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## Problems in Editing Renaissance Texts

### 1.

The study of Renaissance encompasses various fields of intellectual activity from history of ideas to historical linguistics and literary comparative studies. The remarks proposed in this paper are to a great extent technical in nature and concern the issue of editing Renaissance texts and making them accessible to scholars and readers in a form that is both up-to-date and respectful of the historical character of texts discussed. I believe it is worthwhile to discuss the situation of the editor dealing with Polish Renaissance writings as it is the editorial decisions that determine the success or failure of research focused on other aspects of the text. The above statement appears to be particularly important in reference to the period so deeply influenced by its passion for philology: the Renaissance humanism was inspired by a strong kinship to ancient culture experienced through texts.

Some oversimplifications as well as absence of documentary justification for the proposed generalisations are caused by a necessity to comply with article requirements. Still, the subject deserves attention and may reward for risk incurred as the issue is absolutely crucial for the study of Polish Renaissance.

At the beginning, let me pronounce my *Credo*: I believe in the necessity of scholarly editorial work, even if its price is being secluded in a ghetto for die-hard philologists, all sorts of incorrigible traditionalists devoted to an uphill job, labouring in real – not virtual – libraries (how many scholars do still visit them anyway?). In view of the advancements that are continuing to change our discipline, the adherents of this ingenuous belief take some pride in the fact that a strenuously prepared edition of a text is a more durable and worthy contribution than a flash-in-the-pan essay, interpretation or monograph. As one of the participants of this conference said, bibliography is like the heavy industry of literature studies; in the same vein it could be said that a suitable metaphor of editing is a jewellery workshop, where precious stones are given appearance that pleases an eye.

## 2.

To begin with, I have to make some remarks on the current situation of a reader seeking a contemporary critical (which means meticulously elaborated) editions of Renaissance texts. Their shortage combined with poor availability is almost proverbial and may account for widespread complaining on occasions similar to ours and present in general discussions of literary study.<sup>1</sup> Admittedly, the problem is acute indeed as the unexplored areas include the heritage of even the most eminent poets, let alone minor ones. The edition of Kochanowski's *Collected Works* was started in 1982 (on instigation by the parliament in 1978) and the last volume appeared in 1997 – a quarter of a century was not enough to publish more than a half of the intended whole; it might be discouraging to try to predict how many of us will live long enough to see the last volume being published. Fortunately, Kochanowski's Latin works, which are no doubt a challenging task for an editor, had recently been published – outside of the *Collected Works* – more than once, and are nowadays even easier available than poet's oeuvre in Polish language.<sup>2</sup>

Mikołaj Rej has been slightly more fortunate as his *Krótką rozprawą, Postylla, Wizerunk, Apocalypsis* and *Kupiec*<sup>3</sup> were all published after the Second World War. However, even the oeuvre of the founding father of Polish literary language suffers from editorial shortages: his *Postylla*, a magnificent example of Renaissance prose, lacks an accurate transcription since the above-mentioned edition had not been finished and there is little chance of its successful completion in near future.

A long list of shortcomings can be reeled off: Piotr Skarga is next in the line with his sermons published only partially (in fact, *Kazania sej-*

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<sup>1</sup> I made similar remarks during a philological convention in Cracow in 2004 (See: J. Gruchała, *Nowe możliwości w edytorstwie literatury dawnej*, in *Polonistyka w przebudowie. Literaturoznawstwo – wiedza o języku – wiedza o kulturze – edukacja. Zjazd Polonistów, Cracow, 22–25 września 2004*, ed. by M. Czermińska et al. (Kraków: Universitas, 2005), vol. 1, 434–444.

<sup>2</sup> Jan Kochanowski, *Carmina Latina. Poezja łacińska*. Pars I: *Imago phototypica-transcriptio*. Pars II: *Index verborum et formarum*, Pars III: *Commentarius*, edited by Zofia Głombiowska (Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego, 2008, 2013); *Ioannes Cochranovius. Pisma łacińskie*, ed. W. Walecki et al., (Kraków: Collegium Columbinum, 2008); Biblioteka Literatury Staropolskiej i Nowołacińskiej [Library of Old Polish and Neo-Latin Literature], ed. G. Urban-Godziek et al., accessible on-line: <http://neolatina.bj.uj.edu.pl> (accessed May 23, 2014).

