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## Major Currents in the Renaissance and Humanism Studies in Poland over the Last Fifty Years

The first decade of the century that has just started provides us with a particular opportunity to reflect upon the general characteristics of the state of research on the Renaissance and the epoch's humanism. The announcement of the year 2005 as "The Year of Mikołaj Rej" was an almost formal procedure in Poland and its goal was to make the general public aware of the fact that it had been 500 years since the birth of "the father of the Polish book intended for reading," as called by Aleksander Brückner. The anniversary was commemorated with several scholarly conferences devoted to the life and works of the author of *Krótką rozmową między trzema osobami, panem, wójtem i plebanem* [*A Short Conversation Between Three Persons: a Squire, a Bailiff, and a Parson*]. Nevertheless, here we have neither time nor scope to review all the events associated with those initiatives. Let us then briefly note the celebrations of the anniversary. From the 25<sup>th</sup> to 27<sup>th</sup> October The Polish Department at the University of Łódź initiated the anniversary events with an interesting conference devoted to the assessment of recent research on Rej's works. In spring 2005 an extensive session for the scholars from all over Poland took place in Nagłowice, a village situated 100 km from Cracow, which was once the ancestral place of the Rej family. Mikołaj's father, Stanisław Rej, moved from Nagłowice to Żórawno, where the writer was born. From the 11<sup>th</sup> to the 13<sup>th</sup> May Polish historians of literature and culture discussed Rej's life and work (1505–1569) at the University of Wrocław. The series of conferences was finished by the one organized by the University of Silesia in Katowice in autumn that year, and of which the subject matter was also related to Rej.

However, the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Mikołaj Rej's birth does not constitute the sole opportunity and inspiration for our discussion of the past and the future in the domain of Renaissance studies. We should abandon

the anniversary stereotype observable in all regions of Poland. Instead of discussing exclusively Mikołaj Rej and the subjects associated with his life and works, we would like to analyse the present state of interdisciplinary research on the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries and recent major tendencies in the Renaissance and humanism studies in Poland and in the world throughout the last fifty years. There are at least two significant reasons for this. The special conjunction of several other anniversaries creates a unique chance to discuss the subjects above in a specific context. Over the last few years several quincentenary anniversaries have been celebrated: those of not solely one writer, but a number of them who could be perceived, more or less, as Rej's peers, or at least his close contemporaries. By this I mean the writers born towards the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century or in the first decade of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Several outstanding representatives of Polish and European culture may be included as members of that generation. The most significant ones belonged to the circle of Polish followers of Erasmus, but their personal and spiritual lives would start to differ from one another later.

The first member of that group was Jan Łaski the Younger (1499–1560), a promising representative of Christian humanism, who became one of the key figures of Reformation in Northern Germany and in England. The second of the patrons whose anniversary should be celebrated is Andrzej Frycz Modrzewski (1503–1572), a man transcending his age and hence a partly tragic figure of the Polish movement within Christian humanism. The 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his birth was commemorated rather quietly in 1999 in the form of, among others, the publication of his monumental *Commentariorum de republica emendanda libri quinque* translated by Cyprian Bazylik.

Cardinal Stanisław Hozjusz (1504–1579) must be noted as the third of the first-rate writers providing patronage for our "Renaissance decade." He was a humanist and follower of Erasmus in his youth, while later he became one of the most outstanding figures in the Catholic Church after the Trident Council.

That generation could be situated between two generations clearly distinguishable from each other; the earlier one included the Polish Neo-Latin poets born around 1480: Paweł of Krosno, Mikołaj Hussowczyk, Andrzej Krzycki, Jan of Wiślica, and Johannes Danticus. Rej's peers were in turn followed by another generation: Marcin Kromer (1512–1589), Stanisław Orzechowski (1513–1566), and Klemens Janicius (1516–1543). The juxtaposition of those dates and writers demonstrates that it had been half a millennium since the Renaissance humanism established a definite turning point in Polish culture: humanism introduces its cul-

