



Wojciech Tomasiak. *Inna droga. Romantycy a kolej*. Wydawnictwo Instytutu Badań Literackich Polskiej Akademii Nauk, 2012. 308. ISBN: 9788361552536

Titled *Inna droga. Romantycy a kolej* (*A Different Route. The Romantics and Railways*), Wojciech Tomasiak's book is an attempt to present changing perceptions of mobility in the nineteenth century, with a special focus on railway travel. The author is an eminent Polish historian and literary theorist, and his book testifies to his interest in the experience of travel and the manner of describing it. Although Tomasiak limits his discussion to Poland in the age of Romanticism, he constantly compares observations and comments by Poles with what other Europeans wrote about trains and railway journeys at the time. The author lays particular emphasis on the English, French and German contexts. His comparative perspective enhances the quality of the book insofar as it places Polish discourse on railways in a wider European discursive context focused on the development of a new means of transportation. Tomasiak's approach also makes it possible for us to single out the innovative elements in Polish discourse on railways, as well as to note the reproduction of popular European opinions by Polish writers.

The book is divided into two main parts. The first one is an extensive and very erudite introduction while the second part is an anthology of texts dealing with experiences of railway travel. The anthology consists of 75 different literary forms (letters, poems, memoirs, travel reports).

The first part, "*Inni romantycy, inny romantyzm*" (Different Romantics, Different Romanticism), is made up of three chapters: "*Literatura z przypisów i wykropkowań*" ("Literature in Footnotes and Ellipses"), "*Wszyscy i wszystkie inaczej*" ("Everyone in a Different Way") and "*Romantyzm prze-pisany*" ("Romanticism Re-Written"). The author starts his argument by saying that "in the first half of the nineteenth century travel constituted an important form of cultural behaviour." He further points out that Polish experience largely coincided with that of other Europeans for whom travel had become a manifestation of a Romantic perception of the world. It seems that for Poles travel gained particular importance insofar as it enabled them to visit "significant places, as if made sacred by the great and still vivid past" (5). The author cogently argues against stereotypical perceptions of the works of Polish Romantics and particularly against the tendency to view them as tragic and full of pathos, set among failed bids for national independence. He demonstrates that Romantic texts concerned with travel represented a wide range of experiences, including positive ones, informed by topics, such as technology, comfort, fascination with novelty and the egalitarianism of travel. Tomasiak also shows how the Polish language developed along with the progress of railways and new forms of travel and how a lot of words changed their original meanings. He also describes the unprecedented fascination with technology, velocity, mechanization and novelties, such as photography. Generally speaking, the book's first part enhances our awareness of factors that changed traditional perceptions of the world and enabled nineteenth-century Europeans to re-define a lot of received notions and systems.

As already indicated, the second part is an anthology of texts which "are all concerned with railways and train travel" (5). The author explains that a lot of those are little known texts which were for the most part published in periodicals. He further dwells on the texts' shared themes, such as optimism and fascination with railway travel. These themes were apparently used as criteria for the selection of texts for the book's second part (75-106). In addition, Tomasiak draws attention to a perception of history as an ongoing process which plays a major organizing role in the texts that he has included and seems to be closely linked to their mode of publication in periodicals rather than in full-length books. Such texts documented popular reactions to events of general interest and shaped readers' opinions about whatever was new and important. They evidently had a short life span and "aged" quickly, turning into mere "documents of social thought" (105).

Interestingly, the Polish discourse on railways developed before the new invention had reached Poland. While the history of railways in Poland started in 1842, with the opening of a section from Breslau to Oława, the first serious references to locomotives could be found in Stanisław Janicki's doctoral thesis of 1823. And Janicki was by no means the only one to be fascinated by them. Tomasik repeatedly proves that nineteenth-century technological discourse had a national dimension; the same was true of railways. Advances in civilization were treated as a common good, the way to follow. And in the case of major railway accidents, such as train derailment, the Polish press did not so much seek sensational material but rather used them to remind its readers that progress could take a very heavy toll.

The anthology consists of four parts, with each of them being organized around one of the following topics: 1. The Railway; 2. At the Station and in the Carriage; 3. A Magic Journey; 4. The Course of Life. Apart from texts by authors, who are well-known to Polish readers, such as Józef Hoene-Wroński, Wincenty Pol, Władysław Syrokomla, Józef Ignacy Kraszewski, Aleksander Fredro and Zygmunt Krasiński, there are also names that would be unfamiliar to the general public. Apart from superbly written texts, full of profound observations, there are also texts which never reached a wide readership. It may be argued that the latter, though less sophisticated, rendered the mindset and experiences of the average traveller in a more adequate way. Such texts also provide more information about the first two generations of middle-class Poles as well as about significant changes in railway travel. In the anthology certain authors are represented with several texts, which allows us to explore the process of change and realize that railways were an important point of reference in their literary and journalistic work. Geographically, the texts do not refer only to Poland but there are accounts of journeys in Italy, Germany, Austria, France and the USA.

As a reviewer, I need to add that Tomasik has for the most part restricted his analysis to middle-class authors who are predominantly members of the intelligentsia. Except for a few representatives of the gentry, there are no aristocrats among the writers whom he has included in his book. Texts by writers from the *szlachta*, such as Zygmunt Krasiński and Aleksander Fredro, have been selected on account of the authors' links to literature, not because of their social class. There are no accounts by workers or agricultural labourers, which is only natural, as they did not contribute to newspapers in the early nineteenth century. It seems to me, however, that Tomasik might have stated explicitly that the Romantic view of the railways came from a very specific group of authors who addressed their texts to a specific segment of the reading public. Four of the included texts were authored by women but Tomasik does not refer in any way to women's experiences of railway travel. It seems to be common knowledge that female and male observations on travel differ. And even if the overrepresentation of texts written by men appears justified in view of the era's standards and nineteenth-century restrictions on female mobility, Tomasik's failure to analyse the texts from the point of view of gender studies is a major limitation of his book.

Despite my critical remarks, *Inna droga* is a publication that provides valuable insights into nineteenth-century Polish culture and travel writing. There is plentiful evidence of its author's expertise and knowledge of both subjects. Tomasik's analysis is enlivened by the use of multiple examples. His arguments are clear and cogent throughout the text. The broad perspective, which Tomasik adopts, and his comparative approach are likely to attract numerous readers both in Poland and elsewhere.

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