

script materials. Clearly, what we need is more primary material—editions like this one. When we no longer have to rely on subjective vocabulary lists which allegedly prove that a translation was made in one or another center, we will be able to compile exhaustive comparative lexica. These, together with detailed syntactic information, might possibly allow us to make realistic estimates concerning the time and place of different schools of translation before A.D. 1100.

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ON MEDIEVAL AND RENAISSANCE SLAVIC WRITING: SELECTED ESSAYS. By *Henrik Birnbaum*. Preface by *Roman Jakobson*. Slavistic Printings and Reprintings. The Hague and Paris: Mouton, 1974. 381 pp.

The appearance of this elegantly-jacketed book should give us cause for joy. Here are seventeen collected essays—two in Russian, five in English, ten in German—all written by a distinguished American Slavist. Covered in English are such topics as the comparative study of Old Church Slavonic literature, aspects of the Slavic renaissance, and Old Serbian literature. The Russian and German selections deal largely with problems of Old Church Slavonic and Old Russian syntax.

Yes, problems of syntax! Which brings us immediately to the book's chief defect: the author's *own* syntax. (We will focus on the essays he has written in English, but are those in Russian or German any better?) Birnbaum rarely expresses himself in a simple declarative sentence. Instead, he favors long, graceless "periods" which twist back and forth as he keeps qualifying his ideas. Overuse of the passive voice further obscures the meaning. Here is a sample utterance, found on pages 37–38: "However, mention should also be made here of the fact that, in some instances, Slavic hymns which, while originally written and composed, to be sure, for specific ecclesiastical purposes and occasions, subsequently could be used in more or secular contexts (cf., for example, the well-known account by the Polish chronicler Jan Długosz, who notes that the Polish warriors intoned the *Bogurodzica* in the battle of Grunwald in 1410)." Similar syntax prevails throughout much of the book. When such sentences follow one another in suffocating succession, a reader's interest gasps and expires.

If Birnbaum's sentences suffer from overloading, so do his paragraphs; they, too, tend to be unnecessarily long. And they are afflicted with "this-itis": the overused demonstrative adjective or pronoun recurs in sentence after sentence (for example, pp. 14–15, 33, 42). A reader sometimes loses track of the particular idea to which "this" refers. Worse yet, a Birnbaum paragraph—even the rare short one—may change course in the middle, to the reader's distress. The last paragraph on page 314, for example, begins with a topic sentence promising a "more positive appraisal" of old Serbian *vitae*, yet the same paragraph concludes that "the quality of Old Serbian writing . . . declined. . . ." As a result of all this, thoughts which would be clear when discussed by other scholars (such as Eremin, Unbegaun, Vinogradov, and Worth), become turgid and confusing when Birnbaum takes them up.

Nevertheless, a brave reader may persist. For his pains he will get generous amounts of description and analysis where Old Slavic syntax is concerned, plus some literary criticism of uncertain quality. On occasion Birnbaum can be tantalizingly cryptic, as when he offhandedly alludes to the "almost modern realism"

of Epifanii Premudryi (p. 50). Most of the time, however, it is the other way around: the reader will get an impression of unnecessary verbiage. The author uses many words and much jargon but tells us little that is new. His enthusiasm for Kochanowski brims with evaluative terms like "absolute peak," "the greatest," "true masterpiece," "most prominent," "most outstanding," and "unsurpassed" (pp. 58–60). Yet for all these superlatives, Birnbaum offers us no fresh perception of Kochanowski's art; the whole passage could have come from some second-rate literary encyclopedia.

The reader will be disappointed if he expects to find major theses and original conclusions in this book. When dealing with a topic which has provoked scholarly disagreement, Birnbaum hovers gingerly over both "thesis" and "anti-thesis," finally coming down as gently as possible on one side or the other. Rarely does he offer a clear, independent "synthesis"; rarely does he give us new insights or thought-provoking ideas.

There is no denying Birnbaum's erudition. Footnotes sometimes take up over half the page. We only wish he could present his material in a clearer, more stimulating fashion.

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JAN KOCHANOWSKI. By *David Welsh*. Twayne's World Author Series, no. 330. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1974. 160 pp. \$7.50.

Jan Kochanowski (1530–84) was Poland's greatest Renaissance poet. He was also a reformer of verse in his own time and a seminal influence on Polish poetry down to the present. This book is the first English-language account of Kochanowski's poetry and his contribution to Polish literature. As such, it is certainly welcome, because Renaissance Poland is simply too interesting and worthy of study to remain so poorly known in this country. Anything that contributes to an expansion of knowledge about the Polish Renaissance performs a real service. What makes the appearance of Professor Welsh's book on Kochanowski additionally noteworthy is that it comes at a time when the culture of both the Polish Renaissance and the Polish Baroque are attracting more attention—especially among younger scholars in the Polish field—and translations are making some of the more significant literature available in English. The time is not far off when it will be possible to teach courses in Old Polish culture to students who do not yet read Polish and, perhaps more important, it will be possible to introduce more Polish material in courses on general European history and civilization.

Professor Welsh's brief study draws on all the major literature about Kochanowski and offers in turn an unpretentious, almost deceptively simple, and always very readable survey of Kochanowski's achievements as a poet. All the major—and, indeed, some minor—works are described and critically assessed in an admirably concise manner that never ignores relevant or interesting details, yet at the same time successfully avoids the kind of minutiae that would only encumber the easy narrative pace of the book.

Despite this conciseness and the book's modest size, Professor Welsh has been able to work in a considerable amount of literary history. Kochanowski is consistently viewed within the framework of contemporary Polish culture, enabling the reader to gain some insight into the overall scope of sixteenth-century Polish