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## The Revival of the Rhetorical Phoenix\*

Iwona Słomak, „*Phoenix rhetorum*” Jana Kwiatkiewicza. *Wprowadzenie – przekład – opracowanie* [“*Phoenix rhetorum*” by Jan Kwiatkiewicz: Introduction—Translation—Edition], Faculty of Polish Studies, University of Warsaw, Warsaw 2016

There is a poetic story about a phoenix transmitted by Lactantius and previously told by Herodotus, Ovid and Pliny the Elder. The phoenix, which in an undefined land in the East, travelled to Syria at the end of his millennium-long life. There, it built a nest of myrrh and acanthus on a tall palm tree. With the rising sunlight, singing funeral songs to himself, he burned himself and then was reborn from the ashes sepulchred among fragrant herbs. The phoenix was said to be exceptionally beautiful, which was associated with its exuberant colouring: golden-red plumage, sapphire eyes, white beak with emerald gloss,

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pink claws, and a yellow tail sprinkled with purple. No wonder that this mythical bird, as marvellous as the poetic narrative about death and rebirth, has become a symbol of exotic uniqueness and rare beauty.

Jan Kwiatkiewicz, a Jesuit teacher of rhetoric, philosophy and theology from the second half of the seventeenth century, used the figure of the colourful phoenix in the title of his rhetoric textbook: *The phoenix of rhetors or very rare Atticism, as well as foundations and varieties of elegant eloquence (Phoenix rhetorum, seu rarioris Atticismi nec vulgaris eloquentiae fundamenta et species, Cracow 1672)*. Thanks to the edition and excellent translation by Iwona Słomak, the rhetorical phoenix could be reborn not only from its own ashes, but also from library dust in the Polish language. Although it is regrettable that the edition is not bilingual (the availability of the text in digital libraries does not resolve the issue of transcription), there is no doubt that the book under discussion is one of the most important studies on the history of rhetoric and literature of the seventeenth century which have been published recently. On the one hand, it provides an important source text with the introduction and necessary explanations, and on the other hand, it may contribute to the verification of many simplifications, harmful superstitions and too far-reaching generalisations about the almost universal corruption of rhetoric in the second half of the seventeenth century.

A few words about the author of the textbook. Jan Kwiatkiewicz (1629–1703) was a Jesuit, active throughout his life as a teacher. He taught grammar, rhetoric, philosophy, and theology at colleges in Kalisz, Brest on the Bug, Lublin, Lviv, Jarosław, Sandomierz (Gostomianum; Rector in 1681–1684), and Cracow. Among his works, written in Polish (collections of sermons, occasional speeches, church history) and Latin (a poem celebrating the victory at Vienna), a special place is occupied by three textbooks on rhetoric: *Suada civilis* (Lublin 1672), *Phoenix rhetorum* (Cracow 1672), and *Eloquentia reconditior* (Poznań 1689), reprinted many times, also abroad, in Cologne, Wrocław, and Prague. All of them, although they have been on the periphery of literary historians' interests for a long time, give an excellent idea of the changes in the contemporary understanding

of excellent style, imitation of antique authors, amplification, and rhetorical ornamentation.

The mythical bird mentioned in the title of this treatise is an interesting and instructive example of practical application of the theory of rhetoric. It is an important element of the carefully prepared self-presentation by Kwiatkiewicz, who appears to us simultaneously as an ingenious rhetor (teacher) and a talented orator. He uses the figure of an unusual multicoloured phoenix in three contexts. Firstly, in a dedication letter addressed to Stanisław Leszczyński (after 1656–1722), in which he compares the addressee to this extraordinary bird because of his rare and exceptional qualities (“a phoenix born in an eagle’s nest”). Secondly, in the introduction to both a kind and unkind reader, which brings information about the genesis, subject matter and purpose of the textbook, he designs two types of reception for his work, referring to the mythical story of the phoenix. Kind and favourable recipients will treat it as a lecture on the rules of extraordinary and surprising rhetoric (the admirability of a phoenix), while the adverse and unfriendly will be able to throw them into the fire and turn them into ashes (the natural fate of this bird). And thirdly, Kwiatkiewicz treated the phoenix as a presentive, emblematic figure of Atticism, which denotes a certain ideal of “rare and uncommon” eloquence, arising from a perfect combination of inventive brilliance and elocutionary virtuosity. The presentation of concrete rules and examples that give an idea of such an understanding of rhetoric is the main goal of Kwiatkiewicz’s (meta)rhetorical undertaking.

