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"Renesans", Jerzy Ziomek, Warszawa 1976 : [recenzja]

Literary Studies in Poland 3, 111-113

1979

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Book Reviews

Comptes rendus de livres

Jerzy Ziomek, **Renesans (Renaissance)**, PWN, Warszawa 1976.

Ziomek's *Renesans*, first published in 1973, is a fresh attempt (the previous one can be found in Krzyżanowski's *Historia literatury polskiej – History of Polish Literature*, 1939) at a synthesis of the epoch and it is meant to be a guide for university students of literature. By a "guide" the author understands a book "designed for reading and helpful in studying the literature of the epoch." Ziomek's aim is not to replace the university lecture but to relieve lecturers of presenting many detailed facts and interpretations, and thus to enable them to concentrate on problems chosen by them. At the same time, to avoid presenting the subject in the form of "a dry record" the author introduces the mode of discourse. In consequence, the book grew to 447 pages of the main text, and together with the index and bibliography (up to 1975) to 554 pages.

One of the basic problems faced by the author of the synthesis was the necessity of making a choice among the material concerning the epoch. A particularly difficult task was to separate literature proper from writing of a non-literary character, "since at the time two tendencies are developing: the fictionalizing of 'applied' form of writing is accompanied by the utilizing of artistic forms." Ziomek has left out specialistic works (on astronomy, mathematics, medicine, natural science and economics) but he discusses "the history of social, political and religious writing and the most outstanding works in this field." He also includes in his discussion neo-Latin pieces (written both by Poles and by foreigners living in Poland) as well as Polish reprints and theatrical productions of works of foreign origin.

Of the works belonging to the beginning and close of the epoch only those are discussed in which there appear the features of the Renaissance style. For the Renaissance is for Jerzy Ziomek the epoch in the history of culture which created "a style – in thinking, in private and social life, and in art" rather than an ideology.

According to Ziomek, two facts mark the beginning and the end of the epoch: Kallimach's arrival in Poland (winter 1469/70) and the death of Szymon Szymonowic (1629). At the end of his work the author proposes the further division of this epoch into four periods: Pre-Renaissance, stretching from the second half of the 15th century to the end of the 1520's; period II, ending in the 1540's; period III, closing with the death of Kochanowski and period IV—till the death of Szymonowic. He bases this division "primarily on historioliterary facts, searching then for their correlation with the social and political history."

As far as the principles of the make-up of the book are concerned, Ziomek decided on „such a chronological arrangement which would be closest to the course of the historioliterary process." The successive chapters and subchapters are devoted to the problems dominating in particular phases of the period and entitled after them. These predominant problems are: language, genre, subject, style, poetics, an institution or an outstanding creative individuality, depending on the phase. Thus, in the title of the chapter the reader finds the answer to the question "which of those elements was the decisive or primary factor of the given phase of the evolution of literature." Where the criteria of the division interfere with one another the author—generally, though not always—turns to the figure of a writer, using the system of references to those parts of his book in which the reader will find the necessary information concerning the remaining problems.

The two introductory chapters contain "elementary information on the Renaissance period in Europe and in Poland, on the development of printing and education, on the role of language." The exposition proper, starting from the third chapter, covers: early humanistic literature, irregular drama, narrative art, individual writers and their works (A. Frycz Modrzewski, M. Rej, J. Kochanowski, M. Sep Szarzyński, the contemporaries and followers of Kochanowski), prose

in the second half of the 16th century, and—finally—literature at the close of the 16th century.

While stressing the national and, at the same time, universal character of Polish renaissance culture, Ziomek treats it as one of the links in the process of the development of the Mediterranean culture. The author warns us against opposing overhastily the renaissance culture and literature to the culture and literature of the Middle Ages, pointing out that the Renaissance was inspired both by the Antiquity and by the Middle Ages, the former inspiration being a result of the conscious choice, the latter being drawn spontaneously, as it were.

It is not only the weakening of the opposition of the Renaissance and the Middle Ages, or a different arrangement of the material, which makes Ziomek's book a novelty. The author took into consideration the results of studies on, among others, problems of versification, renaissance drama, literary consciousness. The interpretation of the collected material is also clearly influenced by the theory of communication.

Sum. by *Katarzyna Mroczek*
Transl. by *Aniela Korzeniowska*

Czesław Hernas, **Barok (Baroque)**, PWN, Warszawa 1976.

In 1976 PWN published the second and enlarged edition of Czesław Hernas' academic guide *Barok*, first published in 1973. It is a fresh attempt, after 34 years that elapsed from the first edition of Julian Krzyżanowski's *Historia literatury polskiej (History of Polish Literature)*, at discussing the epoch, an attempt that shows not only the progress in the field of detailed research but also a different view on the role of a guide to the history of literature. The authors of the hitherto written works aimed at the reader's acquiring the knowledge of historioliterary facts; Hernas assumes "that the task of the history of literature is not only to teach facts but, first of all, to accompany the reader" and "to bring the texts closer" to him, helping him to evaluate them properly. Accordingly, the author of the guide made use only of those works which were significant for the processes of the epoch.