

Andrzej Borowski

*Iter Polono-Belgo-Ollandicum: Cultural and Literary Relationships
between the Commonwealth of Poland and the Netherlands
in the 16th and 17th Centuries*

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Andrzej Borowski is a professor at the Jagiellonian University and a member of numerous academic institutes and associations, such as the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences. He is editor-in-chief of *TERMINUS*, a biannual periodical for neo-Latin studies in Poland, and was professor of European Literature at the Centre for Studies on the Classical Tradition (OBTA) at the University of Warsaw from 2002 to 2005. He is interested in literature and has many publications to his name, mainly dealing with old literature and culture, such as *Pojęcie i problem Renesansu północnego* [Problem of the Northern Renaissance, 1987], *Powrót Europy* [The home-coming of Europe. On European Studies and Literature, 1999] and *Renesans* [Renaissance, 1992, 2nd ed. 2002]. Borowski's output also includes various articles on Polish-Dutch-Belgian cultural and literary relations. He is a pioneer in this field and in the research of Polish-Dutch cultural penetration in Polish literature and culture. His latest publication sheds light on links between these two nations in the 16th and 17th century. The author himself characterizes his work in the following way:

“This book is not the chronicle, nor was it meant to be. It is not any *dictionnaire raisonnée* either, pretending to grasp as a whole the subject of the mutual relationships between the inhabitants of the Commonwealth of Poland and of the Netherlands [...] in the 16th and 17th century” (Borowski 2007: 7).

Moreover, he underscores the goal of his book: “The aim of this work is modest” (Borowski 2007: 7) – yet this type of rhetoric emphasizes the fact that the author is an expert on old literature. He confines himself to an enumeration and superficial analysis of selected events and factors from 1550-1650 that, according to him, have had an influence on the development of Polish-Dutch relations – including various instances of travel between the two countries and of friendship between cultural representatives of both nations. At the same time the author attempts to draw parallels between the countries with regard to their political and historical situation during this period; on the one hand the Polish Golden Age and the Swedish Deluge which left the country in ruins, and on the other, the Golden Age which was terminated by the Spanish Fury in the Netherlands. In Borowski's opinion, no existing publications strive comprehensively to present the cultural relations between Poland and the Netherlands. However, there is a considerable number of fragmentary works analyzing certain aspects of this problem, such as armament, literature and art

history. Moreover, Polish-Dutch links have been deemed of minor importance in this period and have not been discussed as widely in Poland as, for example, links between Poland and Italy. Borowski also draws the reader's attention to the universalism of humanistic phenomena which have to a great extent influenced the unity of ideas throughout Europe.

The book is divided into three parts, namely "Polish-Netherlandish Relationships: General Problems and Ideas," "Iter Polono-Belgicum" and "Iter Polono-Ollandicum." Each part additionally consists of some smaller chapters and subchapters.

The first part begins with an analysis of terminology connected with the history of the three nations. The author concentrates on names such as Batavi, Sarmatae and Belgae. He then raises the problem of distinction between the Northern Netherlands (also called Holland) and the Southern Netherlands (today's Belgium), as well as the geographical and national identities of both countries. This issue of identity leads us further towards so-called "European identity" (Borowski 2007: 41), which was considered to be a universal phenomenon – specifically since all European languages stem both from Christian roots and pagan traditions in Europe. Through adherence to this common identity, Poland and the Netherlands supposedly have some kind of primordial relationship.

The second part is devoted to Polish-Belgian links. The author's analysis starts with the earliest known examples of links between the two nations, such as the presence of Flemish and Walloon settlers in Silesia (platea gallicorum in Wrocław) in the Middle Ages, Flemish artefacts (cloth and arrases) found in Poland, as well as connections established through the Hanseatic League. The Renaissance and advent of humanism introduce much deeper links between Poland and Belgium, related to travel and to the fact that representatives of both nations studied in Italy. The author mentions particular names, including Jan Łaski Senior, Karel Utenhove and Jan Kochanowski; the latter two having been friends since their studies in Padua. Such acquaintances were also the result of the education young Poles received at universities in the Southern Netherlands, e.g. in Lovanium, where famous professors such as Eric Puteau (Puteanus), Joest Lips (Lipsius) and Nicolaus Vernulaneus taught. The descendants of the most significant Polish aristocratic families – such as Sapieha, Potocki, Radziwiłł and Ossoliński – received their education there. Borowski claims that young men educated there later on had a great impact on Polish culture, and that thanks to them, Justus Lipsius gained such popularity in Poland. His style of writing and teaching had been admired and imitated so often that it eventually came to be known as "Lipsianism" (Borowski 2007: 121). Lipsius popularized Mediterranean tradition and culture, which he saw as the basis of Western culture. Polish Lipsianists include Lipsius's students Jan Aureli Szydłowski and Kazimierz Sarbiewski – yet they were not the only ones influenced by Lipsius. Polish writers who did not know him personally and only read his works were likewise inspired by the Dutch intellectual.