His textbook consists of two parts. In the first one, he mentions and discusses the ten foundations of Atticism. These are: astonishing insights (*sensus admirabiles*), the unusual use of erudition (*eruditionis usus non vulgaris*), astounding brilliance (*mirum acumen*), admirable descriptions (*descriptiones admirabiles*), extraordinary feelings (*affectus non vulgares*), the amazing adornment of style with allegories and excellent figures (*mira per allegoriam et insigniores figuras styli exornatio*), the extraordinary combination of circumstances and things (*circumstantiarum rerumque mira combinatio*), the use of a remarkable amplification (*amplificationis usus singularis*), the skill to

employ various and surprising arguments (*argumenti tractandi varia nec obvia ratio*), the rhetorical period, and the striking decorousness (*numerus oratorius et admirabile decorum*). In the second part, Kwiatkiewicz presents four “varieties of extraordinary eloquence”, namely an unprepared or improvised speech (*eloquentia extemporanea seu subitaria*), a universal speech in every matter, prepared in different variations of style (*eloquentia versatilis in omnes partes et in species styli varios circumacta*), an extremely elegant scholarly speech (*eloquentia scholastica extraordinarie perpolitata*), and a civil speech, i.e. a political speech, exceptionally prepared (*eloquentia civilis seu politica extraordinarie proposita*). The very enumeration of fixed epithets with which Kwiatkiewicz uses to describe a way of speaking (unusual, extraordinary, exceptional, astounding, astonishing) indicates the main characteristic of Atticism, shared with the mythical phoenix. It is a broadly understood uniqueness concerning two interconnected spheres of reality, things (concepts, ideas) and words.

In his opinion, an excellent speaker is supposed to surprise the audience with the “uncommonness” of his oratorical art. It is not enough for him to master the principles of using allegories, tropes, figures, or various amplification strategies. He must also be able to use these devices creatively and transform them in order to condense the meanings in his expression to an even greater degree. This aspiration to achieve the effect of rhetorical uniqueness, sometimes at the expense of deliberate obscuring of the meaning, in some cases bears all the hallmarks of a somewhat ostentatious display of the speaker. However, it draws the attention of readers to a new way of speaking and allows rhetors to distinguish it from the less rhetorically refined ones. That is why in his letter to the reader Kwiatkiewicz employs the figurative personification of the Rhetoric, the “queen of human minds” (p. 81), dressed in the magnificent purple coat of a victorious leader and thus elevated above the grey populace.

In the introduction to the translation of the textbook, Iwona Słomak discussed the history of research on Atticism, pointing to the fundamental problems with defining this concept in relation to the oratorical practice of the Greeks and Romans, with particular

emphasis, understandably, on the concepts of Cicero and Quintilian. In this interesting reconstruction, she also took into account early-modern authors known to Kwiatkiewicz who wrote about the excellent rhetoric of Attica (Erycius Puteanus, Jakob Pontanus) and two later authors interested in Atticism (Gaetano Felice Verani, Johann Gottfried Hauptmann). Against this broad backdrop, she presented and characterised Kwiatkiewicz's views on Atticism, emphasising his great innovativeness in the use and untrammelled modification of ideas derived from both the works of old and contemporary rhetors, who preferred different styles and genres of expression. In my opinion, the main problem revealed here concerns the notion recalled by Kwiatkiewicz and connected with an attempt to close a given speaker within the framework of only one, even if the most perfect, model of rhetoric. This wide-ranging project entails all the difficulties of clearly defining the essence of Atticism, identifying its clear rhetorical criteria and drawing up the canon of the most eminent representatives. Its reduction to a segment of the well-known ahistorical opposition of the Asian style (exuberant, floral, elevated) and Attic style (simple, clear, restrained), which appears, for example, in Jakub Górski's textbook *On the genres of eloquence (De generibus dicendi, Cracow 1559)*, has an equally limited analytical value.

Having excellent erudition in the history of ancient rhetoric, Kwiatkiewicz was aware of the limitations associated with the promotion of only one kind of eloquence. A perfect example in this respect was Cicero, whose oratorical practice did not fit into the rigid divisions of later rhetors, such as Quintilian defending the Arpinate against various, often mutually exclusive objections raised by critics. The interpretation proposed by Słomak, who links Kwiatkiewicz's concept with Cicero's pragmatism, seems convincing to me (p. 65). For both Cicero and Kwiatkiewicz Atticism was a metonymy that meant the ability to combine the art of reasoning with the art of speaking in an apt and decorous way (the rule of *decorum*). Interpreted in this way, it was identified with a rhetorical tradition considered perfect in these respects (i.e. culture and rhetoric of Attica), and on the other hand, it left open the question of the canon of Attic speakers and ways of imitating them.

