

# Tadeusz Bieńkowski

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[recenzja]

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scolaire, ce sera un programme éducatif défini et la propagande religieuse, dans le cas de la scène foraine, une association spécifique des visées pieuses et ludiques.

Rés. par l'auteur  
Trad. par *Lucjan Grobelak*

**Tadeusz Bienkowski, Antyk w literaturze i kulturze staropolskiej (1450–1750). Główne problemy i kierunki recepcji (Antiquity in Polish Literature and Culture 1450–1750. The Main Problems and Trends of Reception), Ossolineum, Wrocław 1976.**

The book is a kind of a recapitulation and generalization of studies made on the problem so far, including also those of the author. The great factual material has been divided into several sections with the intention of arranging it according to the main tendencies in the reception of Antiquity. In showing the different levels of interest in classical literature in the discussed period and, at the same time, the different roles and functions—not always creative and progressive—the book does not follow the accepted pattern usually observed by researchers concerned with the influence of Antiquity. Thus, this influence is traced not only within literature but within other fields of intellectual life as well: at school, in science or art. The study is not confined to recording certain borrowings from the Antiquity but deals also with their function, ideological role and interpretation. The author avoided the *a priori* treatment, so often practised by other researchers, of the influence of Greek and Latin literature as an unquestionably beneficent and creative process. Keeping to the Antique traditions had more than once proved to be a hindrance in the development of a given branch of creative work.

The book, divided into two main parts, covers two separate epochs: the Renaissance and the Baroque. In each of these epochs the author has tried to detect the predominant characteristics of the reception of Antiquity and to interpret them in the intellectual and ideological context of the times.

In the 16th century in Poland it was mainly the original texts of ancient writers that spread the knowledge of Greek and Roman civilization. The texts were read in both Polish and foreign editions, and in many cases they were the subject of lectures at the university of Cracow. The most popular and widely read authors were Virgil, Ovid and Horace, the prose writers: Cicero, Aristotle and Pliny, and Roman historians, such as Livius, Sallustius and Florus. The knowledge of ancient culture and history acquired through reading those and many other authors and works provided the ground for the proper reception of classical literature, or, in other words, for Polish works which in various ways made use of ancient themes or formal elements. It should be emphasized, however, that although the 16th-century knowledge of Antiquity was based on texts and not on compendia, encyclopaedias and textbooks, i. e. on secondary sources, the texts themselves were read with appropriate introductions and long commentaries which impressed certain interpretations on them and, what is more important, assigned to them a definite artistic and ideological role.

In the 16th century Antiquity was studied in Poland particularly for utilitarian and pragmatic purposes, cognitive reasons being more in the background. Ancient writers' writing and composition techniques could be used in the works of Polish authors, their experiences and views could be applied in the ideological, political, social and artistic reality of the 16th century. The basic principle of interpreting and adapting classical contents was the principle which had already been formulated in the early Middle Ages by the Fathers of the Church, Saint Basil and Saint Augustine: from pagan antiquity Christians could take only the writing and rhetoric technique and those opinions which were not contradictory to Christian beliefs and ethics. The adopted ancient views were to uphold the Christian doctrine. This principle of the reception of classical literature, characteristic of the so-called Christian humanism and propagated by Erasmus and Vives as well as by many other outstanding Renaissance thinkers, was also fully observed in Poland.

According to this principle many ancient philosophical statements were interpreted as being in agreement and concurrence with Christian ethics. The mythology, which provided themes for so many Antique poetic works, was read allegorically as collections of edifying stories,

made up by ancient poets. Works which included vivid erotic scenes or propagated ancient materialism (e.g. Lucretius' poem), considered to be inappropriate for young people, were not to be found in school curricula, and atheistic views as expressed by the Epicureans and Lucretius were the subject of polemics.

The second principle also determining, to a great extent, the direction and force of the reception of the ancient heritage in 16th-century Poland was the adaptation of Roman formulas and juridical and political notions to the native forms of government and administration. The Polish political system at the time, with the King, the Senate and the Sejm, was believed to be similar to the Roman republican system, acknowledged as the best.

Polish Renaissance writing in its various forms was entirely open to classical themes. References to Antiquity are therefore frequent and of various kinds; it is referred to as a philosophical and scientific authority, also ancient achievements in the sphere of state-governing and education are often cited. Ancient literature and history provided a multitude of themes and motifs, ready patterns of poetry and oratory. Knowledge of Antiquity was acquired not only through school; classical literature was widely read, and the most popular were Virgil, Ovid, Plautus and Terentius and the Roman historians.

The clash between the Counter-Reformation and the Reformation, which in Poland took place at the end of the 16th century and the beginning of the 17th century, and the victory of the Counter-Reformation brought about great changes in Polish culture and, to the same extent, in the direction and mode of the reception of Antiquity. The range of reception and interpretation of ancient themes during the Counter-Reformation period is dealt with in the second part of the book. At that time the popularity of ancient themes in literature started to diminish, for much greater interest was taken in religious topics as well as in problems concerning contemporary life, where the achievements in certain fields (science, the organization of the state and society) rivalled effectively those of the ancients. During the Baroque Antiquity begins to lose its authority as "an argument and point of reference," which in Poland is manifested in the preference for religious topics on one hand and in emphasizing Polish historical traditions, considered to be the highest argu-

ment and authority, on the other, the preference for native heroes and history being connected with the Sarmatian ideology with its cult for the Polish past.

In that epoch the main source of knowledge of Antiquity were textbooks, compendia, encyclopaedias, anthologies of selected passages from classical works. Generally, original texts were not used at school. The domination of Antiquity was still apparent in rhetoric and poetry, full of ancient phraseology and still using the general rules of construction and composition established by the ancients.

The still prevalent tendency towards certain classical texts was the emphasizing of those moral and educational values which were in accordance with Christian ethics. But the literature and culture of the ancient world slowly ceased to be treated as a source providing both personal and intellectual models and those of public life.

Sum. by the author

Transl. by *Aniela Korzeniowska*

**Barbara Otwinowska, *Język — naród — kultura. Antecedencje i motywy renesansowej myśli o języku (Language—Nation—Culture. Antecedents and Motives of Renaissance Thought on Language)*, Ossolineum, Wrocław 1974.**

The book is a historical outline of the language consciousness, in the wide sense of the term, studied against the background of the history of the Mediterranean culture and over many centuries, starting from Homer's Greece and ending with the 16th century. The organizing criterion of the intellectual currents revealed in the work is a body of notions and ideas which during the Renaissance period lay behind the emancipation of vernacular languages, and especially that of the Polish language. It is an attempt at presenting the so-called "battle for the Polish language," hitherto treated in a detailed and synchronic manner, as a historical phenomenon not only in the social and national sense but also in the sphere of formulated ideas, theories, myths, arguments and opinions which were inherent in the mentality of the times. The author traces