ture into the cultural community of modern Europe with everything that the act entails. Thus it becomes highly interesting to scrutinize not only the phenomena characteristic of the Polish and European Renaissance, such as formulating national identity indicators on the basis of ancient paradigms, *latinitas* and *christianitas*, and the construction of nation and civic state based on the ideal of gentry [*szlachta*] democracy and the freedom of the individual, but also reconstruction of the humanist discourse. It had been used throughout the previous fifty years by the scholars conducting research on Polish and European culture and is still employed at present in order to describe the model of historical phenomena called “the Renaissance” or, in much broader sense “the early modern epoch.” The discourse, with all its varieties, reflects qualities characteristic of the current philosophy of culture, which is visible in the difference between the image of the Renaissance present in the literary history from 1953 to 1963 and the perception that has started to dominate nowadays and gradually replace the previous one. The overview of several Polish research attitudes that have been delineated over the last fifty years will provide scope for reflection on the issues stated above.<sup>1</sup>

## 1. A retrospection of the past half century

Apart from the anniversary celebrations, there exists another reason for a retrospection of the last fifty years. In 2003 it had been fifty years since the largest conference (from the point of view of organization) and the most important one (considering other aspects as well) devoted to the Renaissance, humanism, and the Reformation in Poland. It was organized in the year officially announced as “the Renaissance year,” 1953. Refraining from passing judgments on the historical significance of that event, it has to be stated that it established the mode of writing about the Renaissance in Poland for at least the following few decades. By this two conflicting tendencies are meant. The first equals the positive attitude, conforming to the methodology delineated at the above mentioned time, but regretfully also to its ideology. The other is tantamount to initiating opposition to the first, dominating, attitude, which was to a certain extent involuntary. Throughout the following decades the opposition

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<sup>1</sup> A concise overview of the Polish publications on the Renaissance is provided by W. Walecki; see “Podmiotowa i przedmiotowa zagraniczna bibliografia renesansu polskiego,” in *Podmiotowa i przedmiotowa zagraniczna bibliografia polskiego renesansu i baroku* [Foreign Primary and Secondary Bibliography of the Polish Renaissance and Baroque], ed. Walecki (Kraków, 2005).

manifested itself in diverse ways, mostly creative for the modern literary culture and the knowledge thereof. Hence if we adopt the year 1953 as the census of our perspective we should recapitulate the most significant anniversaries and the conferences accompanying them, referring back from 2005.

Throughout the last fifty years in Poland there have been relatively few opportunities to substantially debate the most eminent poets of the Polish Renaissance and on the methodology of research on the Renaissance and its variety of humanism. The brief retrospective of the events ought to be commenced with those anniversaries that are the most recent for us (in 2003 and 1997): the anniversaries related to Łukasz Górnicki (1527–1603) and reverend Jakub Wujek SJ (1541–1597), a Catholic translator of the Bible into Polish. The 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary was commemorated with an edition of his translation of the Scriptures (1599). Nevertheless, the scholarly sessions organized at the time had a distinctly narrow, specialized range and they did not inspire to any more general, all-encompassing discussion on the Renaissance studies methodology. Even earlier, in 1995, we had large international anniversary conferences in Poland (Cracow and Warsaw) and in Lithuania (Vilnius), whose aim was to mark the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Maciej Kazimierz Sarbiewski (1595–1640). The event provided scholars with an opportunity to discuss, among others, universalism, transcending the poet's indicators of national consciousness that were then so narrowly conceived. The poet was a truly European writer, known as *Horatius christianus*, rather than solely a *sarmaticus* one, hence our conceptual limitations had to be overcome by dint of universalism based on his Latinity and Christianity.<sup>2</sup> The latter subject matter became particularly transparent during the conference in Vilnius. Another significant topic associated with Sarbiewski's works was the issue of "mannerism" or even the "baroque quality" of his poetry, which embodied the Horatian quality in the most perfect mode, hence it resulted from the idea of "the Renaissance of culture following the ancient patterns;" moreover, the mode was correctly perceived as a perfect model of aesthetic attitude in relation to the authority of the antiquity emulated and close to modern conceptualism.<sup>3</sup> The opportunity to discuss the topic resulted in

<sup>2</sup> On the universalism of Neo-Latin literature in Poland see Jerzy Axer, *Łacina jako drugi język narodu szlacheckiego Rzeczypospolitej* [Latin as a Second Language of the Gentry-Nation in Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth], in *Łacina jako język elit* [Latin as a Language of Elites], ed. J. Axer (Warszawa, 2004).

