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CHARTING NEW WAYS FOR POLISH CULTURAL HISTORY:
STANISŁAW KOT

Stanisław Kot who died December 26, 1975 at the age of ninety in Edgware near London owes his position of one of the leading 20th-century Polish historians to his own scholarly publications as well as to his quite exceptional organizational drive and initiative. From his school years on, he had been also immersed in politics as editor of the youth periodical "Płomień" (Flame) in his student years, director of the press and propaganda office of the NKN (Chief National Committee) during the First World War, one of the leading figures of the PSL (Polish Peasant Party) during the interwar period, minister in the Polish Government in Exile in Paris and in London after the outbreak of the war, then for one year (1941-1942) ambassador to the USSR, for another (1942-1943) minister plenipotentiary in the Middle East, and after the war, ambassador of the Polish People's Republic in Rome (1945-1947). Few scholars could claim such an active and dramatic life. The present paper will, however, deal exclusively with Kot the scholar.

He was born in 1885 in a peasant family in the village Ruda near Rzeszów where he attended secondary school. Rzeszów was situated half way between the two university centers of the part of Poland then controlled by Austria—Cracow and Lvov. Kot decided for Lvov because students' political life there was much more vigorous than in Cracow. In 1904 he enrolled at the university where he studied Polish literature and where, in spite of hectic political activity, he obtained his diploma in 1909. For two years he taught in a Cracow secondary school. Then he spent two more years on a scholarship abroad collecting in European archives and libraries materials on Poland's cultural relations with the West, primarily in the 16th century. These two years of intensive re-

search turned out to be decisive for the direction of his subsequent scholarship: the influence of the West on Renaissance Poland would always be a subject close to his heart and one about which he was exceptionally knowledgeable. In addition to his habit of hard work he must have had a special knack for ferreting out new archival material because he brought back to Cracow a surprisingly rich booty.

He returned to scholarship after the hiatus of the war years. Two major books which he published simultaneously in 1919 paved the way for the chair of the history of Poland and of Polish culture created for him *ad personam* in 1920. People grumbled that the name of the chair was too general and too vague, that, after all, every humanist dealing with the past is a historian of culture. But what other appellation could be invented for a chair occupied by a scholar who was at the same time a historian of education, of political ideas, of the Reform movement and who dabbled from time to time in literary history? In 1921, at the age of thirty six, he was elected a member of the Academy of Sciences of Cracow.

He taught at the University for thirteen years only. As an active politician opposing Piłsudski's régime and as the chief organizer of the protest of university professors against the maltreatment of political prisoners at the Brześć fortress, he was deprived of his chair in 1933. He managed, however, during that relatively short period, to make of his seminar a remarkably active research center, especially productive in the field of the studies of the religious Reform movement. Those were, however, above all, the years in which he showed his mettle and initiative as a first-class organizer of cultural enterprises. In 1919, he launched a highly successful publishing venture, "Biblioteka Narodowa," which became the Polish counterpart of the English "Everyman's Library" or the French "Classiques Garnier." In 1921, he founded a scholarly periodical "Reformacja w Polsce" which to a large extent was filled with dissertations and papers that originated in his seminar. In the Academy he was the editor of two series. One of them, "Biblioteka Pisarzów Polskich," was devoted to scholarly reprints of 16th- and 17th-century literary texts; another, "Archiwum do Dziejów Literatury i Oświaty w Polsce," published sources for the history of culture. When in 1930 the Academy organized a congress in celebration of the four hundredth anniversary of the birth of the great Renaissance poet, Jan Kochanowski, Kot was the *spiritus movens* of the venture. Its main achievement, the impressive collective volume of papers read at the congress and dealing with various facets of Polish Renaissance culture, *Kultura staropolska* (The Old-Polish Culture), published in 1932, was to a large extent his initiative and was edited by him.

No other Polish historian in the interwar period could equal Kot in the scope and impetus of his organizational activities. His own scholarly production from those years was less impressive but by far not negligible. In addition to some special papers and editions of sources he published a general history of education and a book dealing with the social and political ideas of the Polish radical reformers, the Antitrinitarians.

