will primarily emphasize textual methods of recording emotional reality; in other words: the emanation of emotions (individual and collective) from texts, but also outside of them, including drawing conclusions from the way they function in social reality, how they are treated, and in which processes of reading they are used.

It is then a clear limitation compared to the possibilities opened by studying the history of emotions "in general," feeding on archival materials, documents, and testimonies to learn about old societies, their governing principles, and the people living therein. A broad spectrum of such possibilities is demonstrated by the three-volume work titled "Histoire des émotions", its approach referencing *Histoire de la vie privée* by Philippe Ariès and Georges Duby. Its second volume, edited by Alan Corbin, covers the period from the Enlightenment to the end of the 19th century (Seuil, 2016). For the eighteenth century (until the end of the French Revolution), the authors describe, among other things, the awakening of the sensitive soul of the time, individual emotions related to the coming times, emotions expressed for the spectacle of nature (including landscape), great common emotions expressed for meteorological phenomena, and political emotions, especially those expressed during the period of the Revolution, including less obvious ones, like revolutionary joy and melancholy.

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<sup>1</sup> B. Rosenwein, *Worrying about Emotions in History*, „The American Historical Review”, Vol. 107, No. 3 (June 2002), p. 821.

This very general review of possibilities in studies of “emotional topics,” using the example of the eighteenth century in France, demonstrates the primary issue in my chosen perspective: studying the unveiling of emotions does not have to concern only self-evident issues such as — to simplify — love or patriotism. It can also involve an entire set of emotional behaviours that appear as components accompanying behaviours that do not fit the area traditionally named “high” due to the hierarchy of cultural norms and models.

Here is only one example representing this area: Robert Darnton’s study titled “Workers Revolt” in his book *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History*<sup>2</sup>. Research of literature necessitates a path accounting for text as its basis, not the event itself, and thus searching for emotions in this text — and not just the author’s emotions, but also common, collective ones.

It is not something completely new that researchers of the (Polish) Enlightenment would need to treat the perspective mentioned here. Such wording of the issue would ignore both previous observations and — what seems more significant — would mean ignoring the particularity of the Enlightenment, its literature, and culture. This particularity exhibits itself when it is treated not just like cold, rationalist, and soulless mechanisms whose “residents” replicate in their actions this “affectless” nature of the period.

The presence of phenomena with a clear emotional component in the Enlightenment literature, unveiling itself on many levels — to say this in very general terms — has been noticed long ago by researchers working on this period, and some of them believe it to be one of the distinguishing features of the Enlightenment. It has also been noticed by people living in that period, both in reflections on its nature and the naming of phenomena. In order to refer to primary issues, to the lattice of concepts and terms concerning emotions about various languages of culture and literature of the 18th century, we must notice the existence of such studies and research traditions in which these emotional components are exposed.

Such is the history of German-language literature, where we can find the terms *Empfindsamkeit* and *Sturm und Drang*. The former — literally meaning emotionalism or sensitivity — does not have a stable status and can signify a certain period in the 18th-century literature (today, we tend to avoid this interpretation), a certain trend in the Enlightenment (i.e., *Aufklärung*), a group of phenomena emerging from it, or finally the turn of individual interest of an author in the direction of exposing emotional-

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<sup>2</sup> Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History*, Basic Books 1984.

ism. On the other hand, *Sturm und Drang* (the so-called period of “storm and stress” is a clear entity of the periodization process of German literature of the second half of the 18th century, covering the 70s and 80s, and transitioning into the period named *Klassik/ Weimarer Klassik*. Despite many discussions concerning the nature of this phenomenon, it is accepted to define it by pointing out the significant rise, at the time, of the role of individualism of the author’s subject and the appearing fierceness in the manifestation of social attitudes and beliefs (in the longer perspective, characterizing especially the works by Friedrich Schiller).

On the other hand, in studies on Polish literature, the term sentimentalism is used to determine the literary trend whose most important determinant is, at this moment in research, the introduction into literature, especially poetry, of feelings (sentiments) situated in the area of “feeling” linked with the “heart,” to invoke the categories from reflections of contemporary authors. In the description of Polish literature, sentimentalism operates within specified temporal boundaries. However, it signifies not a period but a phenomenon coexisting in the Enlightenment order of literary trends. At the same time, basic periodization models of French or English literature of the 18th century do not account for emotion-related categories as clear entities. However, naturally, we perceive in them phenomena that trigger the emotionalism embedded in the text or expected of the reader.

Such a diversity of methods of “embedding” emotions into the surface of the literary process, outlined here in very general terms, is also tied to the diversity of terms signifying emotions in individual languages, which means that crossing the barriers of languages can cause misunderstanding or incomprehension. According to Barbara Rosenwein:

Many European languages have more than one word to refer to phenomena the Anglo-Saxons call “emotions,” and these terms often cannot be used interchangeably. In France, love is not called *émotion* — it is classified as *sentiment*. Anger, on the other hand, is *émotion*, because *émotion* is short and violent, while — in principle — every *sentiment* is characterized by a certain subtlety and longer duration.<sup>3</sup>

This list is longer and concluded with a question that — adapted appropriately — is worth placing within these contemplations. The researcher wonders:

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<sup>3</sup> Barbara H. Rosenwein, *Wspólnoty emocjonalne we wczesnym średniowieczu*, red. G. Urban-Godziek, trans. Lidia Grzybowska, Jerzy Szafranowski, Grażyna Urban-Godziek, Seria Nowa Humanistyka, Warszawa 2016, s. 20–21.