<sup>3</sup> E. Buszewicz, *Sarmacki Horacy i jego liryka. Imitacja – gatunek – styl. Rzecz o poezji Macieja Kazimierza Sarbiewskiego* [The Sarmatian Horace and His Lyrical Verse. Imitation, Genre, Style. On M.K. Sarbiewski's poetry] (Kraków, 2006).

the demonstration of helplessness towards facts and the non-functional nature of the contrastive historical paradigm non-reflexively juxtaposing the so-called “Renaissance” with the so-called “baroque.” Nonetheless, it has to be stressed that the conceptual pattern above has thoroughly dominated Polish discussion of the Renaissance and the baroque in the first half of the previous century.

## 2. The Anniversaries of Jan Kochanowski

In the penultimate decade of the previous century (1980–1984) the most significant anniversary abounding in copious and memorable scholarly investigations was that of Jan Kochanowski (1530–1584). During those four years important international scholarly and popularizing conferences were organized at almost all of the universities in Poland and at Instytut Badań Literackich Polskiej Akademii Nauk [The Institute of Literary Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences]. The conferences had as their subject a comprehensive assessment of the state of research on the life and works of the poet. The conference proceedings from Warsaw (1980 and 1984)<sup>4</sup> and from Cracow (1984) deserve particular attention due to their consideration of methodology.<sup>5</sup> The edition of *Complete Works* was commenced at the time; unfortunately, it has not been finished at the time of writing this article. The lack of a modern critical edition of Kochanowski’s works in Latin is a particular hindrance to this research.

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<sup>4</sup> *Jan Kochanowski i epoka renesansu. W 450 rocznice urodzin poety 1530–1980* [J. Kochanowski and the Époque of Renaissance. In the 450<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Poet’s Birthday], ed. T. Michałowska (Warszawa, 1984); *Jan Kochanowski i kultura odrodzenia*, Materiały z sesji naukowej zorganizowanej przez Uniwersytet Warszawski w dniach od 19 do 21 marca 1981 roku w Warszawie [Kochanowski and the Culture of Renaissance. Materials from the Scholarly Session organized in Warsaw Univ., 19<sup>th</sup>–21<sup>st</sup> of March 1981], ed. by Z. Libera and M. Żurowski (Warszawa, 1985); *Jan Kochanowski 1584–1984. Epoka – Twórczość – Recepcja* [Époque – Works – Reception], ed. J. Pelc, P. Buchwald-Pelcowa, and B. Otwinowska, vols. 1–2 (Lublin, 1989).

<sup>5</sup> *Cracovia litterarum. Kultura umysłowa i literacka Krakowa i Małopolski w dobie Renesansu* [Intellectual and Literary Culture of Cracow and Malopolska in the Times of Renaissance], Księga zbiorowa Międzynarodowej Sesji Naukowej w czterechsetlecie zgonu Jana Kochanowskiego (w Krakowie, 10–13 października 1984 r.) (Wrocław, 1991). The state of research on the life and works of Rej contemporary to the session was presented in detail by Jerzy Starnawski in his study *Mikołaj Rej (Rocznik Przemyski XV–XVI)* (1975), 137–158). Starnawski published a continuation of that analysis devoted to “the Rej studies” in the chapter of *Odrodzenie. Czasy – ludzie – książki* [Renaissance. Times – People – Books] (Łódź, 1991), 104–137. I am using both of those texts in this article.

### 3. The anniversaries of Mikołaj Rej

Proceeding in our retrospective further into the past, we have to mention the 1969 quartercentenary anniversary of Mikołaj Rej's birth, which was very modestly reflected in scholarly publications and edited texts. The most significant outcome of the anniversary was the session at Instytut Badań Literackich PAN along with the proceedings from that conference and another, published as late as 1971.<sup>6</sup> The scholars gathered at the session stated the existence of an urgent need to prepare a critical edition of Mikołaj Rej's *Collected Works*, particularly under the circumstances that the name "the father of writings in Polish" was traditionally attributed to him. Nowadays, it remains a task of primary importance and to a certain extent a prestigious one. The lack of a complete modern scholarly and critical edition is a paradox difficult to justify, but understandable. It becomes more and more difficult to gather a team of adequately educated philologists and, simultaneously, editors. The diagnosis may be confirmed by the above mentioned and equally regrettable fact of delaying the end of editing all the works of Jan Kochanowski.<sup>7</sup>

In this retrospective overview, going further back in our discussion of the Renaissance anniversary sessions, another one, this time international, has to be broached. It was organized by the Cracow branch of PAN in 1966, commemorating the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Piotr Kochanowski's birth (1565–1620), therefore it took place one year later than it should have.