After he had become an emeritus at the age of forty eight, his scholarly output somehow slackened. It was partly due to the deterioration of his health but the main reason for it is to be seen elsewhere. The repression that affected him rankled in his mind and he threw himself all the more eagerly into politics. From his short visit to England in 1934 (where his guide was the great English historian Louis Namier, whom he knew from his student's years) he brought back a remarkably rich harvest of source material on 16th- and 17th-century Anglo-Polish cultural relations on which he reported in a lengthy paper *Anglo-Polonica*, published in the yearbook "Nauka Polska." Invited to Collège de France he gave there four lectures on the Polish Antitrinitarians. They were published in Paris in 1937.

The war years as well as those closely following the war were completely lost for him in respect to research, if we set apart the popular pamphlet, *Five Centuries of Polish Learning*, which contains the text of the three lectures he delivered at Oxford in May 1941 in connection with the honorary degree he received there. The pamphlet ran through three editions, the last one published, of all places, in Bombay.

Once, however, Kot had settled as an émigré in 1947, he resumed his scholarly activity. He lived a rather nomadic life, partly in London and partly in Paris. Quite often he travelled in Western Europe and, whenever possible, carried on library and archival research. Once he visited the USA. For years he was toying with the idea of writing in English a general history of the Reform movement in Poland, but nothing came of it. He managed, however, to publish a series of papers. Some of them, thanks to his analytical skill and the wealth of new data, are among the best things he has ever written. Unfortunately, they are also the most inaccessible part of his scholarly production. They are scattered in special scholarly publications and written in several languages: English, French, German, Italian and, one, in Dutch. In 1955, he published in Polish two mostly documentary books which covered his ambassadorship to Moscow.

Kot's active life was ended at the beginning of 1964; he spent his last twelve years in a geriatric ward of the Edgware hospital, half paralyzed and only intermittently lucid.

Kot started as a historian of education. In 1910 there appeared his first major work, a monograph on elementary, parish schools in Little Poland from the 16th to the 18th century: *Szkolnictwo parafialne w Małopolsce XVI–XVII w.* Already in that early book one can recognize some basic features of his scholarly production: the documentation is solid, the author is never lost in the welter of details but can bring out and deftly analyze general trends, and the presentation is clear and vigorous. By choosing that particular topic the author wanted to answer a much wider question, namely, to what extent the political passivity of the masses of peasantry and of burghers in the gentry republic was due to the elementary curricula and, in general, to the low level of their schooling. The presentation is enlivened by colorful details taken from the popular satirical literature which flourished early in the 17th century and was written mostly by parish schools teachers, and called *literatura rybałtowska*.

Quite soon his major interests would shift to other domains of the history of culture, but he would never abandon the history of education completely, and published several papers in the field: on 16th-century Protestant schools, on the short-lived Zamość Academy, on Konarski's school reform in the 18th century, on the Commission of National Education, the last one being published on the occasion of the 100th and 50th anniversary of the founding of the Commission, in fact a special ministry responsible for education in Poland. He became especially interested in studies of 16th-century Polish students at foreign universities. In 1929 he published a substantial volume of the correspondence of a 16th-century pedagogical writer, Szymon Maricius from Pilzno.

The above mentioned *Historia wychowania* (History of Education, 1924, and the second, expanded edition in 1933) was the only venture by Kot into the expanses of universal history. Well structured, vigorous in presentation, it was *the* manual of the subject used in Polish pre-war universities and, in a shortened, popular version, in pedagogical institutes throughout the country. In the late fifties, Kot prepared a new, revised version of the book which, however, remained in manuscript.

In the Polish scholarly community, however, Kot secured his position as a first-rank historian, primarily thanks to his studies in a different field, namely his research on the eminent political theorist and theologian Andrzej Frycz Modrzewski (Modrevius, 1503–1572). The choice of that particular thinker is, again, significant. Frycz's religious stance, with time more and more radical, was close to what we would call today the theology of liberation. No other Polish Renaissance writer protested so powerfully and so consistently against the social iniquities of his times.

