

# Barbara Otwinowska

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[recenzja]

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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

their coming into being and development back to the past that is very remote from the Polish 16th-century reality, and in different branches of knowledge and intellectual culture: in philosophy, linguistics, historiography, religion, literature, in various types of definitions of man and society. The result of these observations is both the showing of the "precedents" and "antecedents" of the great linguistic discussion in the 16th century, its ideological and scientific bases, and the attempt at outlining the Renaissance "theory of a native language," this theory being, to a great extent, a supra-national one because it was based on the same motives of the historical view on language and formed in analogical cultural situations. This diachronic and comparative tendency of the book is not inconsistent with its ambition to accentuate simultaneously those ideological and cultural characteristics which were peculiar to the Polish Renaissance.

The work consists of the following sections: 1) Greek and Latin Civilization, 2) The Bible and Patristics, 3) The Middle Ages, 4) The Renaissance. The first section presents the problems of genesis and principle (*arche*) of speech, the grammatical dispute between analogists and anomalists (i.e. the dispute on the subject of analogy and anomaly in language), the beginnings of semiological thinking (Aristotle—the Stoics—St. Augustine) and chiefly Roman views on the literary language, its criteria and functions in the culture of the state.

The second section deals with the Christian theory of the language, which has mainly a historical and axiological aspect. The problems considered in this part are the following: the "fall" and "redemption" of languages (the myth of the Tower of Babel and the exegesis of the Descent of the Holy Ghost), the patristic dilemma of the pagan, though beautiful, language of rhetoric and the holy simplicity of the Biblical language, or the dilemma of secular culture and religion, and finally the problem of the multiplicity of nations and languages.

The discussion of the last-mentioned problem is continued in the third section of the book. Apart from the history and theology of "the multiplicity of languages," the Middle Ages developed also a specific language hierarchy. At the very top of it were placed three "holy, or main, languages": Greek, Hebrew and Latin; its further legitimate units being those languages which belonged to

the magical circle of 72 languages of the world, and to which other, not mentioned among them, "dialects," having no existence of their own that would be acknowledged by official science, were supposed to be subordinated. Beside this division there also was a, somewhat closer to reality, dichotomic division into Latin and the vernacular languages (*vulgares*), this division, however, understood not as a phenomenon of ethnic bilingualism but rather as a division of functions in the locally diversified, and yet universal, culture of the epoch. At the time it was a division into the literary language (in its broad sense of the language of science, religion, the written word) and the vernacular: tribal, spoken. An important element of the historical thinking in the Middle Ages was the modernist theory of the so-called *translatio studii*, giving certain countries and peoples the right to play out the next leading role in the world's culture.

In the chapter concerned with Polish historical thinking the author analyzes how the notion of "Poland" crystallized among the synonymous ethnic and political notions used in the medieval chronicles, especially taking into account if, and to what extent, language criteria took part in those definitions and myths which contributed to the forming of the national consciousness of Poles.

The most developed section is the fourth one—the Renaissance. It shows the language cults of the epoch and how the humanistic philologism, being a philosophy of life and a science at the same time, led, through the revision of medieval Latin, in two directions: to well-founded misgivings of the debasement of what was felt to be *sacramentum linguae Latinae*, and to emancipation and the defence of vernacular languages. At the same time, the glorification of the three "holy" languages still persisted and was continuously grammatically and religiously justified, and despite new geographical knowledge, the table of 72 languages of the world and the memories of the tribal-linguistic unities, which had long been broken up, were still lingering. To the new dilemma: the humanistic language—the language of Scholasticism (this refers to Latin) it is necessary to add the old dilemma, taken from the works of the Fathers of the Church, of the simple and the sophisticated language, this one gaining new application in the accusations of neo-paganism, in religious discussions and particularly in Reformation writings which were in the vernacular and addressed to the people.

In connection with the medieval historiographical conceptions a large part of this section is occupied by a detailed analysis of the problem of the ethnogenesis of the Slavs, of the Slavonic and Sarmatian consciousness of the Poles. The "Sarmatianism" of Renaissance chronicles is one of the mytho-scientific conceptions which were brought into being as a manifestation of growing national ambition and in search of the ethnical genesis of the Poles, transmitted by the ancient sources. This theory, however, is neither a dominating one in the 16th century nor does it go beyond the style of historical thinking. It will not become a social ideology until the next century. In those parts (usually introductory ones) of Polish chronicles which deal with this problem, the range of functions of the language as a criterion of national identity is greatly widened. However, the identification of "language" and "nation" is not always complete. An equally important criterion is sometimes the "cradle" of the people, the language being then associated more with place than with a definite ethnic group. Furthermore, there is also at the time a specific theory of the evolution of languages, either considered together with their ethnic substratum or making the language a quality almost independent of ethnic contexts and having its own laws of development. Here the medieval hierarchy changes into a chronology: the main languages become the ancestors of all the other languages of the world, and to each nation it remains only to find its own way back to them, motivated by freely treated erudition and freely named stages. The majority of nations believed the Greek tongue to be the most honourable source of their languages. Also in the Polish Renaissance historiography the "Greek" and "Trojan" conceptions are important hypotheses, motivating not only the age-old past and grandeur of the Polish nation but also its right to the "Renaissance" in the sphere of national culture. For, in this view, this culture was not being built from its foundation for the first time but, inherent in the nation's history, language and spirit, it was being "rebuilt" anew.