To what extent should we account for these differences when studying ‘emotional communities’ in the Early Middle Ages? If it could be strictly defined, it would be necessary to rethink not just the title, but the very assumptions of this book. Nonetheless, such a definition is impossible.<sup>4</sup>

Discussions about emotions in the 18th century took place using a language much more like modern language than the medieval language, although reading Linde’s *Słownik* (Dictionary) makes us realize that the gap is quite large. We should also emphasize that comparing the role of medieval Latin and the Enlightenment French is only superficially justified. National languages functioning in the 18th century had a strong status practically throughout Europe. They were used in most societies and communities to exchange thoughts; therefore, there are much fewer silent witnesses of history than in the Middle Ages, evidenced by studies on alphabetism. At the same time, there are differences between languages in terms of expressing and naming emotions; thus, historians of language and lexicologists should answer how this situation changed and its current status.

We should also account for issues related to translation (terminology) and the dominant position of English as the language of global scientific communication. Indeed, if we adapt the problem raised by Rosenwein to the situation of the Enlightenment, it does not seem to be any possibility to draw conclusions. We should be aware of language differences, but at the same time remember that we have tools (especially single- and multi-language dictionaries) that allow us to try to understand old ways of expressing emotions that have a relatively low risk of making a significant error.

Other important issues were pointed out by Gerhard Sauder in the entry on *Affekt* (in the compendium *Handbuch Europäische Aufklärung. Begriffe, Konzepte, Wirkung*). He emphasized the significance of the gradual process of their “scientification”, which should be understood as the presence of affects in the medical discourse and practice — for the 18th-century functioning of emotions. Today’s metaphorical understanding of the heart as a place where emotions are located is, according to Sauder, a result of a long process, one of the stages of which was the 18th-century recognition of the chest and heart as the true seat of suffering. Since the mid 18th century, there has been a clear differentiation of vocabulary concerning emotions; emotions are still subject to value judgements; they are directly related to axiology. According to Sauder, the defence of strong feelings is combined with a longing for the primal

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<sup>4</sup> Ibidem.



greatness and heroic virtue in authors of *Sturm und Drang*, like Rousseau, Diderot, and Helvétius.

In the Polish Enlightenment, many emotional components relevant to the West European affective discourse did not exist on a high level of abstraction and scientification. Identifying emotions functioning in the society of the time seems more important here than comparing them to abstract European models. At the same time, the process of diffusion of specific ways of talking about emotions and their regulating norms into the Polish society of the second half of the 18th century should be seen here as very significant.

Seemingly, the attempt to reflect on this society's way of expressing emotions using broadly defined written texts, in them and through them, must account for — to use a certain shortcut — the Sarmatist-Noble-Baroque tradition to a much greater extent than in relation to just belles-lettres written in the time of Stanisław II August. If a change of a “programmatic” nature took place in the strictly literary sphere, in the sphere of non-literary or personal texts, it resulted from many different overlapping factors spread throughout time, operating with different strength in different spaces (e.g., the regional perspective). We should emphasize the significance of issues related to education which homogenizing effect is obvious also in relation to emotionalism — permitted or not, expressed or hidden.

We could formulate an initial hypothesis that would indicate that, when it comes to expressing emotions, the society of the Republic of Poland in the 18th century (and early 19th century) depended on the state of “emotional culture” developed in the 17th century more than other European societies. In other words, the change in the manner of expressing emotions was limited in 18<sup>th</sup>-century Poland by the burden of the “previous century”; this seems indisputable about the first half of the century, and if we talk about times after 1764, I invoke largely partial explorations whose systematic reviews would be necessary for future research.

Thus, one of the perspectives from which studies of emotions in texts should be studied is chronological, which refers to diachrony. The basic question would concern the progress of change, over eighty years between 1750 and 1830, between the domination of Sarmatism and the beginning of Romanticism, of the set of affects operating among residents of the Republic of Poland and expressed by them

What follows is just one example comprising two quotes, indicating what types of texts we can use to this end. The first fragment is from *Diariusz życia mego* (“Diary of My Life”) by Marcin Matuszewicz, born in 1714, from texts concerning the year 1757 (probably written a short time later):

Even then I remained, as I said, like a poor sheep in a wolf's mouth, alone in Nowogródek, without anyone — other than the Lord God — to place all faith and hope in. Nonetheless, I tensed up for my wife, for what has been happening to her, because I left her very close to labour; but when I visited Fleming for lunch at his personal invitation, I received a letter from home saying that the Lord God has fortunately made my wife deliver and gave her a son who was given the first name Józef at the holy baptism of water; it was the name of my late benefactor father, Jerzy Józef. Nevertheless, I wanted to use this name to find myself in the good graces of my brother, colonel Józef.<sup>5</sup>

