LETTERS TO THE EDITORS

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RESPONSE TO MARIA CIEŚLA'S 'SHORT NOTE' IN APH 116/2017

The 'Short Note' on my book, *Homo nobilis. Wzorzec szlachcica w Rzeczypospolitej XVI i XVII wieku* [*Homo nobilis*. Models of Noblemen in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries] (PWN, Warszawa, 2017), fails to meet the standards of scholarly rigour or sound reviewing practices. This is evident in both the form and content of the piece. The note has taken the form of a mini-review, limited to several sentences in which the author attempts, unsuccessfully, to produce a brief outline of the main arguments of my monograph. Meanwhile, the content of the mini-review is formed exclusively of critical remarks, including many that are ultimately unsubstantiated as they do not contain any reference to the work under review.

Examples of this practice are:

- Stating that the method employed to analyse the Old Polish conduct books [Pol.: *zwierciadło*, Lat.: *speculum*] is naïve and literary without including any examples of this apparent naivety and literariness. In order to help the reviewer, I would suggest she read the volume *Dzieło literackie jako źródło historyczne* [The Work of Literature as a Historical Source], edited by Bronisław Geremek.
- Stating that the timeframe of the study is undefined, even though the dates are given in the title (sixteenth and seventeenth centuries).
- Stating that the book is based on quotations from sources that are selected to match preestablished hypotheses. I consider this an insinuation that has no place in scholarship; it is an accusation that no ethically-minded reviewer would ever permit herself. At the same time, I am wondering how the author of the 'Short Note' reached her conclusion. What basis does she have for suggesting to readers of APH that I am twisting the sources to suit predetermined theses? What grounds does she have to call into question my research findings? At no point does she provide any basis for her claims.
- Stating that the book is full of generalisations. This is another curious accusation, one that suggests that the reviewer has failed to understand the concept of a 'synthesis'. My monograph is a synthesis. As such, it necessarily contains generalisations and broad conclusions because

they are what determines the scholarly value of each and every book, including mine.
- Stating that the majority of concepts in my work are used in the contemporary and colloquial sense. In light of this accusation, I thus await an indication as to which of the terms in *Homo nobilis* are used incorrectly and what alternatives might be employed.
- And, finally, the reviewer's question as to why such a renowned publishing house as PWN decided to publish "so poor a study". Any such doubts might be best addressed to the publishers themselves. In my defence, I would point to the very positive peer review by Prof. Henryk Samsonowicz, which ended with the statement: "highly recommended for publication".

The above shows that the views of Prof. Samsonowicz and Dr. Cieśla are diametrically opposed. I consider such discrepancies permissible if the opinions are based on the reviewers' own expertise. As stated in the Polish Academy of Sciences' *Code of Ethics for Researchers* [Polish: *Kodeks etyki pracownika naukowego*]: "Reviewers should not agree to peer review any research, scientific achievements or research concepts of other scholars, when the research falls outside their areas of expertise" (Paragraph 3.4.1).

Dr Cieśla, however, does not meet this condition. She has indeed published several works on the history of Jews in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, yet she has not produced even a single article on the subject of Polish mentalities or models of individual or noble axiology.

Elsewhere, *The Code of Ethics* states that reviews should provide accurate, objective, substantiated and justifiable assessments that mention the strong and weak points of a publication (3.4.3). Cieśla's review of my book makes no mention of its strengths, while any criticism is not based on a justifiable argument. I must, therefore, conclude that the review fails to meet the ethical and scholarly standards. The review is thus unfair and biased, aiming solely at discrediting my work in the eyes of the research community.

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