Meanwhile, the most well known Polish author in the Netherlands was Maciej Kazimierz Sarbiewski. The works of this Jesuit were published by Plantin-Moretus in Antwerp. Prominent readers and commentators of his works include Ericius Puteanus, P.C. Hooft and Jean de Tollenaere. Sarbiewski wrote *Ad Amicos Belgas*, in which he analyzes the Golden Age in the Netherlands and praises Puteanus, comparing him to Socrates.

The last part of the book, "Iter Polono – Ollandicum," is devoted to relations between Poland and the Northern Netherlands (today's Holland). The author begins by introducing

the difficulties involved even nowadays in discerning Flemings and Hollanders. According to the author the only Dutch figure whose popularity lives in the memory of Poles to these days is Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam. Borowski also stresses that since the 16th century, when the Mennonites – refugees from the Northern Netherlands – settled along the Vistula River in Polish territory, close bonds have existed between the two countries. In the next century, after the Synod of Dordrecht (1618 – 19), the second wave of refugees from the Netherlands reached the banks of the Vistula River. This time they were followers of Arminianism, known as Remonstrants. The writer also emphasizes the presence of literary connections – for example the translation of Dutch texts from the Netherlands into Polish, and vice versa. Georg van Lanckvelt's *Hecastus*, based on the play *Elckerlijc* by Petrus Diesthemius, gained a measure of popularity among Polish readers. It is also known that the historical works of Maciej Miechowita and Marcin Kromer were partly translated into Dutch. Moreover, it is likely that in his work *Żywot Józefa z pokolenia żydowskiego, syna Jakubowego, rozdzielony w osobach* (Kraków 1545), Mikołaj Rej modelled himself on *Comoedia Sacra cui titulus Iosephus* by Cornelius Crocus (1536).

The author next analyzes the literary culture of both countries, starting with stereotypes of the Northern Netherlands as reflected in Polish literature – for example in newspapers, where the Dutch are portrayed as primitive and mean, yet professional when it comes to the army. Furthermore, according to Borowski, Polish motifs appear in Dutch literature and vice versa. The most well known examples in Dutch literature are Joost van den Vondel's dramas *Triomf over Funnern* (1699) and *Gijsbrecht van Aemstel* – the former being about the Polish-Swedish war; the latter the story of a Mennonite refugee from the Northern Netherlands who arrives in the settlement on the banks of the Vistula River. Borowski also mentions a non-literary example, namely Rembrandt's painting *The Polish Rider*, which supposedly portrays Gijsbrecht van Aemstel himself and expresses the painter's fascination with Poles residing in Holland. Dutch motifs in Polish literature, on the other hand, are mainly related to the translations of works written by the most renowned Dutch writers and poets such as de Groot (translated by Zbigniew Morsztyn), Hooft, Huygens and Vondel (translated by Krzysztof Arciszewski). In addition, in the author's opinion, Polish Baroque literature owes its vanitas motif to the Northern Netherlands, from where it was imported to our country by means of emblems. The book is based on a rich array of not only primary sources, but also secondary texts published by Polish scholars on Dutch literature, culture and art, and Polish-Dutch relationships.

Borowski's text does not reveal anything new, but it does not attempt to do so. It is a rather concise collection of material covered by earlier articles on the same topic, and it is mostly based on Borowski's own texts, published in various Polish and European periodicals. All parts and chapters are very short, which influences the size of the book. Nevertheless, it could constitute a good contribution to a more extended and comprehensive text on multiple Polish-Dutch relationships, which will surely be written by Borowski himself, or by his students.

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