The monograph, published in 1911, *Wpływ starożytności klasycznej na teorie polityczne Andrzeja Frycza z Modrzewa* (The Influence of Classical Antiquity on the Political Theories of Andrzej Frycz from Modrzewo), offers the reader much more than its rather uninspiring title would suggest. Kot probes into the reasons why classical state models and classical political thinking had such paradigmatic value for Renaissance Poles, and tries to prove that it is not only the question of veneration of classical wisdom. The gentry society in Poland, where the economy was based on serfdom, easily identified itself with Greek and Roman models because their social system, based on slavery, seemed to justify the institution of serfdom. Furthermore, Kot analyses Frycz's indebtedness to classical thinkers, primarily to Aristotle, and shows how the Polish writer radically parts company with the Stagirite when it comes to his favorite idea that legal norms should disregard class distinctions.

It seemed that such a study would lead to a systematic analysis of Modrzewski's political ideas, as expressed, above all, in his treatise *De republica emendanda*, and, in fact, Kot's monograph contained a promise of such a study. The promise, however, was never fulfilled. Instead, in 1919, after the war year's hiatus, he published a biographical volume, *Andrzej Frycz Modrzewski*. Frycz's biography had been fairly well researched before Kot, and it cannot be said that he discovered important new biographical data. The main value of the book is to be found elsewhere: Kot displayed there his unrivalled knowledge of the period and its protagonists. Thus, he managed to present Frycz against a rich and colorful background. The author is obviously enamored of his hero, but that emotional coloring, although always palpable, is firmly kept in check. The drama of Frycz's life, the historical setting throbbing with life and the author's involvement make the book eminently readable. In 1923, there appeared its second edition.

After the last war, studies on Frycz got a new impetus in Poland. We owe to it a fine critical edition of Frycz's works both in the original Latin and in Polish translation as well as a spate of books and papers on Frycz's social doctrine. But Kot's book remains to the present day, after sixty years, the standard biography of the great religious and social heresiarch; together with the beautifully written book by Kazimierz Morawski on the Ciceronian scholar Andrzej Patrycy Nidecki, a study which is almost one hundred years old, it is the best biography in the field of the Polish Renaissance, a historical "classic."

In the same year in which Frycz's biography first appeared, Kot published another book, a study of the Polish Commonwealth as seen in the mirror of the political literature of the West from the 16th till

the end of the 18th century, *Rzeczpospolita polska w literaturze politycznej Zachodu*. It is a relatively short book, 250 pages, but it covers very rich material. In fact, one could reproach it for being too compact, for discussing particular political thinkers in too summary a fashion. It is obvious to the reader that the author was writing that book *aus der Fülle des Wissens* and in a hurry. It covers systematically Italian, French, and German, political writers, while English opinions are treated only marginally. Burke, for instance, is not even mentioned.

Like his books on parish schools and on Frycz, this one also has its roots in present-day concerns. The recovery of independence in 1918 revived the debate among historians on the thesis of the so-called Cracow historical school, according to which the Poles themselves are to be blamed for the loss of their independence because they were not able to create a viable, modern socio-political system. Kot decided to contribute to the discussion by looking at the problem from a new angle, by analyzing what the foreigners liked and what they disapproved of in the old Commonwealth, in other words, by seeing pre-partitioned Poland "under Western eyes." The results of his analysis were not always relevant for the current discussion (16th-century papal nuncios, for instance, were scandalized by the extent of Polish religious tolerance), but the book enables us to see in sharp focus the specific traits of old Poland, those that distinguished it from the rest of Europe.

We now have at our disposal a much more detailed presentation of some specific problems dealt with in Kot's book as, for instance, Leibniz's ideas on Poland (nb. Kot promised another, special study of that particular subject, but he did not keep his promise) or 18th-century French views, but as an overall rapid study of a vast body of opinions the book still has no competitor in Polish historical literature. Although some parts of it are antiquated today, it is still indispensable.