The second fragment is from *Historia mego wieku i ludzi, z którymi żyłem* ("History of My Age and People with Whom I Have Lived"), from the diary of Franciszek Karpiński, the pre-eminent poet of Polish sentimentalism, who was born in 1741 and died in 1825; this diary was created in the final years of his life and described an episode taking place in the second half of the 1780s:

One summer, during entertainment at Mrs Krakowska's [Izabella Branicka], she was visited by Marcin Badeni, the royal chamberlain managing the king's property, a plenipotentiary in general. I have liked this truly good-hearted man since the first day we met due to his sensible replies, but on the next day — due to his great soul and generous treatment of me. [...] I shall remember this esteemed friend until the day I die because, after he initiated our friendship with generous treatment, he later maintained it with reciprocity in so many events, and with respect for me proclaimed everywhere, although I did not even have the time to earn it.<sup>6</sup>

Matuszewicz names his emotions in a very general manner; he says that he "tensed up" for his wife, and his statement is essentially filled with events, a report of actions, although according to the diarist's declaration, we can also notice his emotions related to religious attitude and family relations. On the other hand, Karpiński wrote his diary in style, according to Roman Sobol, emulating the pattern of Rousseau's *Confessions*. The fragment mentioned above demonstrates natural relations between people despite their entanglement in court life and complications of the world — friendship and selflessness are placed in the foreground, which is indirectly used to reveal the diarist's scale of emotional values. The way emotions are shown is meticulously thought out; they are not just named, but the path leading to their inception and their meaning (in the author's subject perspective) are demonstrated.

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<sup>5</sup> Marcin Matuszewicz, *Diariusz życia mego* [Diary of My Life], vol. 1, 1714–1757, ed. and introduction by Bohdan Królikowski, commentary by Zofia Zielińska, Warszawa 1986, p. 760.

<sup>6</sup> Franciszek Karpiński, *Historia mego wieku i ludzi, z którymi żyłem* [History of My Age and People with whom I have Lived], ed. Roman Sobol, Warsaw 1987, p. 128.



This example indicates not just the possibilities of studying changes in the manner of expressing emotions over time but also shows diversity within one genre, differentiation of attitudes, which also enables us (naturally, with more examples) to contemplate the dependence of showing emotions on genre norms. At the same time, diaries — moving to the issue of materials that can be used to study emotions — are a genre particularly destined for such analyses. That is because of the compulsion of sorts to expose oneself — “diarist I” — through the prism of memory, but in a manner that reconstructs, so to speak, past events, often ones where the emotional component played a role, often significant (which facilitated their memorization). This reconstruction also involves projecting a diarist’s knowledge about themselves when writing the text down onto their past version as they would want to present it, which features and emotions would they want to grant themselves in self-presentation before the (future) reader.

Such an offset of perspective is not present in the second of important personal genres, i.e., in the letter, which registers hot emotions in the moment of writing, although it also concerns events that had already taken place. Moreover, it is difficult to view the letter as a single text, as a wholly reliable testimony of emotions; however, analyzing sets of correspondence that would include the sender’s relationships with individual recipients would enable us to draw much more justified conclusions.

The diary and the letter belong to documents less burdened by statement conventions and social norms of expressing emotions. On the other hand, they impact political writings to a much greater extent; I am aware of using here, concerning political writing of the Polish Enlightenment, a process of an extensive reduction to a single functional pattern, whereas it had been a very diverse part of writings of the time. However, in the case of subsequent studies, appropriate filters (genre, thematic, and personal) will have to be applied consistently, enabling us to group materials and make comparisons, leading to reliable results.

It is evident that the field of reflections concerning emotions also contains literary works, including those intended for theatre, with potential possible information about their stage shape. Indeed, the set of texts in which we can search for testimonies of emotionalism is vast but heterogeneous; firstly, all genre conventions and norms of intimacy functioning in the society of the time must be accounted for, along with the knowledge of what can be conveyed to others, and in what type of text can this occur. Other documents and genres of texts not mentioned here — like the Polish government official journals — will likely constitute a subject of interest remaining in the competence of historians. However, they will

also analyze the genres mentioned above of texts, mainly diaries and letters, searching for testimonies of emotions related to other activities.

Interests in communal and individual emotions, in affects manifested in private and in the public space, will certainly meet in these searches. We can also study — to be very brief here — emotions revealed thematically, through gardens or landscapes, or from another perspective — testimonies of melancholy or joy. We could, naturally, list many more examples.

Nevertheless, examples are not that important; we need to notice the significance of emotions in a new way, following Barbara Rosenwein's statement at the end of her sketch, mentioned earlier, concerning fears about emotions in history:

The new narrative will recognize various emotional styles, emotional communities, emotional outlets, and emotional restraints in *every* period, and it will consider how and why these have changed over time.<sup>7</sup>

The Enlightenment, not only the Polish one, seems to be an area we should study from this perspective; the use of tools mentioned above creates opportunities to complete and modify its image and our method of conducting contemporary historical reconstruction concerning texts and people of that time.

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<sup>7</sup> Barbara Rosenwein, *Worrying about Emotions in History*, *op. cit.*, p. 845.