### 4. The session *The Renaissance in Poland* (1953)

Our retrospective leads us to the year 1953 and the event that considerably modified the post-war history of research on Mikołaj Rej and on the Renaissance in Poland as well. In the same year in which Stalin died, a long congress titled *The Renaissance in Poland* was organized in Warsaw (alongside smaller conferences organized locally). It lasted for many days and was supported by the authorities. The congress was devoted to a multi-faceted, but highly ideologized discussion over philosophic anthropology of the Renaissance, Renaissance culture in Poland, and research methodology in that field.

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<sup>6</sup> The state of research on the life and works of Rej contemporary to the session was presented in detail by Starnawski in *Mikołaj Rej*, *ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Recently an initiative to edit the Latin works of Jan Kochanowski as an e-text has been undertaken by the scholars gathered at the Renaissance Studies Centre in Krakow; the task is being coordinated by Dr. Grażyna Urban-Godziek.

The congress' date commemorated the year 1543, which was momentous due to certain events and publications important for the Polish Renaissance. One of them was the death of Nicholas Copernicus and the publication of *De revolutionibus*; accordingly the year 1953 was announced to be "The Year of the Polish Renaissance" and "The Year of Copernicus." The date also marked the anniversary of Klemens Janicius' death; the Polish-Latin poet was the most outstanding poet prior to Jan Kochanowski. It was also the time when the literary debut of Andrzej Frycz Modrzewski, *Lascius sive de poena homicidii*, was published, as well as Stanisław Orzechowski's *De bello adversus Turcas suscipiendo*. It has to be underlined at this point that the conference celebrated the memory of Mikołaj Rej: to be specific, the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the publication of his literary debut, the famous political satire *Krótka rozprawa między trzema osobami, panem, wójtem i plebanem*. All the texts were printed in 1543, therefore the anniversary of all those important publications hardly could have been celebrated during sad wartime. Consequently, the reasons for moving the anniversary ten years forward were understandable. What may be less clear for students nowadays is the historical context of the congress *The Renaissance in Poland* and its practical meaning for the humanities in Poland at the time.

The papers read at the congress and the conference proceedings constitute evidence of the confrontation between two generations and two concepts of the humanities. On the one hand it was a presentation of the traditional pre-war Polish school of literary history and theory by those scholars investigating Polish culture in the past who had lived through the war. On the other hand, a new outlook on the history, culture, and philosophy of scholarship was presented in Warsaw. The latter perspective was supposed to be representative of the generation of young scholars fascinated with the methodology, or rather the scholarly Marxist ideology, which determined the direction of Polish studies of the Renaissance and Reformation at least for that decade. It has to be added here that the ideology ossified the official discourse of syntheses written about the Renaissance and Baroque culture and the ossification lasted for a long time. The official discourse in question was used at schools, particularly in secondary education. The stereotypes formulated at the time may even be encountered nowadays, despite continuous revisions of syllabi and the publications of new textbooks for the study of Old Polish literature. Nevertheless, certain deeper and continuous consequences of the congress *The Renaissance in Poland* may be noticed. Above I have already discussed the congress as a stimulus to reflection opposing the officially approved mode of thinking about the Renaissance. More-

over, we have to admit that despite the short-term opportunistic goals that have long been forgotten, a traditional pre-war vision of “the Polish Golden Age” was preserved. The undisputable achievements of the Age in turn remained a point of reference. Material records of such a perspective on the Renaissance and especially on Jan Kochanowski’s works are numerous. I shall limit myself to Mieczysław Jastrun’s *Diary*, where he notes successive battles over keeping *Odprawa posłów greckich* [The Dismissal of the Grecian Envoys] in school syllabi and writes the following in the entry for 10 November 1956: “Like during the German occupation, I will probably return to the Bible and Kochanowski’s *Psalms*.”<sup>8</sup>