With time the religious Reform movement would occupy a more and more important part in Kot's bibliography, but he displayed vivid interest in it already at the very beginning of his scholarly activity. He was only twenty-five years old when he published an article in the Lvov pedagogical quarterly "Museum" overtly on the place which the Reform movement should occupy in school curricula but in which he also gave a general survey of research done in the field and listed vast areas neglected by scholarship. His book on Frycz, published nine years later, already shows him to be a scholar with an excellent orientation in the intricacies and vicissitudes of the movement.

Kot's mastery of the subject had its limitations. He was not interested in theological or philosophical problems. Because of it, his Collège de France lectures on Polish Antitrinitarianism, *Le mouvement antitrini-*

taire au XVI^e et XVII^e siècle (1937), a movement which was rich in original thinkers, are rather disappointing and somehow superficial. The Reform movement interested him primarily as a great cultural ferment which affected people's ways of thinking not only in theological matters and which forged links with fellow believers over national frontiers and thus became a potent stimulus of international exchanges: Polish Calvinists were in regular contacts with Geneva, while the Polish Antitrinitarian Church was to a large degree originated by Italian radical reformers who fled persecution in their native country and settled in the much more tolerant Polish Commonwealth where they could proselytize and publish their treatises.

Kot's biography of Frycz was the study of a man whose passionate opposition against social abuses was mightily stimulated by his understanding of the message of the Gospel. Kot's book *Ideologia polityczna i społeczna Braci Polskich, zwanych arianami* (Political and Social Ideology of the Polish Brethren, Called Arians, 1932) was another study on interrelation between social and religious radicalism. Some from among the Polish Antitrinitarians drew from the Gospel the conclusions that a true Christian cannot live from the toil of other people (which amounted to a condemnation of the institution of serfdom), cannot hold State offices or take part in military service. The book discusses the emergence in Poland of those radical views which originated there under the influence of the Anabaptist doctrine, early polemics, Polish criticism of Moravian Communists, the attitude at the turn of the century of the Italian Faustus Socinus, the leading theologian of the Antitrinitarians in Poland who tried hard to restrain the radical tendencies of his coreligionaries, the further decline of radical tendencies after Socinus, and, finally, changes in the social doctrine of that Church from radicalism to humanitarianism. In 1957, an updated text of the book appeared in Boston under the title *Socinianism in Poland*. It was translated into English by the well-known American historian of Unitarianism, E. M. Wilbur.

A prominent part of the book is occupied by the discussion of the views of Szymon Budny, as expressed in his book *O urzędzie miecza używającym* (On Office Employing the Sword), a classic in Polish reform literature which appeared in 1583 and was edited by Kot in the same year 1932. Kot was fascinated by Budny, an arch-radical in theology and a staunch conservative in social matters who probably never set foot outside Poland and published in provincial Lithuanian localities, but whose views nonetheless managed to scandalize most of Budny's coreligionaries in Poland. He drew down the thunders of Josias Simler in Zurich and created quite a stir among Oxford theologians by

an epistolary doctrinal treatise which he sent in 1574 from Łosk in Lithuania to John Foxe. In 1956, Kot devoted to him a masterly biographical study in German, *Szymon Budny, der grösste Häretiker Litauens im 16. Jahrhundert* which appeared in the second volume of "Wiener Archiv für Geschichte des Slawentums und Osteuropa."

Budny was considered a disgrace to the Reform movement by his contemporaries: his books were destroyed and only a part of his literary production has reached us (as a rule, in unique copies), and the traces of his life were effaced. That is why Kot's *Szymon Budny* which gives us an idea of the man and reconstructs the main lines of his life story is such a triumph of the historian's perseverance, perspicacity and a rare flair for new source material. The achievement was possible only for a scholar with Kot's phenomenal orientation in Western libraries and archives: he found Budny's letter to Foxe, which he had published previously in 1936, in the Bodleyan, some materials in Zurich and Wolfenbüttel, and he was able to establish the exact date of Budny's death thanks to a note in a book which he found in Copenhagen.