<sup>3</sup> Editions in Biblioteka Pisarzy Polskich: *Krótką rozprawą*, ed. Witold Taszycki and Konrad Górski in 1953; *Postylla* ed. K. Górski et al., in 1965; *Wizerunk* ed. Władysław Kuraszkiwicz et al., in 1971. Recently published: *Apocalypsis*, ed. Wojciech Kriegseisen et al. (Warszawa: Semper, 2005); *Kupiec*, ed. Anna Kochan (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IBL, 2008, Biblioteka Pisarzy Staropolskich, vol. 36).

*mowe* are the only well-edited collection);<sup>4</sup> *Dworzanin* by Łukasz Górnicki has not been issued for half a century (the last complete edition was elaborated by Roman Pollak in 1961<sup>5</sup> and was followed by editions of fragments only). The worst problem concerns Neo-Latin authors such as Janicjusz, Krzycki, Dantyszek and others, whose works are studied in original on the basis of old editions or more modern anthologies.<sup>6</sup>

Obviously, the current situation has also its brighter aspects, including some editions of individual authors meeting all requirements of modern editorial art. Listing them is not my purpose here as their existence can do little to change the generally grim picture. It should be emphasised at this point that Renaissance texts are not usually complex from the perspective of textual criticism: of the above-mentioned authors only Krzycki's work involves some editorial hurdles to be overcome due to problems with determining authorship of works collected in *Corpus Critianum*. This relative lack of complexity becomes especially apparent in comparison with the tradition of baroque texts in the form of numerous manuscripts called *silva rerum*. A crucial majority of Renaissance texts does not necessitate a painstaking reconstruction or resorting to shaky hypotheses like *stemma codicum*, but a mere diligent and laborious elaboration of the already existing sources. In these circumstances, it is even more difficult to excuse the glaring editorial negligence concerning Polish Renaissance writings.

It has to be regretfully admitted that the traditional formula of editorial series is becoming outworn. Unfortunately, this applies also to the meritorious *Biblioteka Pisarzy Polskich*, started after the Second World War as a replacement (for political reasons) of a series under the same title issued by the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences in Cracow. It was in this series that the (still uncompleted) edition of Kochanowski's and Rej's collected works was started. Another important series that used to provide high-standard new editions of Renaissance texts is *Biblioteka Narodowa*, but it has been through hard times recently, too.

Editorial enterprises devoted to Latin works (unfairly limited to niche existence) are not in a much better condition. *Corpus Antiquissimorum Poetarum Poloniae Latinorum usque ad Ioannem Cochranovium* from the very start in 1887 was not aimed at great efficiency with nine volumes

<sup>4</sup> Complete edition of Piotr Skarga's *Sermons* has been prepared by Janusz Gruchała et al. in 2013, and is waiting for publication in printed form.

<sup>5</sup> In Górnicki's *Writings*, Warsaw, 1961; *Dworzanin polski* (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 2005) is a reprint of the edition by Pollak published in the series *Biblioteka Narodowa* (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1954).

<sup>6</sup> The most important of these is: *Antologia poezji łacińskiej w Polsce. Renesans*, ed. I. Lewandowski (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, 1996) [bilingual edition].

published over 120 years, including four in the post-war period.<sup>7</sup> Another interesting series, *Bibliotheca Latina Medii et Recentioris Aevi*, published under the patronage of the Committee for the Advancement of Classical Culture Studies, has vanished from the market recently.<sup>8</sup>

The demise can be accounted for in many ways. First of all, the scholarly editions (the so-called type A) have to be prepared in accordance with certain established principles specified in *Zasady wydawania tekstów staropolskich* (1955) and require a full critical apparatus and a vast commentary accompanied with index of words and their variants. Therefore, they are a time-consuming and costly enterprise as the work cannot be executed without a group of experts.

Secondly, the available specialists in the field have been becoming increasingly scarce because even young promising adepts of editorial craft stand hardly any chance to prove their talents, simply because they cannot be awarded an academic degree for the editorial work.