The atmosphere of the congress was conducive to commencing several publishing initiatives, which (supported by considerable funding and organizational help from the state authorities) led to valuable and lasting results. Among others it resulted in a collection of essays entitled *Odrodzenie w Polsce. Materiały z sesji naukowej PAN 25–30 października 1953* [The Renaissance in Poland. PAN Session Proceedings 25–30 October 1953], whose publication took almost 10 years (1955–1962). IBL PAN and the Ossolineum publishers in Wrocław began the edition of the highly valued book collection *Studia staropolskie* [Studies in Old Polish Literature], which is currently continued by Instytut Badań Literackich PAN in a new graphic layout. In the same year the series *Biblioteka Pisarzy Polskich* [The Polish Writers Library] started to appear after the disruption of wartime. Moreover, in that publishing series, the critical edition of *Krótką Rozprawą* was issued and in turn led to the publication of an edition of Mikołaj Rej’s *Collected Works* in the same year. Later, *Biblioteka Pisarzy Staropolskich* issued *Postylla* (1965) and *Wizerunek własny żywota człowieka pościwego* [The Faithful Image of an Honest Man] (1971). The edition was then stopped and has not been resumed till now. Even though the “heresiarch” Rej was the ideological patron of the enterprise and even through real enthusiasm and deep motivation stimulated people to act, the practical problems in the form of a permanent lack of adequately prepared philologists who could undertake the arduous task were too overwhelming.

## 5. Patterns of thinking about the Renaissance

The circumstances mentioned above, which occur once in a few generations, inspire us to a more general and interdisciplinary discussion. Characteristic differences between the views of specific schools and generations of scholars at this point become conspicuous. It is easier to notice

<sup>8</sup> M. Jastrun, *Dziennik 1955–1981* (Kraków, 2002), 82.



the qualities and tendencies of the current patterns in anthropological and philosophical, historiosophical, and cultural reflection. An overview of material and theses appearing in those anniversary debates constitutes the right opportunity for a particularly thorough comparative reflection on research methodology and its ideological conditioning. It allows us to reliably interpret the central ideas of those studies. Bringing forward the edition of the texts preserved from destruction in the war-time, the texts not necessarily being from the Renaissance, has undoubtedly been the dominating postulate in post-war Polish humanities. It has also been a postulate reported at international forums. Nonetheless, even though many source texts have already been published, the scholarly and editing work in Poland has encountered numerous obstacles and there remains plenty to be done in the field. The problem is even more serious nowadays than it was fifty years ago, since after the ravages of the war reconstruction of scholarly teams competent enough and motivated to do selfless work has proved to be much harder than could be imagined.

Accordingly, those scholars who survived the war, such as Henryk Barycz, Mieczysław Brahmer, Alodia Kawecka-Gryczowa, Stanisław Kot, Julian Krzyżanowski, Stanisław Łempicki, and Bronisław Nadolski, continued their pre-war research despite the obstacles discussed above, including research on the Renaissance and on humanism. They largely contributed to the quality and quantity of the state of research on sixteenth-century intellectual culture, Polish Renaissance printing presses, literature (especially popular literature), and the contacts between Polish humanist circles and the Renaissance humanist centres in Italy and Southern Netherlands (Belgium at present).

As has already been mentioned, new initiatives would also emerge in the two decades directly after the war. On the one hand, the ideological project of reinterpreting the image of Polish Renaissance literary culture involved formulating postulates and attempting to apply the so-called Marxist methodology on the subject. The most eminent representative of that group of scholars was Kazimierz Budzyk, who had enough conviction to try to use that methodology in his study of sixteenth-century Polish Literature (*Przełom renesansowy w literaturze polskiej* [The Renaissance Climax in Polish Literature], 1953; *Z dziejów renesansu w Polsce* [From the History of Renaissance in Poland], 1953). Still, it has to be emphasized here that in certain statements representative of that critical school numerous ideologically grounded ideas were involved that were too simplistic even for the historical materialism supporters themselves. On the other hand, till the time when historical materialism became outdated attempts were made to continue the course of studies on

the Polish literary culture in the Renaissance that had been delineated by the above mentioned scholars before the war. The pre-war research had been inspired by the accomplishments of their Polish predecessors (Aleksander Brückner and others) and the contemporary ideas in the fields of cultural theory and of humanities in the world.