Another problem which interested Kot very much was that of the history of religious tolerance. In an important paper published in the first volume of "Reformacja w Polsce," in 1921, *U źródeł polskiej myśli krytycznej XVI wieku* (At the Sources of the 16th-century Polish Critical Thought), he traced the influence of two fighters for religious tolerance, the Italian Celio Secundo Curione and the Frenchman Sébastien Castellion, on Polish students who met them in Basel. Some twenty years later, in 1953, in a collective book *Autour de Michel Servet et de Sébastien Castellion* he discussed *l'Influence de Michel Servet sur le mouvement antitrinitarien en Pologne et en Transylvanie*. While doing research for that paper, Kot found in Stuttgart a manuscript copy of an unknown book by Servet which was in Polish hands in the 16th century and which he planned to publish.

At least two more papers on the Reform movement should be mentioned here. One of them is *Hugo Grotius a Polska* (Hugo Grotius and Poland), written for the third centenary of the book *De jure belli ac pacis* and published in 1926 in "Reformacja w Polsce." It discusses both Grotius' personal relations with Poles and the influence of this work on Polish political thinking. The other is the paper published in 1952, in the Festschrift for Henri Grégoire under the title *la Réforme dans le Grand-Duché de Lithuanie, facteur d'occidentalisation culturelle*. The subject had already been treated before Kot by Antoine Martel in his book *la Longue polonaise en les pays ruthènes* (1938), but his documentation was scanty in comparison with Kot's. The paper, in spite of its

length, some sixty pages, reads in fact like a compression of a book, unfortunately never written.

In 1960 Kot published as a separate short book a biographical study *Georges Niemirycz et la lutte contre l'intolérance au XVII^e siècle*, which appeared simultaneously in a Polish version as well. Niemirycz was an Antitrinitarian magnate and dignitary, today remembered primarily as the chief architect of the Polish-Ukrainian covenant at Hadziacz in 1659. The book was written in commemoration of the third centenary of that covenant. In discussing the 17th-century political history Kot was out of his depth, did not avoid simplifications, and the biography, in spite of the fact that it is based, like everything Kot wrote, on new archival material, and publishes in the annex interesting texts by Niemirycz, is a disappointment.

The periodical "Reformacja w Polsce" of which Kot managed to publish ten volumes before the war and which has in present-day Poland a continuation under the title "Odrodzenie i Reformacja w Polsce" (Renaissance and Reformation in Poland) bears the strong imprint of the personality of its editor, the more so since a majority of its articles are either compressed doctoral dissertations written under Kot's guidance or papers written by Kot's former pupils. The articles published there distinguish themselves by their solid documentation. Kot was quite exacting in this respect; on the other hand, he could be very generous in opening to his students the rich results of his own archival research. These articles are never long-winded. Kot knew how to write concisely and demanded concision from his contributors. The thematic range of papers printed there is quite large with biographical studies prevailing. A certain neglect of philosophical-theological problems and discussions of respective doctrines can be also noticed there.

Let us have a look at a typical volume, the double one VII-VIII for the years 1935-1936. The editor provides there one paper (on the influence of Polish Antitrinitarians in England, a subject to which later on, in 1951, H. J. McLachlan would devote his book *Socinianism in Seventeenth-Century England*), a short appendix to another paper, two batches of source material from libraries in England, Holland, and Romania (Transylvania), and seven reviews. Three papers were written by Kot's former pupils. One of them, a history of Antitrinitarian synods from 1569 till 1662, by Stanisław Szczotka, is a compressed doctoral dissertation. Another, *Ex regestro arianismi* by Marek Wajsbłum, is the first part of a larger whole, well researched and beautifully written, which deals with the legal persecution of Antitrinitarians once they were banned from Poland in 1658. The third paper, by Stanisław Bodniak, is

a biographical sketch of Grzegorz Orszak, the author of the first collection of Polish Protestant sermons. Another biographical paper deals with Daniel Naborowski, a Baroque poet who was a Calvinist. There is also a substantial paper discussing the part the Reformed gentry played in the armed revolt against King Sigismund III, known in Polish history as "Zbrzydowski's rebellion," and an obituary of Waclaw Sobieski, a Cracow professor of history.