The processes of language changes were also examined in the spirit of cyclic changes. The passing of the language into another was qualified either as a process of debasement, of degradation, or as its improvement. The first motif was more frequent. After all, mankind's "initial" language was the language of Paradise, given by

God—a “natural” language, i.e. reflecting the nature of things; but even if the basis of the universal genealogy of language was not sought so far back, still there were the three “main” languages to be considered as this basis. For Poles, however, the nearest point of reference was the “Slavonic” language. The frequent identification of the two terms: “Polish language” and “Slavonic language,” does not, by any means, testify to any ideological bonds of the Slavonic nations at the time. It is a manifestation of a historical way of thinking, of projecting the past into the present in order to stress, in international science, operating with broad notions, the high standing of the Polish nation and language by means of the notion having both a longer written history and a wider geographical range. At the same time the notion of a “language family” is formed and the genealogical reasoning even creates premises for the much later notion of the “proto-Indo-European language.” The above-mentioned identification is a kind of metonymy—Poland is treated either as a “part of the whole” (as in Gallus) or as a heiress and the best representative of Slavonic nations, or, with growing pride, as their “queen.” Similarly, the Polish tongue is treated as “the daughter of the Slavonic tongue.” It can refer to a common past and base on it its arguments in favour of its antiquity or connections with ancient culture, its bravery and chances for development (*virtus*). These last-mentioned, however, depend just as much on the organic possibilities of the language and national culture as on the energy and good will of its speakers and propagators.

The notion of the literary language appears in the statements and appeals of contemporaries as the object of love and ambition for it is—says the author—just as much a creation of the favourable Nature and the history of the nation as a “work of art” of its individual creators and artists—writers and translators. It comes into being in a great cultural and creative spurt whose causes, hopes and motives flourish in the atmosphere of Renaissance enthusiasm, of faith in the aims and effects of the work undertaken, in the atmosphere of fervent pathos and the strong conviction of the importance of certain individuals’ contribution as well as of the continuity and durability of the work undertaken by them and passing from hand to hand. [...] But beside the language-as-writing theory the theory of the language-as-dialogue is formed, the latter language understood either as a social bond, in the wide sense, or as the language of scientific discussion, of common arriving at the truth through verbal expression of thought, or finally as a language of the courtly conversation, the language of the cultural élite who creates its spoken norm (pp. 274–5).

The vernacular as a Reformation instrument of religious strife and the achievements gained in this way is a quite familiar problem. The author, however, connects the motives and arguments—with their often unknown sources—coming from both sides, and classifies them according to the conceptions brought to light in the previous chapters, sometimes pointing out also their modifications of meaning in comparison with the old way of thinking. It turns out, for example, that in the course of the feverish discussions, the Tower of Babel argument loses its moral implications, whereas the theory of the three “holy” languages gains a new meaning in consequence of the development of the classical languages and Renaissance Bible study. While examining disputes concerning the language of the Bible and liturgy, the author takes into consideration the arguments of both sides, i.e. those of the Reformation as well as those of Catholicism.

The book shows then various spheres which have become the frame for specific conceptions concerning the problems of language, or, to be more precise: the general theory of speech, the theory and the pragmatic situation of literary language in its both Latin and native (Polish) form, the function and range of Latin on one hand and the vernacular on the other, in the Church, in social life and in science and literature. These subjects are connected, depending on the context, with many other problems, which compelled the author to enter into the autonomous problems of other disciplines and to provide the research with modern methodological tools of the history of culture, mythographical and thematic criticism, the history of ideas, philosophy and science.

Covering so much time and space has made certain rigorous cuts necessary. These include whole disciplines having their own, usually well-known, history or being autonomous problems which are too wide to be treated as one of the elements subordinated to the relation suggested by the title. These disciplines are: rhetoric, dialectic, grammar (especially ancient and medieval), philology, lexicography. Without taking into consideration the internal problems of these branches of learning, whose common subject is language (*scientiae sermocinales*), the author refers to them only inasmuch as is necessary to show certain general “attitudes” towards the twofold relation: language—nation and language—culture, and to connect them in certain homogeneous trains of thought which in the

16th century contributed to the Renaissance mentality of scholars, ideologists and propagators of the native language and national humanistic culture. In effect, the so-called "battle for the Polish language" gained a multifold background in its diachronic plane and a comparative frame in its synchronic one.

Otwinowska's study, taking into account ancient and Christian intellectual traditions and revealing certain, common to the whole Renaissance culture, assumptions and ways of thinking on language, may serve as a starting point for examining analogical processes in other European countries. The forms of historical, religious and magic, as well as philosophical, thinking, methods of both humanists and advocates of the Reformation, and even the emotional rhetoric of defenders of the vernacular, were similar and common for northern countries and Italy, for the Slavonic as well as Germanic or Romanic countries. Even specific differences can be explained within those same categories of thinking. B. Otwinowska's book is an attempt at going beyond the hermetic treatment of nation and language, characteristic of analogical monographs written so far, and establishes, despite the understandable stress on things Polish, a common basis for similar studies in other languages.

Sum. by the author

Transl. by *Aniela Korzeniowska*

**Tadeusz Ulewicz, *Wśród impresorów krakowskich doby Renesansu (Études sur les imprimeurs cracoviens de la Renaissance)*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Kraków 1977.**

L'ouvrage se compose de six études analytiques et comparatives, classées d'une manière cyclique et se complétant l'une l'autre. Il est le résultat de vingt ans de travail persévérant et porte sur un choix de problèmes historiques et culturels qui relèvent de l'histoire des imprimeries et de l'art typographique cracovien à l'époque de la Renaissance. Ces études ont déjà paru pour la plupart dans des publications spécialisées en Pologne ou à l'étranger, elles ont cependant été augmentées avant d'être réunies dans ce volume; étroitement liées les unes aux autres et conduites jusqu'à l'état actuel de la