A non-ideological discussion of the patterns of Polish identity was started on the basis of objective explication of the sources and ethnogenetic components of the "Sarmatian" myth (Tadeusz Mańkowski's *Genealogia Sarmatyzmu* [Genealogy of Sarmatism], 1946). The process was simplified also by explaining the origin and the meaning of "Sarmatia" as a concept denoting Polish cultural space in modern Europe in the context of Renaissance writers' Slavic identity. Tadeusz Ulewicz undertook the subject in two of his studies published soon after the war (*Świadomość słowiańska Jana Kochanowskiego* [The Slavic Identity of Kochanowski], 1947; *Sarmacja. Studium z problematyki słowiańskiej XVI i XVII w.* [Sarmatia. A Study on the Slavic Issues in 16th and 17th Century, 1950). Ulewicz was also a specialist in the history of printing presses in Cracow and Polish-Italian relations towards the end of the Renaissance. After the war Jerzy Starnawski in turn became involved in comparative research in Renaissance literature in general (i.e. contact relations, affinities, and homology). He also belongs to the same generation as Ulewicz and has been a scholar interested in a vast scope of subjects and the pioneer of post-war Latin studies in Poland. Prematurely deceased Jerzy Ziomek was the youngest of the generation; he started modern research on rhetoric and wrote the only existing university textbook constituting a synthesis of the Polish Renaissance.

The generation younger than the one above occupies a separate place in the history of Polish research on the Renaissance. Janusz Pelc (1930–2005), the editor and commentator of numerous Renaissance texts and the author of a synthesis of literary history of the epoch in Poland, developed research on Renaissance emblems, which had not been practiced before in Polish scholarship. Above all, he wrote a monumental monograph on the life and works of Jan Kochanowski. Only two years younger than Pelc, another representative of that generation Stefan Zabłocki (1932–2001) founded new centres of Neo-Latin studies in Gdańsk and Katowice. The centers joined the others already existing (K. Kumaniecki, E. Sarnowska-Temierusz, and J. Axer in Warsaw; and J. Starnawski in Łódź). Furthermore, Zabłocki was the first scholar to publish a study on Polish-Latin humanist literature of the Renaissance. Yet another scholar from the same generation, Stanisław Grzeszczuk (1934–1999) revised the ideologized post-war perspective on the sixteenth-century

literary culture and its variety known as the picaresque. In the overview of that generation's publications, studies on Renaissance books in Poland should be mentioned (including printing presses, censorship, etc.), which were developed, among others, by Paulina Buchwald-Pelcowa.

## 6. "The conjunction of dates" and the historical image of the Renaissance in Poland

The first section of this article included the most famous dates and names of the writers of primary importance, whose existence had always clarified the image of the Polish Renaissance. The clarification may be likened to the situation when certain stars facilitate our orientation and allow us to call constellations with traditional mythological names. When Renaissance studies and humanism in Poland are discussed (not only in Poland itself but also abroad) we have unavoidable problems with the troublesome analogy between the astronomical names of constellations, conventional as they are, and the chronological terms that give us orientation or at least the most basic periodization of the Renaissance in Poland. Nevertheless, the anniversaries of representatives of Mikołaj Rej's generation and, above all, the anniversaries of writers belonging to the two previous generations indicate the first decade of the 16<sup>th</sup> c. as momentous for the Polish culture.