Kot's activity as scholar, teacher, and editor, is a turning point in the history of the studies of the Polish Reform movement. Probably no other aspect of the history of the old Polish Commonwealth interested non-Polish historians so much as that one. After all, 16th-century Poland was the one and only European country in which confessional dissent did not lead to armed clashes and to open persecution of religious minorities. Thus religious polemical literature was very rich, and late in the century Poland became the hotbed of radical doctrines and the refuge of foreign radical thinkers. No wonder then that the field attracted the attention of foreign scholars, mostly German (like Dalton, Wotschke, Völker) and Russian (Lyubovich, Kareev) and was dominated by them up to the First World War. Wotschke, for instance, was a productive historian, although parochial in outlook, of the Polish Reform movement who disregarded Polish scholarship and, most probably, never mastered the language. Thanks to Kot and the group of scholars he educated this became no longer possible, and more recent studies, like *Eretici italiani del Cinquecento* by Delio Cantimoro, the first volume of *A history of Unitarianism* by E. M. Wilbur, or *The Radical Reformation* by G. H. Williams, to name only the most important scholarly works, are, in the parts dealing with the development in Poland, based to a large extent on Polish research.

Another field to which Kot devoted a lot of attention was that of the cultural contacts of Poles with Western scholarly centers, especially studies of Polish students in Western universities and the relations between Polish scholars and their Western colleagues. In December of 1925, after having returned from a long stay in Italy where he did research in the archives and libraries of sixteen Italian cities from Venice to Naples, he presented in the Polish Academy a plan for a vast publication of sources of the history of the cultural relations of Poland with the West in the 16th and at the beginning of the following century, "Źródła do dziejów życia umysłowego Polski w dobie humanizmu. Stosunki kulturalne z Zachodem." The collection would contain, he announced, in addition to the Italian material, sources from French, Belgian, Dutch, Swiss, and German, archives which he had managed to collect during earlier trips, and it would be concluded by a special

volume listing Poles who studied abroad in the 16th and the first half of the 17th century. "Cette liste ou index—we read in the "Bulletin International" of the Academy—serait en quelque sort un 'armorial' contenant les titres de noblesse intellectuelle de la Pologne du XVI^e et de la première partie du XVII^e siècle."¹

These grandiose plans never materialized, and Kot utilized only a fraction of his materials in special papers dealing with the part which such cultural centers as Bologna, Basel, Orléans, and Strasbourg played in the culture of Renaissance Poland. Another paper, published in Italian in 1947, discussed Polish impressions of Venice throughout the centuries. A rapid survey of Swiss-Polish cultural relations in the 16th century is to be found in the collective volume *Pologne—Suisse*, published by Polish historians in 1938, on the occasion of the International Historical Congress at Zurich.

In the collective volume *Kultura staropolska* (Old-Polish Culture, 1932) Kot published a long paper *Polska Złotego Wieku wobec kultury Zachodu* (Poland's Golden Age vs. Western Culture), one of most important items in his bibliography. On some sixty odd pages he managed to compress a wealth of information with which another writer could easily fill a book. The paper not only shows how Western culture affected different aspects of Polish life from religious ideas to fashions in dress, but also traces changing Polish attitudes towards the West. Especially interesting is its final part which discusses the growing disenchantment with the West by the end of the century and, in connection with it, a new emphasis on specific, native features, an emphasis sometimes turning into xenophobia. Thus, Renaissance Poland was giving way to Baroque Sarmatism.

A fairly large body, mostly from manuscripts, of old stereotyped formulas concerning foreigners, was collected in two related papers. The first part, *Old International Insults and Praises: 1. The Medieval Period*, appeared in "Harvard Slavjic Studies" (five years later, a German scholar Hans Walther, not knowing Kot's paper, published a parallel body of texts in the "Archiv für Kulturgeschichte"). A sequel to *Old International Insults* was published the following year in the "Oxford Slavonic Papers" under the title *Nationum proprietates*.