Placing the concept of the “uncommon” Attic rhetoric of Kwiatkiewicz against the background of Cicero’s rhetorical theory allows us to look at this project from a slightly different perspective. It is about placing his textbook in the broader context of seventeenth-century Ciceronianism and describing the transformations that this movement underwent due to the influence of constant discussions about the ways and limits of imitating the style (diction) of the Arpinate. To see this clearly, it is enough to recall Kwiatkiewicz’s predecessors from the Society of Jesus who taught rhetorical art, especially Maciej Kazimierz Sarbiewski (*On the figures of thoughts, De figuris sententiarum*, 1626/1627) and his disciple, Zygmunt Lauksmin (*The oratorical practice, or the rules of the art of rhetoric, Praxis oratoria, sive praecepta artis rhetoricae*, Braniewo 1648). The two latter Jesuits drew extensively on Cicero’s speeches, showing him as a model to follow in terms of the ability to find tropes and rhetorical figures, or to apply different amplification strategies. Lapidary and sometimes rather general remarks on the subject of, among other things, maxims, epiphonema, descriptions and hypotyposis were drawn from a textbook by Cypriano de Soarez entitled *On the Art of Rhetoric (De arte rhetorica)*, which was reprinted many times in the seventeenth century. Compared to the textbooks they left behind, Kwiatkiewicz’s work on Atticism can be regarded as a detailed development of rhetorical forms that were previously merely outlined (maxims, allegories, descriptions, *acumen*), supported by rich illustrative material.

Rhetors from the early-modern era, attentive and critical readers of ancient treatises on rhetoric, often gave a picture of a perfect speaker or constructed a model of perfect eloquence. Identifying the best way of speaking with, for example, broadly understood Atticism led consequently to the search for its traces in speakers connected with various conventions, aesthetics, or genres. Kwiatkiewicz found them in the works of Cicero, Pliny, Seneca, Lipsius, and Puteanus. As Słomak convincingly proves (p. 65), however, his main intention was to revive interest in the unusual, rare and uncommon way of speaking known as Atticism. In drawing inspiration from many different rhetorical models, an important role was given to creative imitation,

which enables the shaping of one's own idiomatic style. In the introduction, Kwiatkiewicz elaborates on this issue even more illustratively—he decided to draw new water from the Greek source (Pericles, Demosthenes) and to disseminate Atticism outside Greece and Athens (p. 80). Thus, he becomes a continuator of the work started once by Cicero, an admirer of Demosthenes, more Attic than Athens themselves (*Orat.* 7.23), and Quintilian, the apologist of the Arpinate's rhetorical artistry.

Kwiatkiewicz's textbook translated by Iwona Słomak is a real pleasure to read. Where rhetorical terminology (e.g. *color*) was difficult to express in Polish, she chose words that corresponded to the terms of *ars bene dicendi* with regard to meaning. One could possibly consider leaving "gnome" in the translation, since it is an accepted Polish term, in order to avoid a certain terminological inconsistency; once, it even appears as a proverb (p. 92), and elsewhere as a maxim (p. 235). If we also keep *argutia* (Pl. *argucja*) that sounds archaic and require an explanation, we can do the same in the case of *acumen* (Pl. *dowcip*, here it is proposed to be referred to as *akumen*—K. S.), as understood in the seventeenth century (equivalent of English "wit"—K. S.). This is a more complicated problem, which is connected with the popularisation of the Polish equivalent of the Latin term in studies on the aesthetics and rhetoric of that time, due to its ambiguity and the related difficulties in translation. However, this issue is, in my opinion, still open, as the introduction of the word *akumen* into Polish does not solve the problem completely, because it requires further clarifications. This is sometimes accompanied by the effect of an unintentional, truly baroque stylisation of the text, in which we can imagine phrases such as "oratorical acumens full of argutia and erudition". A separate place is occupied by the translation of the examples given by Kwiatkiewicz, which best show Słomak's ingenuity and linguistic intuition in the art of translation. This is particularly evident in the elogia of Emanuel Tesauro, often cited by Kwiatkiewicz, for example in a mysterious inscription for Adam, p. 203), in which she excellently captured and rendered in Polish almost all semantic subtleties, plays on words, and rhetorical concepts of text.

Słomak's erudite knowledge of ancient and early-modern rhetoric revealed in her commentary is extremely functional. It helps the reader to find his or her way around both the tangle of specialist terms and the sometimes dense Attic diction. Of particular importance are the references in the footnotes to the whole of Kwiatkiewicz's rich output as a speaker and rhetor, which allow us to see the textbook as an element of a carefully designed, coherent project of Atticism. It is consistently identified by Kwiatkiewicz with the ideal of rare and uncommon eloquence, whose hallmark is the search for new devices or things renewed by means of a surprising modification. This turn towards novelty entails an even closer cooperation between invention and elocution in order to amaze the audience with an extraordinary idea and, if not more so, with an extraordinary eloquence. Paraphrasing Tesauro's words recalled by Kwiatkiewicz, one can say: stop, reader, you will read about the miracles of . . . the Attic diction.

*Translated from Polish by Kaja Szymańska*