Another obstacle is the institutional structure of universities, where editorial endeavours have not been recognized as worthy of a separate academic unit in the structure of a university and all the institutions affiliated with a university actually depend on the promotion and career mechanisms already described. It seems rather obvious in these circumstances that editing under the auspices of a university or other scientific body is obsolete and inefficient. Obviously, I am not going to act out here a spectacle entitled *A Lamentation over the Institute of Literary Research* (Instytut Badań Literackich), although in the case of *Biblioteka Pisarzy Polskich*, the Institute is fully responsible for its failures in the editing field. I would rather point out to processes that inevitably affect every institution, such as gradual ossification and loss of vitality. As time passes by, editorial committees tend to gather an ever larger circle of reverend members (contributing to the work even posthumously) and reach a stage when they are no longer able to fulfil its tasks. This tendency is best exemplified by the impressive list of venerable scholars who over the past quarter of the century have been working on the undeniably unsuccessful edition of Kochanowski's works.

The fruitless editorial enterprises dragging on for decades indicate that it is high time to turn to other models of institutional and human resources organisation. Large committees appointed by venerable university bodies could be easily replaced with small but more agile groups

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<sup>7</sup> The last volume published: Martinus CROMARUS, *Carmina Latina*, ed. Jerzy Starnawski and Romuald Turasiewicz (Kraków: PAU, 2003).

<sup>8</sup> Vol. 25 published in 1994: Franciszek Dionizy Kniaźnin, *Carmina*, ed. Ewa Jolanta Głębińska (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1994).

of specialists working in proper conditions. If the metaphor of the jeweller's work can be recalled here, the situation reminds me of an anecdote about a famous precious stone that had to be split into many smaller bits: none of the renowned master craftsmen wanted to undertake the task and as a result it had to be executed by a mere apprentice, who was skilful enough to do the job well as he did not risk a damage to his reputation. The comparison is even more accurate if you consider the gallons of ink poured over the necessity of publishing a new edition of *Epigrams* by Maciej Kazimierz Sarbiewski and the excellent work of two young editors published in 2003.<sup>9</sup>

The issue of funding the editions of old texts by the state (Ministry of Culture? Ministry of Education?) definitely needs to be reconsidered and financial resources need to be allocated for this purpose.<sup>10</sup> This duty towards national culture is not as expensive as to become an easy excuse for long-lasting negligence. Grant applications in this field should not be an initiative of individual scholars. Even limited financial support works wonders, as can be proven by the most outstanding editorial enterprise recently, that is *Biblioteka Pisarzy Staropolskich* edited by Adam Karpiński under auspices of the Institute of Literary Research (here is the opportunity to praise the institution after the previous criticism). The series offers a new type of edition, quite different from what we have been accustomed to. In all of the more than 35 volumes of the series the text is prepared in such a way as to be comprehensible for almost all readers interested in masterpieces of old Polish literature. Still, it is accompanied by detailed documentation including text variants, precise source lists and text tradition carefully reconstructed. An excellent modernized transcription and helpful commentary plus a glossary of archaic forms and a short historical introduction make this editions appealing to a wide readership. A specialist will find here a carefully composed collection of sources and a critical apparatus that make these editions suitable for researchers looking for a reliable source. The series is a work of a circle of publishers and editors that welcomes new young members, which bodes well for the future.

The texts are also selected for publication according to trends prevailing in literature studies. A recent tendency to give preference to Baroque

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<sup>9</sup> Maciej Kazimierz Sarbiewski, *Epigrammatum liber. Księga epigramatów*, ed. and transl. Magdalena Piskała and Dorota Sutkowska, *Biblioteka Pisarzy Staropolskich*, vol. 26 (Warszawa: IBL, 2003).

<sup>10</sup> There's hope that the National Programme of Development of Humanities [Narodowy Program Rozwoju Humanistyki], launched in 2011 by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education, will contribute to it.

texts may be the reason why only four or five out of 38 texts published in the *Biblioteka Pisarzy Staropolskich* series are Renaissance literary works. This fondness of Baroque authors can be viewed as an attempt to make up for the shortage of good editions of Baroque works that were almost unavailable or preserved only in handwritten form that makes editorial work a real challenge. Nevertheless, postponing the Renaissance text editions results in decreasing the interest in the Golden Age literature among literary critics.