In 1927, Kot published together with his Cracow colleague and literary historian Ignacy Chrzanowski a large collection of source material, mostly in Latin, *Humanizm i reformacja w Polsce*. Out of the thirteen chapters into which the book is divided Kot edited nine. Since *Humanizm i reformacja* was planned as a book which students were to

¹ "Bulletin International de l'Académie des Sciences de Cracovie. Classe de Philologie. Classe d'Histoire et de Philosophie", (PAU), 1925, p. 181.

learn how to cope with source material, the texts were printed there without any explanatory notes and with only basic bibliography. But the editors tried hard to get correct texts; most of them are better than in previous editions, and some are not available elsewhere in modern reprints.

Occasionally Kot delved directly into literary history, the subject of his Lvov university studies. The largest in scope among them is the anthology of twenty-five poetic texts from the 16th and 17th century, several of them printed for the first time from manuscripts. Preceded by an introductory essay, it was published in 1937 under the title *Urok wsi i życia ziemiańskiego w poezji staropolskiej* (The Charm of the Country and of Gentry Life in Old-Polish Poetry). As poetry these poems are uneven, of which fact Kot was well aware, but they constitute an important testimony, for they bring the reader into touch with the gentry ethos and their life ideals.

In the Festschrift for Aleksander Brückner, *Studia staropolskie* (Old-Polish Studies, 1928) Kot published a paper, *Jana Kochanowskiego podróże i studia zagraniczne* (Foreign Travels and Studies of Jan Kochanowski) which threw new light on the Wanderjahre of the great Renaissance poet. First of all, Kot definitely proved (what had been surmised earlier by Wotschke but was not accepted by Polish scholarship) that Kochanowski who in his poetry regularly attacked the Reform movement himself belonged in his youth to that movement: he stayed twice in Königsberg and was supported financially by Prince Albert. Secondly, Kot managed to identify the mysterious Carolus, the addressee of one of the poet's Latin elegies and his cicerone in France: it was a young Flemish humanist, Utenhofe.

Kot's most important literary study was the one on Skarga's *Kazania sejmowe* (Parliamentary Sermons, 1597), the high point of Polish pulpit oratory. Already in 1913 he had published under the pseudonym of Konstanty Stankowski a lively article, *Pokłosie skargowskie* (Gleanings of Skarga's Anniversary), in which he discussed the publications connected with the 3rd centenary of the death of Skarga, which occurred in 1612, and took issue with those writers for whom the cult of the great preacher had gotten the better of critical discernment. In 1925 he published his edition of *Kazania sejmowe* and his lengthy introductory essay to that edition threw new light on Skarga's work. Already in 1916, Adam Berga, the author of a French book on Skarga, argued that *Kazania sejmowe* contrary to what people had thought until then, were never delivered at a diet. Kot definitely proved that point and discussed *Kazania sejmowe* as a political pamphlet advocating the idea of strong royal power and written under the guise of pulpit oratory.

Kot's findings provoked heated polemics from which he emerged victorious. More recent research (Tazbir's) would somehow tone down Kot's thesis on the political character of the *Kazania sejmowe*, but basically agrees with it. Kot was also the first who tried to investigate, although in a rudimentary fashion only, the rhetorical pattern of Skarga's prose, later on systematically analyzed by Mirosław Korolko.

Kot published the *Kazania sejmowe* in the series "Biblioteka Narodowa" (National Library) in which he had already published earlier, in 1919, an 18th-century political comedy by J. U. Niemcewicz, *Powrót posła* (Deputy's Return). As I have mentioned, the whole series was Kot's idea, and he was its editor until 1939. From among several cultural initiatives undertaken by him, that one was the most impressive and by far the most successful.

