

Summary

WINCENCY IGNACY MAREWICZ: ENLIGHTENMENT WRITER IN THE SOCIETY OF THE GRAND DUCHY OF LITHUANIA

This book focuses on the society of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the last decades of the 18th century and the political, social and cultural processes that took place in it, as reflected through the life and works of a particular person. This person is Wincenty Ignacy Marewicz (1755–1822), a poor nobleman and a writer who tried to make a living from his literary activities. Born in Trakai County, he studied in Vilnius and later spent a significant part of his life in the city. He lived in Vilnius at a turning point in the history of the state, when the Four-Year Sejm was held (1788–1792), when the Constitution of May 3rd 1791 was adopted, when the uprising of Tadeusz Kościuszko broke out (1794),

and when the suppression of the uprising was followed by the final partition of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and the dissolution of the state (1795). At the same time, it was a time of intense changes in social life, with the creation of modern social institutions, changes in attitudes towards the estates of the realm, the position of women, education, and the role of the artist in the life of the state. Marewicz was an active participant in all these political events and a passionate critic of society and supporter of reforms.

Marewicz was one of the first independent writers in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania to attempt to earn a living from literary activity. For a long time, he had no land and no office, and was not connected to any institution or patron, so writing and selling books became a way for him to secure his material and social status. He was involved in this activity for about 12 years (from 1786 to 1798/1799) and published more than 40 books. The writer's works were varied: he published collections of poems, comedies, dramas, works of a political nature and works that hardly fit into any genre. The abundance and variety of his work, and the frankness that often crossed the boundaries of intimacy, gave Marewicz a reputation among his contemporaries as a graphomaniac. This reputation followed him after his death, and only in modern times has attention been drawn to the originality of the writer's work.

This research is carried out as a case study, and Marewicz's works are treated as a distinctive and unique source. The idea of this research is based on the possibility of exploring the life and imagination of the 'little man', a poor and ordinary nobleman, to recognise the universal social and political ideals of the epoch. The work of Marewicz, who aspired to participate in the political life of the state and actively manifested his views, is particularly suitable for such an analysis. The book attempts to answer the questions of how the last decades of the state's life witnessed a change in attitudes towards the nature of human beings,

their position in society and the duties and rights they derive from it, and the impact of new ideas in education. The study also attempts to discern what is typical in Marewicz's works and what individual nuances are given to them by his particular personality.

The book is divided into three chapters. The first chapter discusses Marewicz's activities as a writer, and examines how he treated the profession of writing and the opportunities he had to publish books. The second chapter explores Marewicz's work as a social critic. It attempts to give insight into the social issues in which the writer was interested, how he understood the structure of society and what role he attributed to himself in it, from the point of view of a member of the nobility, a man of letters and a 'little man', how he was influenced by Enlightenment ideas, the sentimentalist worldview and new pedagogical theories. The third chapter deals with Marewicz's activities as a citizen. It examines how Marewicz reacted to and treated the political changes in the state, and what images of the state, the king, and the nobility he created.

The study concludes that the case of Marewicz's literary activity can be considered both typical and exceptional in the social life of Enlightenment society. On the one hand, Marewicz was a typical Enlightenment man who sought to be useful to his state and who viewed his literary activity through the prism of its benefit to society. The writer, as is typical for the Enlightenment, believed in the educational power of literature. He treated the publication of texts as a means of publicity, which could become a tool for the betterment of society, a platform for the glorification of the activities of virtuous citizens as well as a platform for teaching useful subjects. On the other hand, writing and publishing books was his main source of livelihood, which was not typical in the literary field of the times. Unlike most writers of his generation, Marewicz did not have a good education. He was probably aware of the limitations of his abilities, but he treated his literary activity

as honest work. He never talked about his talent, was modest about his work and declared that he would leave it to the public to judge the value of his work.

Writing and publishing books was also a way for Marewicz to establish himself in society. He called himself a 'literary man' and hoped to raise his status by making a name for himself through his literary activities. Books were also a means for the writer to get in touch with powerful persons, to make a request or to express gratitude to them. Marewicz engaged in rather unconventional ways of securing his social and material position: he personally sought out members of the nobility with whom he was not acquainted, presenting his books to them, dedicating to them very personal works depicting the author as a social outcast due to his virtues. In his panegyric works for the nobility, he used both traditional laudatory rhetoric and more original forms of mock praise, more in line with the Enlightenment, when exaggerated praise would seem not to be in good taste.

Marewicz's literary activity was characterised by the fact that he 'made books out of everything', i.e., every text he produced seemed to him worthy of being published and sold. This was driven by pragmatic interests, but also by ethical considerations, as he believed that publicly standing up for the weak against the powerful, like a public expression of thanks, was more impactful.

Marewicz himself had to take care of the printing and distribution of his works, so he took various measures to disseminate his books: he invited subscriptions, he published lists of published and forthcoming works at the end of his books, he announced the titles of manuscripts in progress, he displayed symbols of his origin and status on the covers of books, and he announced the staging of his dramas in theatres of various cities.

Literary activity was Marewicz's main source of income both in Warsaw and in Vilnius, where there were probably fewer self-employed

writers. The demand for Marewicz's books in Vilnius may have been boosted by the popularity of his patriotic works, which became very popular during the reform period. His dramas and comedies, staged in Vilnius, were also in demand.