Moreover, there is a remarkable lack of balance between texts in Polish and those in Latin, which are omitted by publishers due to language difficulties. The noticeable result is a widespread misconception about Polish Renaissance literature, shared even by some specialists in the field, who fail to recognize the full extent of the bilinguality of Renaissance culture in their synthetic writings about the period. Latin literature is scarcely quoted by historians, which is largely due to a shortage of Latin texts editions. All summed up, the image of Renaissance in Poland can be described as hopelessly one-sided, if not simply incorrect.

### 3.

What are the duties and challenges that a Renaissance text editor has to face? Which aspects of his work make it different from working with Baroque texts? What makes this work specific and distinct from other editorial fields?

Beyond doubt, editing mediaeval texts constitutes a separate branch of editorial work as it deals with a specific form of language (or actually languages: both mediaeval Latin and Polish). The division line between Renaissance and Baroque texts is more tenuous, and becomes apparent mainly in the editorial commentary.

Humanistic golden rule *imitatio antiquorum* was used on all levels of text organisation and poses a considerable challenge for contemporary editors who need to be competent in almost as many fields as the Renaissance author. The relatively easiest part of the task is to identify the less complex *similia*, especially if they stem from well-known ancient masterpieces. The only issue here is what size the commentary should reasonably take and the degree to which it should respect the original context. The length and profundity of the commentary depends, of course, on the character of the edition and its targeted readership: a commentary in a professional edition may assume the form of a short study, whereas plainly informative comments may satisfy less proficient readers.

However if carefully considered simplicity of the task may occur fallacious as a quote could have not been borrowed from the original author but one of his followers. Using these mediators as well as numerous compilations (*florilegia*) popular at the time was a habit deeply ingrained at school, which requires an awareness of a possible multi-level mediation from modern scholars. The process of sifting a source through late antique, mediaeval and Renaissance contexts is rarely described without a margin of uncertainty and for this very reason increased caution is expected in determining the character and origin of *similia*.

Intertextuality of Renaissance works all too often goes beyond mere quoting: some allusions and implicit quotations may remain undiscovered even by a professional reader.<sup>11</sup> The tissue of humanistic poetry and prose – both in Polish and in Latin – can be wound of diverse threads and following them can be fascinating for a reader, a publisher or an editor in particular. The latter should always provide the text with a commentary that guides the reader successfully through the complex structure of text loans on the one hand and does not offend their intellect on the other. The second commandment of a good editor would be not to seek a hidden quotation where only remote similarity can be found.

The relation between a Renaissance work of art and classical culture can be so puzzling that it causes publishers to arrive at extraordinary solutions. Let me recall the example of the edition of Kochanowski's *Collected Works* published in the *Biblioteka Pisarzy Polskich* series where the commentary was divided into two parts:

Taking into consideration the character of contemporaneous literary culture, in which Polish and Latin elements coexisted, our commentary consists of two parts and informs about both sources from which the works presented here stem: Polish literary culture and Latin literary culture (both classical and Neo-Latin).<sup>12</sup>

It needs no explaining how troublesome the consequences of this decision have been. Not only is a lot of cross-referencing between both commentaries necessary, but also the whole division appears to have been based on questionable premises – why not add another field of interest connected with the Biblical tradition so common in Kochanowski's writ-

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<sup>11</sup> See Jerzy Axer, "Rola kryptocytatów z literatury łacińskiej w polskojęzycznej twórczości Jana Kochanowskiego", in: *Jan Kochanowski i kultura Odrodzenia*, ed. Zdzisław Libera and Maciej Żurowski (Warszawa: PWN, 1985) 107–120; idem, "Tradycja klasyczna w polskojęzycznej poezji renesansowej a mechanizmy odbioru tej poezji," *Pamiętnik Literacki* 75, no. 2 (1984): 207–216.

<sup>12</sup> Jan Kochanowski, *Treny*, ed. Maria Renata Mayenowa et al. (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1983), 34.

ings? A unified commentary would have yielded better results. The edition is a proof of how deceptive the antique-humanistic parallel may be.