The idea of the series was ambitious. Kot wanted to give the reading public a large body of literary texts that would be well edited, well commented, provided with introductory essays written by good specialists, and inexpensive. He thought that texts used in school curricula and printed in mass editions should pay for other works which could count on only a limited public. At first, the formula worked admirably, and, at the end of its first decade, "Biblioteka Narodowa" could boast of almost two hundred volumes. Then, the economic depression that hit the country around 1930 undercut the existence of the publishing house, Krakowska Spółka Wydawnicza, created primarily for the sake of the series. By that time, however, "Biblioteka Narodowa" had already become a national institution. For every Pole who went to school between 1919 and 1939 the process of immersion into national literature was forever linked in memory with the sight of its white covers, and the publication of some of them were scholarly events. Mickiewicz's *Pan Tadeusz* edited for the first time (in that series) in 1925 by Stanisław Pigoń is to this day the best-commented text in Polish literature. Thus, "Biblioteka Narodowa" was saved and taken over by another publishing house, Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, under whose imprint, resumed after the war under the editorship of Jan Hulewicz, it appears until today. In the thirties, however, the publication tempo slackened considerably and only a few volumes appeared in that decade.

Kot was an active and demanding editor of the series. He did not limit himself to choosing the scholars to whom he confided single volumes but often discussed with them specific problems and took special care to ensure good, reliable texts. And yet the name of the editor was never printed there. Similarly, on the title page of the above mentioned *Studia staropolskie* in honor of Brückner one could read that the book was published by "a committee," and only those with inside knowledge knew

who did the editorial chores. That was characteristic of Kot's style of activity, and that is why it is not easily traceable today. I was close enough to him in 1930-1931 to realize how much effort he put into preparing for publication Brückner's *magnum opus*, the three volumes of his *Dzieje kultury polskiej* (History of Polish Culture). Brückner was a scholar of stupendous erudition and deep insights but temperamentally incapable of doing anything in a systematic, orderly way. His books and papers are full, on the one hand, of short cuts; on the other, of unexpected asides. In a work of synthesis like *Dzieje kultury* a certain modicum of order was *de rigueur* in order to make it accessible to the general public, and if the book is less disorderly than most of Brückner's texts it is thanks to Kot's interventions. Brückner was a touchy man, and Kot occasionally had to go to Berlin, where he lived, in order to discuss the text with him and to persuade him to make changes. And yet Kot's contribution is not acknowledged there (as it was acknowledged on the title page of the fourth volume, published posthumously in 1946).

In 1939, there appeared in Warsaw another major work by Brückner, his two-volume *Encyklopedia staropolska* (Old-Polish Encyclopedia). This time, a petit note at the end of the book, which also appeared posthumously, informs the reader that "the text was prepared for publication by Professor Stanisław Kot." From a later testimony, that of the director of the publishing house which launched the book, one can form an idea of how much effort Kot put into his work: he tried hard to make singular entries more shapely, checked the details, consulted other specialists. Brückner who always worked feverishly wrote his text—some two thousand quarto pages—during one year; the editorial work lasted three years.²

Kot was an excellent teacher, exacting but patient, with a keen interest in his students and a good insight into their potentialities and shortcomings. His professorship was of a short duration, thirteen years only, but he managed to form a number of scholars, like Henryk Barycz (who heads the list of his pupils not only owing to the alphabetical order), Father Stanisław Bednarski, Stanisław Bodniak, Jan Hulewicz, Alodia Kawecka-Gryczowa, Stanisław Szczotka, Marek Wajsblum, Ignacy Zarebski, Jerzy Zathej. His seminar attracted also ambitious students whose main interests were elsewhere, like Maria Czapska, Józef Feldman, Bohdan Suchodolski.

When thinking of his scholarly achievements as a whole one cannot avoid a certain feeling of frustration. He obtained his degree in 1909,

² See: Stanisław Lam, *Zycie wśród wielu*, Warszawa, 1968, p. 357.

and in the first decade of his independent life, from which one has to deduct the four war years, lost for scholarship, he managed to publish three substantial books in three different fields of the history of Polish culture. He was superbly endowed and seemed to be magnificently creative. But after 1919 his scholarly activity lost its initial impetus and he never regained the wonderful productivity of that first decade. So many of his plans remained unfulfilled. In spite of all that, what he left behind secures him, thanks to the breadth of his knowledge and novelty of his approaches, an important place in the annals of Polish historiography. And as a promotor of cultural activities he had few equals among 20th-century Polish humanists.