Rejection of treating "the Renaissance" as a universal term is certainly one of the most significant paradigmatic shifts that took place at the time. Such a notion constituted a point of departure for discussion on the subject of studying the Polish Renaissance as practically synonymous with the sixteenth century. Bronisław Nadolski stated it clearly in his short study *O nową syntezę literatury polskiej XVI wieku* [For a New Synthesis of Polish 16<sup>th</sup> Century]:

No one has yet tried to present a full panorama of the literary life of the Renaissance in Poland, to show how rich, varied, and lively that life was, how the literary world commenced to be replete with poets, how the gentry and bourgeoisie took up writing alongside the clergy, how many writers followed the Reformation, how that religious movement complicated the natural course of literary development, how political changes and relations created the need to write, how the writing became lay and national in the sense of reflecting the life and aspirations of the nation, and how the writing spread throughout the whole country.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Offprint from: *Księga pamiątkowa ku uczczeniu czterdziestolecia pracy naukowej prof. dra Juliusza Kleinera* [A Book Commemorating the Fortieth Anniversary of Prof. Dr. J. Kleiner's Scholarly Work] (Łódź, 1949), 177.

Naturally the universal vision, being a heritage of the nineteenth-century reflection on the Italian Renaissance, has undergone transformation over recent decades. Furthermore, the most frequent questions relate to the usefulness or, rather, functionality of the idea of the Renaissance itself within the framework of what has traditionally been called "the history of Polish literature." Discussion of the issue has so far been raised in diverse (also fragmentary) overviews of research directions and editions of Old Polish Literature, summarizing the last few decades. Detailed bibliographies shortened adequately to the situation may be searched for elsewhere (for instance, in Waclaw Walecki's article also published in this collection). I shall limit myself to the most significant summary that was published forty years ago. In 1966 Tadeusz Ulewicz provided the readers with a description of the work "from not merely the post-war period 1945–1965, which is the closest to us from the formal perspective, but rather embracing the whole generation conceived historically, the generation whose research started around 1939, or 1938/39, and finished in 1965/66."<sup>10</sup> Ulewicz's study tried to portray the continuity of scholarly tradition established in the inter-war period, if such continuity was observable in specific cases. On the other hand, the author skillfully demonstrated the dynamics of conceptual transformations, expansion of analyses and historical hypotheses, and the creative attitude to the ideas of the Renaissance and Renaissance humanism that was adopted by the most significant scholars investigating them in Old Polish Literature.

In the period after the study's publication Jerzy Ziomek wrote his *Renaissance*, a modern overview that distanced itself from the post-war simplifications in the field. Then there were also Ziomek's followers. Comparative studies on the Polish and European literary culture were developed (J. Pelc). Certain modern overviews of Polish-Italian relations have to be mentioned here as well (J. Ślaski, T. Ulewicz, A. Nowicka-Jeżowa), Polish-Basilean (M. Włodarski), Polish-Dutch (Andrzej Borowski), or the introductory studies on Erasmianism (M. Cytowska, J. Domański, L. Hajdukiewicz, W. Szelińska). For the last twenty years Neo-Latin studies have developed in Poland, which rejected one of the most harmful post-war research stereotypes: that the literatures written in Polish and in Latin were separate or even opposing each other in one and the same cultural background. Jerzy Axer has made the idea of discarding the stereotype the cornerstone of his research on Polish-Latin writers. He

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<sup>10</sup> Ulewicz, "W staropolszczyźnie dzieją się rzeczy ważne (dorobek badawczy pokolenia)" [In Old Polish Studies the Important Things Happen (The Scholarly Achievements of a Generation)], *Ruch Literacki* 37, fasc. 4 (1966): 13.

was the one who initiated, among others, the project of editing Jan Dantyszek's (Joannes Dantiscus) letters. The time discussed here strengthened a new perspective on the national awareness of the Polish writers of the Renaissance in the multicultural geography of *Rzeczpospolita* (The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth) in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. More attention than previously is paid to the dynamics of Renaissance's temporal limits, i.e. to the durability of the epoch's influence even after the first decades of the seventeenth century and to the organic relation between Renaissance imitation and Baroque emulation (A. Fulińska). The rhetoric context of the Renaissance literary culture has also been treated with due care (M. Korolko, Z.J. Lichański, A. Gorzkowski).

The emergence of critical apparatus indispensable for a historian of literature is a separate subject which should be analyzed independently from our considerations here. The apparatus has been provided by *Słownik staropolski* [Old Polish Dictionary], *Słownik polszczyzny XVI w.* [The Dictionary of the Sixteenth-Century Polish Language], and *Słownik Jana Kochanowskiego* [The Dictionary of the Jan Kochanowski's Language]. The boundary separating a literary historian of Old Polish Literature from a linguist specializing in the history of the language has proved to be irrational, even though it had once been traditional.