Social criticism was one of the most important sources of inspiration for Marewicz's work. He treated writing as a public activity, a 'tribune' from which the evils of society are denounced. He was concerned with exposing people's weaknesses and sins, the crisis of traditional values, the omnipotence of money, the power of hypocrisy and pandering. As is typical of Enlightenment writers, Marewicz considered the exposure of vices to be the duty of a good citizen.

The writer supported the ideas of egalitarianism and social solidarity, which were often preached by writers from the poor nobility and the urban classes. Inspired by the ideas of the Enlightenment, a constant leitmotif in his works was the judgement of a person not on the basis of his origin and wealth, but on the basis of his virtues. Marewicz often declared the equality of the nobility despite their financial position and he also considered townspeople and peasants as equal members of society. This is also evident in his marital plans. He portrayed himself as a 'little man' and boldly appealed to powerful persons for support, because he did not doubt their obligation to take care of the weak, appealing to a sense of social solidarity. Marewicz also did not shy away from reminding the king of his duty to be equally just and to protect all his subjects equally.

Marewicz felt an affinity with the Rousseauian quest for authenticity and naturalness. He himself considered openness and sincerity to be his greatest virtues, and he demonstrated that in his works, writing about his own hardships, poverty, failures in life and unhappy love stories. However, his autobiographical works tend to teeter on the line between reality and fiction, so there is always some uncertainty as to

how much is the author's real life and how much is the image the author wants to project. In essence, Marewicz's view of society was in line with the canons of sentimentalist literature. The motif of detachment from a society in which interpersonal relationships are based on false values is frequent in his work. In his many autobiographical works, he portrayed himself as a stranger in a hypocritical and mercantilist society, an outcast on account of his virtues.

The writer's views were also close to the anti-urbanism shaped by sentimentalism, which emphasised and poeticized the values of rural life. For Marewicz, the depiction of the city was a pretext for exposing the evils of society. The city, full of unnatural and useless things, seemed to the writer a place of moral degradation. Marewicz denounced a life of excess, the waste of money, immoral entertainment.

The model of education proposed by Marewicz, which was close to the Rousseauian theory of pedagogy, was also based on naturalness. In his work on the education of future offspring, the writer relied on the postulate that the child's greatest teacher is nature. According to Marewicz's educational system, the child's education had to take place in the countryside and had to be based on the observation of nature and the child's direct experience. Like the advocates of natural and individualistic education, Marewicz envisaged the education of the child from infancy, the active involvement of parents in their children's education, and the notion that teachers should take into account the characteristics of the child's age and the child's individual needs. However, we can note that the writer adapted the system of natural education, drawing on his own life experience and taking into account the relevant issues of his own country. The system of education described by Marewicz was aimed at the development of a virtuous citizen. It was based on the attitudes that the writer declared in his patriotic works: work for the good of society, obedience to the king, respect for

religion, striving for the unity of the nation, and hatred of foreigners who undermine the state.

Marewicz's political work was shaped in the highly politicised environment of the Four Years' Sejm period in Warsaw, but most of it was written in Vilnius, where the writer became involved in state activities. The reform era opened up a wide range of opportunities for creative artists such as Marewicz to express themselves. At that time, all social strata were involved in the discussion of political issues, and works on topical political themes became very popular, regardless of their artistic level.

Marewicz, who made his debut in the press in 1784, quickly responded to political issues, getting involved in the '*kontusz versus frock*' dispute, and in 1788 he commented on the work of the Sejm and advocated for the expansion of the rights of townspeople. Marewicz's advice to the Sejm and the King was one of a number of other works of that time, but was likely to attract the attention of readers from the minor nobility and the townspeople with more radical views. Marewicz was an advocate for being proactive: he supported the introduction of a voluntary levy for the maintenance of the army, and agitated for a crackdown on traitors and enemies of the homeland.

In his works, Marewicz unconditionally supported the actions of the ruler and the Patriot Party, even heroising Stanislaus Augustus, and fervently welcoming the Constitution of May 3rd, which he saw as a means of salvation of the state. The motifs of Marewicz's works were typical of patriotic literature at the end of the 18th century: he spoke about the political events of the time and addressed topics related to revolution.

In his works created after the second partition of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, Marewicz reflected on the reasons for the collapse of the state. He saw not only the fault of hostile foreign

powers and local traitors, but also the flaws of the Commonwealth's society – the lack of unity and the priority of self-interest. Looking back in retrospect (in *Nefelonikones*, written in 1821), the writer perceived the guilt of the king and the rich nobility for the loss of the state. The poet blamed the entire social elite for their selfishness, and saw the potential for the salvation of the state in the liberated peasantry.

Marewicz himself declared that not knowing foreign languages, he could not be a follower of fashionable writers. He argued that his very nature shaped the way he wrote. However, in his works we can see the influence of his contemporaries' creative works and popular theories. Marewicz could have gotten acquainted with them through scientific and literary periodicals, which often published texts by foreign as well as native authors. Many of Marewicz's works can be read as a commentary on the most important events of the Commonwealth of the late 18th century, as an expression of the opinions and moods prevailing in society at the time. At the same time, the writer was interested in man, his nature, his position in society and the duties and rights that follow from it. As was typical of Enlightenment writers, he viewed people's positive and negative traits from the perspective of society's interests. Although he considered himself a 'little man', he felt entitled, as a citizen and a nobleman, to expose wrongs and to advise the powerful how to correct them. At the same time, Marewicz had a very personal perspective, stemming from an original personality that often transcended the boundaries of social conventions.