The bilingual character of Renaissance culture raises a question of diversifying transcription rules as it is beyond doubt that editing Latin works requires a different code of practice than working on Polish texts. In both cases, a reasonable modernization of spelling seems inevitable as a letter-to-letter transcription would rather show artlessness than fidelity to the text. The methods of transcribing Latin texts can be based on the methods applied by editors in other countries, but our own solutions have to be developed for Polish texts. The current situation is quite specific: the division into A, B and C edition types (introduced in *Zasady wydawania tekstów staropolskich*, 1955) is perceived as inconvenient by many scientific publishers, but no agreement on a more up-to-date transcription has been reached. My personal view is that the modernizing tendency leads to oversimplification of the spelling as editors are inclined to please the unqualified contemporary readers. A list of problems a publisher has to solve should start with the spelling of nasal vowels, reductions of consonant clusters, inflected forms and the remnants of vowel duration system (particularly the “o” letter with a dash). It seems that even a reader with a limited experience of reading old texts should not be protected from exposure to spelling which is non-standard from the modern point of view, especially as it seldom hinders text comprehension. The above remarks also concern the punctuation, with the reservation that in this field problem areas are even more conspicuous and even greater caution is necessary. This is because our ancestors not only used punctuation without any consistency, but also applied an entirely different punctuation system which could be provisionally named rhetorical-intonational, as opposed to modern punctuation based on syntax and logic.

However strong the demand for a standardised transcription is, it still seems out of reach. Nevertheless, a thorough debate on the issue is definitely in order and it would be best if new editions of important texts were used as weighty arguments, thus shifting the focus from theoretical systems to practical applications. A slavish adherence to *Zasady wydawania tekstów staropolskich* has failed to produce satisfactory results and as a whole it can be perceived as a warning against renewed attempts at establishing a new transcription system.



## 4.

The application of a computer as an editor's assistant is not a novelty these days, but the arrival of the worldwide web has contributed new qualities to the editing process. Despite this fact, it would be difficult to recommend any Polish websites fully exploiting the abundant opportunities created by the new medium. A typical Polish online edition is in fact a set of scanned book pages from a printed edition selected on the basis of print legibility rather than other professional criteria (to facilitate font recognition by the software). Such "edition" is completely deprived of any commentary or critical apparatus and the issue of text origin is not in the slightest degree of interest for the "publisher." The prospective reader is usually perceived as an individual who steers clear of real well-furnished libraries, a person who needs a copy of a text just for fast processing or to make a printout, possibly without any hassles such as a commentary, footnotes etc. Such policy is in unison with a declaration issued by the web designers of Polish Internet Library (*Polska Biblioteka Internetowa*). Although admitting certain advantages of such editions, I believe they fail to exploit satisfactorily new and previously unavailable possibilities offered by electronic media, such as visual elements in the commentary, including pictures, animations, sound recordings or film extracts – all in full colour (traditionally edited books usually lack colourful illustrative material due to financial limitations to which on-line editing is not susceptible). Furthermore, the Internet may contribute to the broadening of critical apparatus and open new perspectives for scholars through links to websites and databases.

If I had to pinpoint the most valuable electronic tool for an editor, I would choose the hypertext. It is not extremely difficult now to imagine a multi-layered edition, in which the first and basic layer is formed by the meticulously transcribed text, accompanied by other layers such as all the sources provided in an electronic format, a carefully prepared commentary and critical apparatus, all popping out in separate windows. The reader's freedom to switch between the layers, depending on their needs and regardless of their proficiency level, is almost impossible to underestimate. A reader of an electronic edition may content himself with the enjoyment of reading the text in a modernized transcription, but without a slightest difficulty he can for example compare the transcription with any of the sources or see the scholarly explanation of the text offered in the commentary.

If an electronic edition is to make extensive use of the vast potential offered by electronic media, a suitable text format should be chosen.

On the one hand, it has to enable a full use of hypertext tools (which is a great advantage of standard HTML format), on the other hand a careful choice of fonts and other typographic elements should reveal a real care for the aesthetic aspects of the edition (the e-book format seems to provide better solutions in this field). It must as well be ensured that the text layout remains unchanged whenever different browsers or display programmes are used (which in turn would suggest pdf as the most suitable format). The chaos prevailing in the field of text formats for personal as well as professional use calls for further quest for a format combining all the above-mentioned advantages and eliminating the drawbacks. The future of electronic editing does not lie with the hardware development but with the new ideas of its application. The currently available hardware capacities and data transfer speeds pave the way for solutions which a few years ago were but a distant dream.