## 7. The current situation in the field

This study has attempted to present the state of research on Renaissance studies in Poland and abroad. Nevertheless, this panorama is not transparent in all the details. There exist too many intricacies that have not yet been thoroughly researched enough to describe and interpret even approximately.<sup>11</sup> Yet, the issue that emerges is basic in its nature: how can a historian of literature weave his narration about the increasingly more complicated subject called the literary Renaissance? The idea of the Renaissance limited to the name of a style and the period dominated by the style and humanism proves to be less and less functional.<sup>12</sup> The

<sup>11</sup> The state of affairs is well exemplified by the discussion over the state of research during the Polish philology scholars' congress, which took place in Cracow in 2004 (J. Sokolski's *O wyższości Średniowiecza nad Renesansem lub odwrotnie* [About the Superiority of Renaissance over the Middle Ages or on the Contrary] and E. Sarnowska-Temierusz's *Światy literatury dawnej: perspektywa kulturowa* [The Worlds of Early-Modern Literature: A Cultural Perspective])

<sup>12</sup> J.R. Hale, "Renaissance," in *The Thames and Hudson Encyclopaedia of the Italian Renaissance*, general ed. J.R. Hale (London, 1989), 278. Cf. also G. Ruggiero, *Introduction. Renaissance Dreaming: In Search of a Paradigm*, in *A Companion to the Worlds of the Renaissance*, ed. G. Ruggiero (London, 2002), 1–4.

idea has already detached itself from the primary anachronistic paradigm of culture dominated by the set of phenomena observable in Italy “between the second generation of the 14<sup>th</sup> century and the second or third generation of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.” What becomes transparent is the feeling of discomfort caused by the inability to fix the temporal boundaries of the period defined in such a way, especially if the period was to also embrace other artistic and literary centers of trans-Alpine Europe apart from the (highly diversified) Italian centers. Not surprisingly, the concept of the “all-embracing” Renaissance should be substituted by the “chronological” terminology, which reflects wise scepticism by avoiding mechanical labeling. The terminology restricts itself to defining specific generational formations, identifiable through the central ideas describing identity or subjected to their aesthetic and philosophical programs and to the sets of qualities characterizing style. A portrayal of the Polish literary culture between 1450 and 1550 has to be seen as one of the most urgent research tasks. The time was particularly significant as it marked a redefinition of such determinants as Christianity, Latinity, and Polishness (and Polish as one’s language). The redefinition was related to the final shaping of national awareness and European awareness of the political and intellectual elites in *Rzeczpospolita*. The other scholarly project, resembling the first one, is a description of “the waning of the Polish Renaissance” (I am consciously using here the term coined by W.J. Bouwsma): diverse phenomena from the widely understood culture of the Polish state in the years between 1550–1650, not definable through stereotypical ideas about the “Renaissance style” or the “Baroque style,” and even less relevant to the opposition between “the Renaissance ideology” and “the Baroque ideology.”<sup>13</sup> Those two centuries constitute a chronological basis for constructing a panorama of early modern Polish culture.

The functionality of the term “humanism,” or rather *humanitas*, perhaps raises fewer doubts; the term detached itself from its primarily limited idea ascribed to that neologism (from German *Humanismus*) at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> or the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> c. The more thoroughly studied sources allow us to designate the determinants of philosophical anthropology in more detail and also more reliably. The determinants are inscribed into the humanist philosophical and parenetic literature, while the philosophical anthropology adopted an arbitrary (Greco-Roman) pattern of ethical and aesthetic values derived from artistic

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<sup>13</sup> W.J. Bouwsma, *The Waning of the Renaissance 1550–1640* (New Haven, 2000).

texts (poetic and rhetoric) for the cornerstone of its project of conducting a “rebirth” of culture and humaneness.

Hope should be expressed at this point that the above overview of the last fifty years in Polish Renaissance studies (particularly the last decade of this period) does not presage a disaster. There are signs that Renaissance and humanism studies in Poland might undergo another “renaissance” again soon.

